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Cinema in Cuban National Development: Women and Film Making Culture

Michelle Spinella
CINEMA IN CUBAN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: WOMEN AND FILM MAKING CULTURE

By

MICHELLE SPINELLA

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The members of the Committee approve the dissertation of Michelle Spinella defended on October 6, 2003.

Vandra Masemann  
Professor Directing Dissertation

John Mayo  
Outside Committee Member

Michael Basile  
Committee Member

Steve Klees  
Committee Member

Approved:

Carolyn Herrington, Chair, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

The office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.
Dedicated to the Beloved
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to contribute to a fuller understanding of cinema in processes of national development and social change. The study explores the use of cinema as an educational strategy in post-revolutionary Cuba. The research focuses closely on the experience of women filmmakers’ and their participation in the production of cultural meaning and creation of a national Cuban cinema. My central thesis is that cultural renewal is primarily an epistemological task and the study of cinema as a way of knowing can inform the practices of education and development.

The themes of representation, culture and development are explored using interviews with women filmmakers, Cuban films, primary source documentation from Cuba’s historic archives, participant observation during a women’s conference on film and video, and the methodology of film elicitation during a filmmakers’ focus group, which evoked taken-for-grant cultural meaning. These data are presented in a contextual analysis that illustrate cinema is a rich context for studying culture and representations of social change processes.
CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

SCRIPTING CINEMA INTO EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Comparative and International Education: Situating this Study

This study explores the use of cinema as an educational strategy in Cuban national development after the 1959 Revolution. Specifically, it looks at women’s experience and participation in film production and the creation of a national cinema that frequently used women’s representation for the political and cultural transformation of Cuban society. I describe and analyze the practices and representational strategies of filmmaking in Cuba and the experience of women filmmakers in the participation and production of cultural meaning. In the sense that the study may provide possible insights into the relationship between social change and the transformative role of the arts in development, this study is exploratory.

In this dissertation I consider post-1959 Cuban cinema from the context of education and national development, in the tradition of international and comparative educators who understand education as a practice, not only from the perspective of national school systems, but through an appreciation of the educational import of social and cultural life beyond the school. Sadler (1964) observed, “School systems alone do not constitute national education.” Contemporary international educator, Noel McGinn (1996) asserted, “there must be other, more powerful kinds of education we have not yet studied” and noted that “the determinants of educational quality, if education comes from the mass media, are not likely to be the same as those that explain the effectiveness of schools” (p. 3). A better understanding of education’s relationship with mass media, an important sectoral alliance for education in development, was underscored at the 1990 Jomtien Education for All World Conference, where the accomplishment of the grand goal, “Education for All” was strategized:
This was a challenge of enormous scale and complexity. To meet it, an expanded vision of education would be required, one that ‘surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula and conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices.’ To act upon such a vision, no single approach, sector, service or agency, national or international, could be relied upon alone. Rather, the Declaration envisioned the creation of many new alliances. Such alliances were expected to mobilize public support for education and to marshal the resources required to satisfy increased learning needs at all levels. (Mayo and Chieuw, 1993, italics mine)

Cuba figures prominently as a country that had anticipated the Jomtien challenge more than thirty years prior with the success of their noted 1961 Literacy Campaign and the development of a national film industry with pedagogic and transformative intent.

Jacques Delors’ UNESCO report entitled, “Learning: The Treasure Within,” made the case for viewing education from a broad perspective. Delors wrote, “no attention is given to the possibility that more learning takes place outside of education institutions than inside. Questions of this later kind suggest that the definition of a research agenda might begin with a new conception of education” (1996, p. 4). In this interpretive study, I strive to think anew and against the grain (and assumption) that the primary purpose of education is for the economic utility of the state; but rather towards a revisioning of education based on other ways of knowing, particularly the examination cinema as an educational strategy in national development.

I hope to contribute to the field of comparative and international education by examining the role of cinema in relation to education and development, adding my voice to comparative scholars interest in “ways of knowing” and their concern with the positivistic narrowing of what is considered “valid knowledge” and what it means “to know” (Masemann 1990; Welch 1999; Hayhoe 2000; Basile 1991; and McGinn 1996.) I would like to expand the conversation in the field regarding the relationship between mass media -- especially film-- and education by conceptually enjoining and examining these identity-forming social sectors to better understand the transformative processes of social change.
This chapter begins to weave the categories of film, education, and national development with the thematics of representation, culture, and identity. I begin by recalling the kernel (or “essence” if you will) of the transformative root of classical education, the Socratic evocation to “Know Thyself.” This possibility remains a generative basis of Western education despite the tattered mantle of Western humanism and poststructural reductionism that negates or reduces the importance of human agency, as in the theoretical deconstructive denial of self and impossibility of knowing anything beyond “the text.”

This chapter also introduces rationales for my methodological and analytical choices and describes the research questions and data sources. The following section backgrounds film’s emergence with capitalist modernity.

**Modernity’s Machine of Illusions**

Film emerged in Europe in the 1890’s as a small-scale, primarily artisan industry. From its inception, “the seventh art” developed within the epistemological and economic grid of Western science and market capitalism to become the art form of modernity. Moving pictures mediated the new time-space sensory environments created by industrialization, and film reflected and responded to these motors of modernization, becoming, in Stanley Aronowitz’s (1996) words, “the art form of late capitalism.”

Film was quickly implicated in the processes of colonization and empire building. As a colonizing tool, the camera swung on the necks of anthropologists and later “salvage ethnographers,” who set out to “capture” the exotic Other by text or image, before their disruption, deculturation, disappearance, or death by Development. Like the novel, the literary genre that contributed to the conception and formation of “the nation” (Bhabha, 1990), film adopted and adapted the Western dramatic tradition to portray ideas of the nation and the modern new world. In Latin America, the early years of cinema marked a time when the continent’s newly formed nations entered the world economy—on unequal terms. Unable to gain access to European markets and reliant on world prices for raw materials and commodities, Latin American modernity evolved marked by extractive, monopolistic capitalism. (p. 26). Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1972), in
his national novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, ironically depicts the fictional arrival
and reception of film into Latin American modernity:

Dazzled by so many marvelous inventions, the people of Macondo did not know where their amazement began….They became indignant over the living images that the prosperous merchant Bruno Crespi projected in the theatre….for a character who had died and was buried in one film and for whose misfortune tears of affliction had been shed would reappear alive and transformed into an Arab in the next one. The audience, who paid two cents apiece to share the difficulties of the actors, would not tolerate that outlandish fraud and broke up the seats. The mayor, at the urging of Bruno Crespi, explained in a proclamation that the cinema was a machine of illusions that did not merit the emotional outbursts of the audience. With that discouraging explanation many felt that they had been the victims of some new and showy gypsy business and they decided not to return to the movies, considering that they already had too many troubles of their own to weep over the acted-out misfortunes of imaginary beings. (p. 209)

As John King (1990) points out in his historical survey of cinema in Latin America, "the train to Macondo brings not just moving images but also the forces of imperialism in the form of the banana company which would soon control the region. (“Look at the mess we've got ourselves into,” says one of the protagonists of the novel, “just because we invited a gringo to eat some bananas” (p.189). In the case of the development of national cinemas, throughout Latin America, the “consolidation of North American cinema in the local market dominated exhibition, set standards of quality and created desires which local artisanal production struggled to replicate” (p. 8). The very technology of cinema:

is seen to highlight the uneven development in the region: cameras, film stock, expertise all came from outside, though they could be exploited by local adventurers or entrepreneurs like Bruno Crespo. They brought with them new ways of seeing, a ‘machine of illusions’ that could entertain, instruct or obfuscate on a massive scale, generating pleasure in its ‘showy gypsy business’ and/or a critical consciousness, as the audience sought to ‘share the difficulties of the actors. (pp. 7-8).
Cinema acquired the role of modern foundational fictions. With the advent of film in Cuba, unlike the people of Macondo, Cubans did not break up the seats but became instead passionate enthusiasts, spectators, amateur filmmakers, and with the development of a revolutionary national cinema, auteurs. Films in Cuba helped to “redefine national, racial, and sexual identities….in effect [becoming] the new foundational fictions [and] …taking on the role previously held by nineteenth century novels such as Cecelia Valdés and Francisco” (Shroeder, 1998, p.xi).

In her chronological survey of filmmaking in Cuba entitled “The Black Tent” (La Tienda Negra), Cuban film historian and archivist Maria Eulalia Douglas describes the beginnings of film in Cuba. The screening rooms for those first, silent, short films called “actualities” were small film tents that “went from corner to corner, town to town looking for their public according to the old tradition of circuses” attracting “an ingenuous and enthusiastic public” (1996, p. 5). During the early days of cinema, it was the naïve enthusiasm of people for the new technology of moving pictures that Lenin in 1919 recognized as a force to be mobilized, and led him to declare, “for us, film is the most important of all the arts” (Chanan, 1985, p. 15).

**Master or “Establishing” Shot**

Early in the twentieth century, liberal minds strongly believed in the perfectibility of human nature and the power of education to improve society. In the last half century, an undeterred faith in education has gone hand in hand with an undeterred faith in Development. The optimism of developmentalist thinking ushered in after World War II is deeply rooted in the utopian soil of Enlightenment rationality and the knowledge claims of Western science. Utopian beliefs in technology and the power of North American know-how to effect economic modernization were matched by the utopian beliefs of social revolutions in countries struggling against dependency and underdevelopment. Utopian dreams motivated visions of modernization along two different and opposing political paths: nationalism and developmentalism. These discourses of modernization, filtered through social, economic, political, and historical narratives, are embedded in ever-shifting notions of “culture” and dramatically portrayed,
in the 20th century, through cinematic representation. Film, the art form of modernity, visually documents this human quest for meaning and a “good life.”

Film, like Development, is much more than a socio-economic endeavor; it is a “perception that models reality” (Sachs, 1993, p.3). The search for a meaningful and good life is a characteristically human endeavor consistently exhibited throughout historical memory. Notions of human growth and development and the modern idea of progress carried on by the nation-state (another modern idea) were existentially called into question by the collective shock of World War II and its mass destructions. After the war, the capacity and processes of nations to provide peace, security, and prosperity for their people, or “national development,” morphed into “Development,” a business of transnational organizations and a powerful labeling device that stratifies countries into “developed” and “underdeveloped.” Development discourse is a “hegemonic form of representation” of the ‘Third World’ says Arturo Escobar, social theorist and keen critic of the Development culture:

For 40 years now, much of Asia, Africa and Latin America has been known as the ‘Third World’ or ‘underdeveloped,’ while the price for joining the ranks of the First, ‘developed’ world – and ultimately, acceding to History – has precisely been to follow the prescriptions laid down for them by those already developed. These prescriptions took the form of Development,¹ a powerful and encompassing discourse which has ruled most social designs and actions of those countries since the early post-World War II period. This discourse has shaped in significant ways the modes of existence of Third World societies, mediating in a profound sense the knowledge they seek about themselves and their peoples, mapping their social landscape, sculpting their economies, transforming their cultures (Escobar, 1992, pp. 411-412).

Wolfgang Sachs believes that labels like “North” and “South” and “development” and “underdevelopment” divide the world into a Eurocentric development discourse or “cast of mind” that prevents the needed leap of imagination to see the world anew (1993, p. 2). I agree. By tackling Development as a “cast of mind,” Sach exposes “some of the unconscious structures that set boundaries on the thinking of our epoch” (p.2). Besides
“imaginative sterility,” Sachs cites “historical inadequacy” as reasons to interrogate the Development concept (p. 2). He invites practitioners and scholars to do the same. In this study, I spotlight a critique of Development from filmmakers involved in the New Latin American Cinema, a cinematic social movement of which Cuba forms an integral part.

Global systems of mass communication, of which the “culture industries” of film, television, and advertising form only a part (others include transborder data flows, remote sensing, and direct satellite broadcasting), are redefining and reconfiguring culture and cultures worldwide, through technological, economic, political, environmental, and very personal processes. Audiences worldwide, whether in so-called developed or developing countries, look to and through film as a mode of perception and identity formation (Benjamin 1969, Giroux 1992). Mass media, specifically film, play an important role in the development of personal and national identity and are important pedagogical sites that educate through local, national, and global representational power (Giroux 1992; McLaren, et al. 1995; Steinberg and Kincheloe 1996; Torres 1998).

Sobchack (1994) argues that the “materialities” of human communication, cinematic and electronic media have not only historically symbolized but also historically constituted a radical alteration of the forms of our culture’s previous temporal and spatial consciousness and of our bodily sense of existential “presence” to the world, to ourselves, and to others….During the last century, historical changes in our contemporary “sense” of temporality, spatiality, and existential and embodied presence cannot be considered less than a consequence of correspondent changes in our technologies of representation. (p. 83). Representation may be thought of as the constitution of human experience and its expression. As Eisner (1993) qualifies, representation is not mental representation but rather:

…the process of transforming the contents of consciousness into a public forum so that they can be stabilized, inspected, edited, and shared with others. Representation is what confers a publicly social dimension to cognition. Since forms of representation differ, the kinds of experiences they make also differ. Different kinds of experience lead to different meanings, which, in turn make different forms of understanding possible. (p. 6).
In this sense, my research echoes the intent of educational theorist Elliot Eisner, who states: “I want to understand the connection between experience and meaning and the contribution that different forms of representation make to each. It seems to me that such matters reside at the heart of any useful theory of education” (1993, p.11).

**Women and Representation: Analytical categories**

Films influence the formation of personal and national identity, a traditional function of schooling, and play a significant role in the reproduction of patriarchal culture (Patel, 1998, p. 125). Therefore, in rethinking the cultural realm as a site of agency in social transformation, I consider the experience of women and the representation of gender an important analytical category. While globalization processes, operating through transnational media, erode national sovereignty and political will, women continue to struggle worldwide for just social practices and alternative social representations. Social representations are manifested not only in language and the subjective culture of individuals but in a variety of displays of objective culture -- literature, art, television, magazines, journal texts, and movies. Feminists continue to explore these representations, to question the “male gaze” and to seek the basis for a female spectatorship.

**Feminist Film Theory**

By looking at the role of cinema in Cuba, this study follows upon the early insight of the late feminist film theorist, Claire Johnson (1972), who declared that the study of women’s cinema if it were to “impinge on consciousness” had to go beyond “representation” (of positive female protagonists or women’s problems, for example); it required “a revolutionary strategy which can only be based on an analysis of how film operates as a medium within a specific cultural system (p. 25). Thus, this study examines cinema within the social system of Cuba. Feminist film theorists provide a comparative, critical perspective in reading women’s experience as filmmakers and as representations and iconic stand-ins for “the nation” in such noted Cuban films (“men’s
films about women”) as Lucia, Portrait of Teresa, Cecelia, Amada, Maria Antonio – “transparent” women all.

In early film studies, the metaphor of the mirror was so often used to establish the relationship between film and culture that early film theorists referred to it as “reflection theory.” In the representation of women, the metaphor continues to be problematic. Molly Haskell, in a seminal 1974 article entitled From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies, questioned the basic tenets of reflection theory. She “maintains that the mirror held up to women in film does not simply “reflect” their social reality, but rather reveals how the cinema has functioned historically to obscure women’s accomplishments and further invest the male point of view…” (Petro, 1990, p.69). She views films as “historical evidence” that documents how cinema “both reflects social conditions and distorts women’s experience of those conditions” (p. 68). In another seminal text, Mary Ann Doane (1987) “challenging the assumption that the cinematic apparatus is...indifferent -- that it stages a universal and hence ahistorical condition of the human psyche -- set out to trace the contours of female subjectivity in the woman’s film, charting the difficulties and failures of Hollywood’s attempt to construct a position for the female spectator” (Petro, 1990, p. 75). In exploring this issue, Doane and others “increasingly turned to questions of consumerism...exploring the ways in which...the history of capitalism transformed not just the organization of narrative and visual pleasure, but also the forms of subjectivity associated with the female spectator. Doane explains that:

film does not provide us with an access to a pure and authentic female subjectivity, much as we might like it to do so. It provides us instead with an image repertoire of poses--classical feminine poses and assumptions about the female appropriation of the gaze. (p. 75).

Despite the generative theorizing evoked by Laura Mulvey’s “male gaze,” Teresa de Laurentis suggests that “the emphasis must be shifted away from the artist behind the camera, the gaze, or the text as origin and determination of meaning, toward the wider public sphere of cinema as a social technology: we must develop our understanding of cinema’s implication in other modes of cultural representation, and its possibilities of
both production and counterproduction of social vision” (Erens, 1990, p. 295). Beyond the portrayal, either positive or negative of women on screen, there is the production of women’s social vision implicit and explicit that emerges in their filmic work.

Therefore, within the present context of globalization and the apparent exhaustion of nationalist and developmentalist discourses of modernity, this study builds both upon feminist film theorizing and contemporary critical Latin American social theorists (e.g. Garcia Canclini 1992; Martín-Barbero1993; Yudice et al.,1992), who envision alternative Latin American modernity/ies by rethinking the emancipatory potential of culture. When the lights go down and the millennial story begins, is culture the hopeful terrain of a different kind of modernity, another kind of development? Is there some kind of “redemptive agency” in the cultural realm, as Latin American theorists believe and feminists assume?

These interrogatory threads weave through my research on the role of film in educational and cultural processes of national development and social transformation. My central thesis is that cultural renewal is primarily an epistemological task and the study of cinema as a way of knowing can inform the practices of education and development. Cinema and film production provide an innovative lens through which to recast as well as understand relationships between education and culture. In the case of Cuba, cinema documents one of the most intriguing social revolutions of our time.

**National Cinema by Revolutionary Fiat**

In March 1959, just three months after coming to power, Cuba’s new revolutionary government signaled the importance and priority of cinema in the transformation of Cuban society by establishing the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industry (ICAIC) with the legal mandate to create a national cinema and film industry. Throughout its history, ICAIC (pronounced “ee-kike”) engaged film in the cultural task of education and development through its production of feature films, documentaries, animation, and newsreels. ICAIC also developed a program on filmmaking for television designed to demystify Hollywood’s cinematic code. Today, this program and others still provide Cuban television viewers with an “informal educational” program on filmmaking and cinema, which has effectively educated a
population of confident critics. While film in the U.S. is primarily considered a mass medium of entertainment, Cuba used film as a mass medium of education in the transformation of Cuban politics and culture, particularly during the first two decades after the Revolution.

Throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s, Cuban filmmakers were at the forefront of a regional effort by Latin American filmmakers to break the spell of dependency through a New Latin American Cinema: “a pan-Latin American cinematic movement dedicated to the struggle…for cultural, political and economic autonomy” (Ana Lopez, 1986, p. 3). Cinema became “a joint Latin American project of cultural liberation” (p. iv). The New Latin American Cinema was “a response to the deepening underdevelopment and economic and cultural dependency of the continent,” (Martin, 1997, p. 16). During the movement's first twenty-five years it endeavored “to transform, under diverse social conditions, the modes of ‘filmic production’ and reception/exhibition.” Revolutionary filmmakers from Latin America “took as their point of departure not simply the introduction of a new content or the transformation of cinematic forms, but the transformation of the subjective conditions of film production and film viewing” (p. 19).

The development of a national cinema in Cuba came on the heels of a revolutionary change in government. Efforts to develop a national film industry did not begin with the Revolution, but the Revolution addressed the ideological and economic conditions that had previously undergirded its failure to develop. The fledgling film institute was capitalized through national appropriation of foreign-owned theaters and ousting of foreign distributors. Domestically-owned film labs and Cuba's well-developed infrastructure of mass communication, television, radio, and press were also nationalized or absorbed by the state.

Through ICAIC, the Cuban state used cinema as an effective mechanism of diffusion and mobilization for revolutionary social change. After winning the military and political battle, the revolutionary leaders were keenly aware that the ideological struggle still remained. The law creating ICAIC stated that “the cinema constitutes, by virtue of its characteristics, an instrument of opinion and formation of individual and collective consciousness, and it can contribute to the depth and clarity of the revolutionary spirit and help to sustain its creative vitality” (Medin, 1990, p. 8).
After 1959, women in Cuba made a dramatic entrance into the work force in both traditional and nontraditional occupations. Film, or “men's films about women” as Christina Benamou (1994) called them, reflected and helped frame the “debates over women's equal participation in the labor force” (p. 52), such as Humberto Solás's *Lucía* (1968) and Pastor Vega’s *Portrait of Teresa* (1979). By 1981 in television production, 39 percent of producers, 32 percent of scriptwriters, 76 percent of editors, and 13 percent of directors were women. (p. 72). But in filmmaking, the only exception to the monopoly by male directors was the work of the late Sara Gómez; who, in her early documentaries and then with her first and only feature film, *De cierta manera (One Way or Another, 1977-1979)*, “penetrated beneath the surface of the uniformly national and into the realm of the subcultural” (p. 57). Sara Gómez remained the only woman to direct a fiction feature film at ICAIC until the 1990’s. In 1986, new initiatives, such as the restructuring within ICAIC toward non-hierarchical and collectively run “creative groups” and “innovations in viewpoint, film portraiture, mode of address, and political discourse around gender” (p. 70) indicated that Cuban cinema might be “on the threshold of gender” (p.51).

**Research Questions and Data Sources**

I examine the educational role of the Cuban film industry in national development through the lens of both women’s participation in the filmmaking process and their cinematic representation. My approach to this topic is not from the “problem” perspective – an educational problem needing or amenable to scientific solutions or interventions. Rather, I engage in a form of redux “salvage ethnography,” not in the anthropological sense of saving a culture from an encroaching (late!) modernity and global market, but from a feminist desire to “register” the lived experience of women filmmakers working in Cuba and their construction of meaning in the context of a daily creative struggle within a socialist society (on the temporal and geographic edge of capital globalization). Women have felt the burden of this struggle throughout the course of the Cuban Revolution. In the sense that women continue to be erased from history, my study is an effort to document their creative life and contribution. How have these filmmakers used film to produce meaning for themselves and others?
What, in effect, constitutes the social practice of Cuban filmmaking? How has film as “the art form of late capitalism” (Aronowitz 1966) engaged with the social/ist practice of Cuban cinema? The following questions guided the research in this study:

1. How was cinema used in Cuba’s national development?
2. What do Cuban women filmmakers have to say about the enterprise of filmmaking in the context of social and political development and their participation in the process of producing cultural meaning?

These questions focus on three interrelated contexts: the production of cultural meanings, the textual analysis of those meanings, and the ethnographic, lived experiences of women filmmakers. To understand these articulations I examine the:

1) practice of cinema as an educational and ideological strategy in social change,
2) mediation of film in the representation of gender and development; and the
3) agency and participation of women as both cultural workers and cultural “products” (i.e. their representation in both the symbolic and material realm of Cuban cinematic production.

Data come from the following sources:

1) interviews with women filmmakers, incorporating (from visual anthropology) the method of film-elicitation - using film clips and other visual material during the interview process to evoke participant responses; 2) Cuban films and their analysis, 3) Cine Cubano, the film journal published since the inception of ICAIC and available in the Institute’s library. 4) reflective and descriptive field notes generated throughout the study, and 5) other forms of written documentation from the archives of the Cinemateca of Cuba.

**Education and Culture**

Education is always an epistemological experience, a coming to know. Epistemological concerns undergird this work. This text is an effort to read against the cognitive poverty of Western rationality and to reclaim ways of knowing that engender individual self-fulfillment and social transformation. The West and its Enlightenment roots have taken quite a lot of heat going on decades now -- a protest across many disciplinary borders against the positivist, rationalized, instrumentalist, technicist,
economistic, and heartless “knowing” that has characterized educational practices and exploitative Development interventions, as unintended consequences and “strange fruits” of a one-sided, impoverished knowing.

Education is most intimately concerned with the formation of self and identity. Within the context of the modern nation state, whose content and contours are primarily economic, it has become axiomatic “common sense” that the purpose of public education is also economic. Economic efficiency is the principle educational rationale that monopolizes all the space on the discursive stage. When education loses its cultural autonomy and is subsumed into being a mere economic utility of the state, then the crisis in education is recognized as having gone beyond a crisis of many particularities and entails the violation of some deep principle (Conrad, 1983). The present crisis of education is a crisis of meaning, and epistemological homelessness. Paul Willis (1990) warns:

The field of education is likely to come under even more intense pressure. It will be further marginalized in most people's experience by common [read "popular" or "everyday"] culture. In so far as educational practices are still predicated on traditional liberal humanist lines and on the assumed superiority of high art, they will become almost totally irrelevant to the real energies and interests of most young people and have no part of their identity formation. Common culture will, increasingly, undertake in its own ways, the roles that education has vacated. Insofar as education/training becomes ever more subordinated to technical instrumentalism and to the "needs" of industry, it will be seen as a necessary evil to be tolerated in order to obtain access to the wage in order to obtain access to leisure and consumption and their cultural energies….We need an altogether new approach in education. (p. 147).

Although education interpenetrates with the economic and political sphere, it is most intimately concerned with the cultural dimension of social life. The Greeks understood this well in their embodiment of two key concepts, paideia and arête:

Paideia referred to education or, more broadly, to culture; in practice it was clearly linked to arête, the ability to live one’s life well -- to be more fully human (Drew, 1978, p. 304). A central question persistently posed by the Greeks was:
What type of *paideia* leads to *arête*? In the process of seeking *arête*, the Greeks created a culture that became an educative force in itself. Liberal education, in turn, was grounded in the idea that education is culture and not simply the transmission of, or knowledge about, culture.

For the Greeks, education for *arête* was fundamentally a moral activity -- not in a narrow religious context but in the sense that ultimately the very life and health of each individual and of society as a whole were at stake. Within such a context, the Socratic maxim “know thyself” was fundamentally a personal and moral inquiry, but not a private one. This blending of personal excellence with the public good was embodied in *arête.* (Conrad, 1983, p. 1)

The postmodern critique notwithstanding, Cuban culture is unselfconsciously imbued with a stubborn air of humanism. This classical Greek ideal is the historical basis for modern liberal education and resonates with the utopian ideals of revolutionary Cuba, where education and culture have developed productive links and a transformative connection through the mass medium of film.

Chapter Two develops a conceptual frame that continues to link education, culture and film through personal “webs of significance” and a metanarrative that shows historical linkages between education and culture (high, popular and mass culture); first through the evolution of Enlightenment rationality, its repression of “the romantic critique,” and later the development of critical theory and its focus on mass media and the “culture industry” as forms of social control.

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1 In this dissertation I use the capitalization of Development proposed by Irene Grendzier, in *Managing Political Change: Social Scientists and the Third World* (Bolder, CO, Westview Press, 1985) and others, especially Escobar, 1992, to refer to the invented and historical nature of the “Development” discourse. I also use it to signal an ironical usage.

2 “What enables us to call representations “social” is not so much their individual or group supports as the fact that they are elaborated during processes of exchange and interaction” (Moscovici, 1989:82).

3 Klees (1996), in a critique of World Bank educational policy critiqued “the idea of economic efficiency [as] simply non-operational.”

4 There seems to be a schizophrenic split between the postmodern disparagement or “post-y” theorizing of the concepts "humanity" and “humanism” versus a sense of things in the real world, where we call upon that same humanity in times of need, resort to it, find comfort in it, and generally use it as a value and meaningful concept in the practical life of feeling and being.
CHAPTER TWO – FRAMES OF REFERENCE
SELF, CULTURE, AND CRITICAL THEORY

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary instrument of knowing. Therefore, this first section begins with a phenomenological overview of how I began to pay attention to the sense people make/construct of their lived world. Section two discusses the various lenses I used throughout the study that provided an orientation for the data collection. I present a critical metanarrative of the “culture” concept and review the early critical theorists’ responses to what they identified and termed the “culture industries.” In this discussion, it is my intention to depict the nature of the capitalist media environment against which the socialist structure of utopian cultural politics in revolutionary Cuba have played out. The chapter ends with a look at the New Latin American Cinema, another kind of social movement and unique case of merging politics and culture. In order “to confront the pervasive contradictions of political, social, and economic processes in Latin America, the movement reasserted the role of cinema as a critically interactive space of communication” and social dialogue (Pick, 1993).

I. Interpretive Webs of Significance: Setting the Stage

This academic back-story begins with the fact and fluke of being born in a place that Miami would become. I experienced the Cuban revolution through the eyes of a child -- an oblivious lazy gaze as history unfolded in my backyard. It didn’t feel like history -- modern, postmodern or otherwise -- but merely my personal space. The ocean was mine! I had an early, proprietary sense of place. Miami never felt like the rest of the U.S. even then. In its fading heydays of the late fifties and early sixties, the old-style glamour of Frank Sinatra and floorshows at the Fontainebleau Hotel still drew refugees from the cold North; and when the "first wave" of Cubans came to Miami, the downtown Woolworth's was never the same. Beautiful ladies in perfect makeup with perfect accents now appeared at the cosmetic counter displacing a dowdier, older coterie of clerks. That year we sat spellbound as the newly arrived Latin soul in Mr. Alvarez's lank body taught us democracy and 8th grade civics - from the heart, with a love and displaced passion that wasn’t in the book. The Revolution had begun.
**Backstory: The Long and Winding Road to Access**

Before beginning my fieldwork in Cuba, I had no “theory” except Harry Wolcott's (1995) sense of the term, a practical respect for “bias as entry-level theorizing, a thought-about position from which the researcher as inquirer feels drawn to an issue and seeks to construct a firm basis in both knowledge and understanding” (p. 196). Wolcott’s plain talk and common sense demystified academic theory and freed me—as a new researcher—to feel comfortable with my own entry-level knowing. I began this study with diverse biases. They included a lifetime of living in Miami with representations of Cuba in the Miami and U.S. media; the counter-culture imagination of my generation known then as the “cultural revolution,” co-opted or memorialized by Korda's famously iconic photograph of “Che” in his star-crossed beret; and the televised war in Vietnam whose images, produced for U.S. mass media consumption, had the unintended consequences of national politicization and the growth of a broad-based coalition united in the demand to end the war.

Embedded in memories that form my biases are my experiences as a young college student, who found class lectures less relevant than participation in the “liberation” discourses then being waged within the public sphere and free speech zone that the college campus once was. Then. Issues of national liberation, women's liberation, personal liberation were all grappled with within the fragmentation and machismo of the ultimately disappointing New Left. The attraction of male politics quickly waned but the informal education of feminist consciousness-raising groups left me with a patriarchal “persistence of vision.” For me, what endured of women's liberationist thinking was not so much the feminist content, which has evolved over the years, but the epistemological shift in my perception. The feminist affirmation of a woman's experience of self and body catalyzed women (and me) as legitimate knowers and authorizers of knowledge—and made us “dangerous.”

Making sense of experience, as Dewey (1934) noted, is always personal. Imagine my surprise upon returning to the university after 20 years to find that my lived experience as a young woman was referred to in the literature as the “second wave of feminism,” and was now theory. A wave. Women's issues had become “Women's Studies,” and were now safely tucked into an academic sphere called “curriculum.”
concept of the “second wave” felt odd and intriguing, like sneaking into history through the back door. On campus in those days -- the years of living dangerously -- was a vociferous and radical presence of women, not afraid, and learning how to speak. As Rosa Braidotti, et al. (1994) depicts “a radical, aggressive movement of young women startled society with brazen actions, daring analyses and bold tactics” (p. 64). The women's movement articulated, in the midst of politicized destructions, an affirmation of life and a way to resist what, at the time, I could barely name. In contrast, “Women's Studies” seemed like a tame depository compared to the “danger” being part of a “wave” often felt like. It often felt like liberation, as in “the truth shall set you free;” or like a “lifting of the veil,” like “understanding,” “realization,” and “discovery.” What it did not feel like was “knowledge production.” No. But rather like angry incredulity and futile denial. I did not want to know what I knew. Visceral knowing triggered unwanted glimpses of structural patriarchy followed by devastating analyses and women’s ongoing struggle to understand the nature of domination and oppression. Women’s personal and collective experience went right to the heart of the knowing process. The “epistemological turn” toward the body, living experience, and self-evidence remains for me the generative contribution of feminism to my own knowing and approach to research.

Mary Belensky, et al, (1986) describe perspectives from which “women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge and authority.” In the opening of the insightful book, *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, she notes:

We do not think of the ordinary person as preoccupied with such difficult and profound questions as: What is truth? What is authority? to whom do I listen? What counts for me as evidence? How do I know what I know? Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more than an intellectual exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see ourselves, the way we interact with others, our public and private personae, our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality (p.3).

Rosa Braidotti et al. (1994), in examining the relationship between experience and knowing, offer an historical analysis of feminist epistemology that includes crediting
feminist literary critics (Showalter 1985; Miller 1985; Christian 1988) with showing the “male-biased structure of thought” (p. 34-36). While decentering reason as the only valid way of knowing may have caused a male crisis in the academy, it “leads women to rethink the link between knowledge, identity, power and the community. It allows them to ask: what does it mean to be a human subject today?” (Braidotti, et al, p. 46). Feminists have opened up creative spaces where embodied knowledge streams into old and new conceptions of social life, where silent, deep waters, and rich veins of human experience wait to be remembered, reconceived, revisited, realized, recognized by human beings whose capacities for knowing and feeling have been expanded, strengthened by what some may call feminist consciousness but which in a more temporal light, may be simply fuller consciousness—brought to bear by women’s knowing.

By the time I began working with exiled Cuban filmmakers, the political categories of left and right had ceased having meaning for me. But the shift in consciousness (i.e., the gain in understanding through feminist knowing/analysis) provoked by participation in the women's movement remained.

**Inter-Disciplinary Plots**

Critical educators understand education as “contested terrain,” the struggle over meaning and power. Chandra Mohanty says, “…education becomes a central terrain where power and politics operate out of the lived culture of individuals and groups situated in asymmetrical social and political positions” (Giroux and McLaren, 1994 p. 147).

This way of understanding the academy entails a critique of education as the mere accumulation of disciplinary knowledges that can be exchanged on the world market for upward mobility. There are much larger questions at stake in the academy these days, not the least of which are questions of self and collective knowledge of marginal peoples and the recovery of alternative, oppositional histories of domination and struggle. Here disciplinary parameters matter less than questions of power, history, and self-identity. For knowledge, *the very act of knowing, is related to the power of self-definition* (p. 147, italics mine.).
Cultural Studies

Cultural studies, as a theoretical frame, transgresses, trespasses disciplinary boundaries and questions the research activity (knowledge production) as the only legitimate way knowledge can be created. Appadurai (1988) suggests that “sometime in the nineteenth century in Europe, the interest in discovery, reflection, observation, inquiry and debate gave way to the idea of something radically new—the idea of research, the systematic pursuit of the not-yet-known. Research, in this sense, represents an inherently collective, replicable, and professionalized mode of inquiry into the world...[vs.] an earlier, more broad ideal of knowledge associated with the formation of a cultivated self” (p. 31). For cultural studies, “context” is the object of study, and by allowing the text/context “to pose the questions cultural studies renounces the power of the institutional boundaries of disciplines in favor of doing the work necessary, wherever it is, to begin to provide better answers” (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, 1992, pp. 144-145). Cultural studies, not unlike critical theory, focuses on mass culture and the cultural place of media in modern society. Scholars note that the work of developing a truly “constitutive” (versus a relational) interdisciplinarity is only just beginning: the work of “culling good quotations, citing theoretical works and positions from outside, and encapsulating requisite background material -- from projects and positions grounded in questions of what and how much must be learned from other fields in order to contextualize the object of study in any given project” (Klein, 1996, p. 131).

In this study I make the effort and spend time “contextualizing” the relationship between education and development, cinema and epistemology and their relationship to social change. This contextualizing delves into and posits the imaginative process as a “critical” function in moving beyond the disciplinary borders that positivism still struggles to maintain. My effort is to strive toward a more constitutive interdisciplinarity that positions filmmaking and cinema more squarely in the field of comparative/international education and development.

Visual Anthropology

Visual anthropology has never been completely incorporated into the mainstream of anthropology. It is trivialized by some
anthropologists as being mainly concerned with audiovisual aids for teaching. The anthropological establishment has yet to acknowledge the centrality of the mass media in the formation of cultural identity in the second half of the twentieth century. Consequently, visual anthropologists sometimes find themselves involved with the research and thinking of professional image makers and scholars from other disciplines--visual sociology, cultural studies, film theory, photo history, dance and performance studies, and architectural theory--rather than with the work of other cultural anthropologists. (Ruby, 1996, p. 1345)

Since the literature seems limited by a lack of theorizing sufficient to the task of conceptualizing how film actually communicates scientific knowledge, my intention is to use the overarching concept of “representation” to examine how cinema and film contribute to other ways of knowing in the formation of modernity and identity, and importantly, in the educational context of development. Things have not much changed since Margaret Mead called anthropology a science of “words, words, words” (no “affective neutrality” for her!) and neglect of the use of film in academic research “criminal” (Hockings, 1975, p.5).

Women’s scholarship and interdisciplinarity

The struggle of women everywhere continues with both great strides and frustrating intransigencies. As an interdisciplinary scholar, Juliet Thompson Klein (1990) suggests that “women is not a category unto itself. It is part of a matrix of interrelations with gender, race, class, and national culture” (p. 119). Thus, women’s relation to culture is a rich and generative source of alternative conceptions and practices or new ‘designs for living’” (p. 119). “Women” and “culture” are categories often juxtaposed: “One--women--is often treated as an enabling part of the reformulation of the other--culture” (p. 115). The growth of women’s studies in academia has not been the hoped-for juggernaut of liberation. Klein notes, “By and large, feminist scholarship has not transformed the academy.

Assessing the current state of the field...women’s studies remains in the shadow structure. Yet conditions of marginality are at the same time conditions of strength: By insisting on the interdisciplinary flexibility and reflexivity, by refusing conventional categories and labels, and by asserting obligations to a self-conscious critique of the
politics of knowledge we resist absorptions into an ‘acceptable’ (and safe) liberal pluralism at the expense of our radical critique.’ The epistemological power of women’s studies depends on its location in spaces where conventional intellectual boundaries are blurred (Women’s Studies 1990, pp. 210-11)” (Klein, 1996, p. 123).

The claim for interdisciplinary research cannot be based solely on the ground of intertextuality (i.e., “education and...,” or “film and...,” -- the “add women and stir” approach), but requires a “mutually constitutive relationship” (p.131). “A mutually constitutive relationship, however, requires integrating textual analysis with sociological investigation of institutions of cultural production as well as the social and political processes and relations in which production occurs” (p. 131). Interdisciplinary work is not simply textual aggregations from various fields, but in some way is a structural transformation (thus the “danger”...of borderlands, boundaries, and frontiers).

In her article “Cuban Cinema: On the Threshold of Gender,” Catherine Benamou (1994) states the dilemma now facing filmmakers in Cuba in the form of a rhetorical question: “Have issues of difference along lines of gender, race, and sexual preference (in addition to class) been adequately addressed within the established institutional channels, or is there a pressing need to create more autonomous spaces within which diverse subjectivities and identities can be represented ‘on their own terms?” (p. 51). The present study contextualizes this question.

II. Conceptual Frame: Culture and Critical Theory

This section begins to make some conceptual links between the reduction of positivism into the instrumental and technical rationality of science and Development, a “hegemonic representation of modernity” as Escobar (1992) noted. The struggle of the political and social sciences to become empirical, and therefore, “scientific” often seemed like the struggle of the village dames to squeeze themselves into the glass slipper. (Only it wasn’t dames doing the squeezing!) It seemed that science was too “small,” had become a wayward scientism characterized by Habermas and others as the conviction that only science is knowledge and the only way to valid knowledge is through the objectivism of science. In this chapter I return to the Romantics and cast them as the first
“critical theorists” who resisted this closure of human knowing and tyranny of logical analysis. They elevated feeling as a way of knowing and imagination as a critical tool of transformative capacity. Dealing with romanticism -- even from an epistemological perspective, entails warring through a thicket of concepts, connotations, devaluations, misrepresentations, and retrogressive fears that the very word "romantic" evokes, especially in current academic minds. Nevertheless, it is here that I lay the ground work for my assertion that cultural renewal is primarily an epistemological task. I take a cue from Richard Bernstein (1990) who suggests:

In following the process of the dissolution of epistemology, which has left the philosophy of science in its place, one makes one’s way over abandoned stages of reflection. Retreading this path from the perspective that looks back toward the point of departure may help recover the forgotten experience of reflection. That we disavow reflection is positivism. (p. 190).

Postmodern criticism notwithstanding, my purpose is not necessarily to “redeem” modernity. Nothing so grand. But to stand on the edge of the moment and feel that moment of hope felt by Coleridge as he exclaimed – “O! the One life within us and abroad.” How grand is that? Living experience. Ineffable, but certainly capable of being known, needing to be known, and expressively represented. I retread this “romantic” path to explore a metanarrative of culture for reasons similar to those expressed by educational anthropologist, Vandra Masemann who affirms “the importance of a coherent moral and epistemological framework in the education of children” and Ruth Hayhoe (in this instance taking a cue from Masemann regarding the metanarrative), who suggests “the possibility that metanarratives could be a helpful vehicle for reflecting on the self and listening to others and are not necessarily “totalizing” expressions rooted in essentialist philosophy. They may also be important in linking scholarship to values and preferred directions for education and society. I have thus linked two enduring metanarratives, redemption and modernity….“ (2000, p. 424).

I construct a story of “the people” by taking a sustained look at anthropology’s central analytical concept, culture, as it begins and remains embedded in the lived experience of people. I do this through a review of the literature of early Critical theory, which provides the theoretical grounds for understanding mass culture and mass media.
To link my themes, I am indebted to Martín-Barbero’s (1993) effort to unravel the paradox and “secret” of hegemony: “One must oppose tyranny in the name of the people while at the same time one opposes the people in the name of reason” (p. 7). One may substitute “market” for “reason” with no loss of vertigo. I highlight the issues of sovereignty and the spatialization of culture by a brief look at concrete examples: the agenda of the Non-Aligned Nations for independent development, the movement of global capital through transnational corporations, the importance of communication in reconfiguring these material processes, and new social movements, particularly the cinematic movement known as the “New Latin American Cinema”.

Romancing the Cultural Imaginary of "the people"

His father came home one night in Copenhagen, gathered his sons about him, and with tears of joy told them that the Bastille had fallen, that a new era had begun, that if they were failures in life they must blame themselves, for henceforth “poverty would vanish, the lowliest would begin the struggles of life on equal terms with the mightiest, with equal arms, on equal ground. (Crane Brinton of Henrik Steffens in Perkins, 1967, p.3).

1789. A Paris mob stormed the Bastille and a great popular uprising ensued throughout France. The shock. The awakening! The Bastille! A prison that symbolized the royal power of the state had fallen. Nothing in historical memory had so stirred the minds of men or women. Perkins (1967) quotes Wordsworth’s poetic description of the soaring feeling of aspiration and regeneration: “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. France standing on the top of golden hours/And human nature seeming born again” (p.3). An expansive sense of possibility stirred in the people, a new conception of themselves that gave birth to a new “cultural imaginary.”

Just Who are “The People”?

Perhaps there is not a more evocative symbol than that of “the people,” and if the bourgeoisie thought “the people” were more powerful incarnate than as a symbol, they had not understood Coleridge. Matthew Arnold certainly did not understand Coleridge
even though he intellectually claimed him in *Culture and Anarchy* (1925), a work that inaugurated the dominating discourse of the “culture and civilization” tradition until the 1950’s (Storey, 1993, p.21). Arnold was primarily concerned with social order, typically conceived at the time as how education could bring a bit of culture to the unruly. Education was part of a cultural arsenal that helped the “Barbarians (aristocracy), Philistines (middle class) and Populace (working class)” find their proper place in the social order (p. 24).

I’d like to rescue Coleridge from the elitism of this tradition but space does not permit. In any case, history has already “absolved” him. Arnold misreads the clerisy to whom Coleridge referred, which Arnold identified as the guardians of civilization, a disappearing aristocracy and new “middle” class. But for Coleridge, the clerisy referred to individuals with transformative vision, a human capacity to know through imaginative union (a topic further discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to subjectivity and the subject/object divide).

The Enlightenment elite based their political theory on the people as “legitimizers of civil government and generators of a new sovereignty” (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 7). It was through the people and the social contract that a population becomes truly a *people* and true foundation of a society; nevertheless, on a cultural level, “the popular synthesized all that [the Enlightenment] wanted to abolish---superstition, ignorance, turbulence---all that they wanted to sweep away with “reason”” (p. 7). The people were not considered as social actors but as a collective category [“the founders of democracy”] that legitimized the birth of the modern nation that legitimized the state. Without their “general will” the modern state is not possible, and without the modern state the constitution of “the people” is not possible. Thus Martín-Barbero elucidates how this circular reasoning obscures a contradiction and ambiguity at the heart of liberal politics:

One must oppose tyranny in the name of the people while at the same time one opposes the people in the name of reason. This formula holds the secret of how hegemony works (p. 7).
In one fell swoop, the people became defined by exclusion and governed in the name of “real” politics and “high culture.” “It was a definition of the people by exclusion---exclusion from participation in the wealth of the nation, exclusion from political office and exclusion from equal education....The relationship between the people and education---the Enlightenment way of thinking culture---is the exclusion which most clearly constitutes culture as distant from and external to the people....Voltaire stated this clearly: the government should procure for the people pleasures different from those of knowledge and more appropriate to their character” (p. 8). The different fronts of rebellion against these enclosures (exclusions) is the Romantic contribution to the evolution of consciousness---to political theory and concepts of culture. According to Martín-Barbero, Romanticism “constructed a new cultural imagination, in which, for the first time, the life of the people---the popular---acquires the status of culture” (p. 9). He tracks three paths that the Romantic effort traveled to put the people front and center: 1) by a transformation of the peasant mob to social collectivity and individual (hero) who rises up; 2) by calling forth a cultural force, a “soul” which animates an emerging nationalism, a soul that finds its origins in the natural origins of the people; and 3). through the aesthetic and political reaction to the tyranny of rationalism (p. 9).

As the people were acquiring access to culture through the above three dynamics, the concept of culture was also changing; changing perhaps because it was so hard to erase from the bourgeoisie’s collective un/consciousness the image of the “conspiratorial mob” (a vast, vulgar, unwashed rabble of irascible and violent Jacobins), from whom they were most concerned to distance themselves. So conceptions of culture began to drift in new directions. “One tendency separated culture from the idea of civilization...[and another recognized] the plurality of cultures, suggesting the need for a comparative mode of studying cultures. The beginning of this is evidenced by Herder’s Volkslieder (1778), the first treatment of popular poetry, and his Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind (1784), arguing that the evolution of humanity cannot be understood by the single, abstract principle of reason, and that there is the need “to accept the existence of a plurality of cultures and different modes of social life” (Martin-Barbero, p. 9).
Martin-Barbero goes on to explore the semantic fields of “folk”, *Volk* and *peuple* in a discussion philologist, Owen Barfield would have loved for the capacity of words to reveal the history of consciousness, but Martin-Barbero’s purpose is to show what these words *occulted* in the cultural imaginary. This discussion is limited to the imaginary of nationalism and how the romantic conception of the “soul of the Nation” mystified the notion of the people, by becoming a mystified people-Nation that formed a mystified ‘organic community’ mystified further by “mythical biological roots...and quasi-sacred ties of race and geography outside history” (p. 11). García Canclini indicates how the nation as a political formation came to be naturalized through the historical romanticizing of the political culture of populism:

> The conflicts in which national traditions were formed are forgotten or told as legends, simple archaic formulas of how institutions and social relations were formed, guaranteeing once and for all the essence of the nation. (1984c, p.5)

As Martin Barbero (1993) notes, once history is removed from popular culture, there can only be a looking backwards, a conserving of traditions and folklore, and a preserving of “originary purity” of the people:

> In the final analysis, the Romantics largely agreed with their old adversaries, the Enlightenment, that culturally speaking, ‘the people’ are a relic of the past. For both movements, the future belonged to abstract generalities of which the bourgeoisie are the incarnation: a *state* that absorbs all cultural differences obstructing the unified exercise of power and a *nation* with social classes or autonomous social groups, held together by the natural ties of land and language (p. 12).

As a relic of the past, “the people” having canonized “the nation,” may now be safely “included,” archived, and studied. Thus we see the grandfathers of anthropology enter stage right and begin their project of cultural analysis, “transforming the superstitions of the people into cultural survival.” Anthropology looked backward and found the “primitive,” and only through contact with *primitive, non-European* societies was cultural diversity given the *imprimatur* of science (p.12). Ginsburg (1980) informs:
“Only through the concept of primitive culture were anthropologists able to recognize as culture what they had earlier defined paternalistically as simply the common people of civilized nations” (Martín-Barbero, p. 12). And lest the anthropomorphized player waiting backstage, the capitalist antagonist, feel unattended to, Martín-Barbero has this to say: “Thus we see how...at the beginning of the nineteenth century...popular songs, stories and religious practices were idealized at the very moment when capitalist development in the form of the national state required their disappearance....And, in the second half of the nineteenth century, anthropology...rationalizes and legitimates colonial exploitation” (p. 13). But this old story in anthropology currently travels a more reformed, deconstructed road to Damascus, seeing now the darker side of its enlightenment tales.

“The people” can be traced in their new configuration as a “mass society” or “mass culture.” The Critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, who were witness to the Nazis spectacle of technology and social control, began to think through the relationship between mass culture and mass communication. Their understanding of the “culture industry” follows. The discussion concludes with cultural imaginaries that re-spatialize the nation and national sovereignty.

**Mass Culture - Where Have All “The People” Gone?**

During the course of the nineteenth century, the idea of “the people” disappeared into the concept of social class (on the left), and into the concept of the masses (on the right) (Martín-Barbero, p. 13). While most communication texts date the origins of ‘mass society’ between 1930-1940, Martín-Barbero indicates that these textual attempts to explain the relationship between culture and the masses, “obstinately disregards” the historical social origins of the masses, and “resolutely” make technology “the necessary and sufficient condition for the new society---and hence for the new culture....”(p. 23).

The transformation of “the people” into “mass culture” or “mass society” was interpreted by many North American intellectuals after World War II as the affirmation of democracy (even then conflated with capitalism). Later, the advent of television and its capacity for transmitting images and messages to mass audiences, further facilitated the conflation of economic strength and information control with political freedom. The
capitalist motors of modernization – specifically, the U.S. geopolitical hegemony and technological conditions that were emerging with the television media provided the “social landscape for the era’s cultural domination perspective,” which was undergirded by the assumption of media and cultural imperialism that Schiller (1991) states “is a subset of the general system of imperialism [with] the corporate economy…increasingly dependent on the media-cultural sector” (p. 14). The contours of what now is the familiar charge of cultural imperialism were only then becoming visible to the eye. Not to anticipate the story, but by the 1970’s Schiller notes, the data were available (Nordenstreng & Varis, 1971): UNESCO had documented the charge that American-produced cultural commodities (especially television programs) were “overwhelming the world” thus setting the stage for the majority of the world’s nations (also known as the Non-Aligned nations) to open the discussion about restructuring the world information order; and by necessity, implicated in the information order was the restructuring of the economic order (p. 14).

This restructuring was not to be. Instead a new myth was in the making with circular dynamics reminiscent of times gone by (“one must oppose tyranny in the name of the people...oppose the people in the name of reason”), only this time the locus was not politics but culture as Daniel Bell (1969) would point out in The End of Ideology. Those who had seen the Nazi system at too close range could no longer view capitalism as solely an economic system. “Its political and cultural texture and tendency toward totalitarianism had surfaced”(p.39). Paradoxically, those same productive, capitalist engines that had enslaved half of Europe had also liberated the world. On this side of the Atlantic, the “popularizers” David Riesman (1950) and Daniel Bell (1960) projected a new cultural imaginary. Riesman’s book, The Lonely Crowd (1950), showed a new society emerging from “another sort of revolution---a whole range of social developments associated with a shift from the era of production to the era of consumption.” Riesman understands modernization through two key processes: the formation of the ‘average man and woman’ in which the conflicts of social class dissolve; and the positioning of mass communication as an “efficient cause” which shapes contemporary history and culture (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 36). Martin-Barbero notes:
this conception of the processes of modernization summarizes the dominant North American line of thought characterizing mass society not as the end of culture but as the beginning of a new culture which the mass media make possible. And mass media are central not simply in the sense of circulation of information but in another more profound sense ‘In a society which lacks well-defined national institutions and a class of elite leadership fully conscious of its legitimate role, social integration is achieved through mass media’ (Bell, et al.,1969: 14).

(p. 36).

Again, the age old problem of social order emerges, and in the context of media’s power to control will be much later identified as “soft power,” or the capacity to manipulate without the use of force. In a society that denies the existence of social classes or class contradictions, media (particularly film and television) masquerade as the great equalizers.

Rosenberg (1964) didn’t find mass culture to be a result of capitalism, or the mass media’s capacity to democratize, or the peculiarities of the American psyche; he attributed it to only one thing--technology. Martín-Barbero (1993) calls this a “technological materialism of effects” that attributes to technology a sufficient cause in the development of mass culture that ignores “conflicting social groups that are continually transforming the structure of power and reconstituting the shape of social existence” (p.79). Founders of the field in mass communication research, including Harold Lasswell (1948), Paul Lazarsfeld (1941), and Wilbur Schramm (1954), were hard pressed to see or avoid the “technological materialism of effects.” For the most part, it was difficult for them to “see” beyond professional, intellectual, and disciplinary constraints especially when trying to legitimate a new field with the imprimatur of positive science; and when they did so glimpse, their vision was blurred by those very conceptual constraints. While critical theorists of the Frankfurt school were pointing their finger at hegemony (or maybe “hegemony” was a pointing finger to something beyond), U.S. researchers of various persuasions looked in other directions and missed their meaning. What were the objects of their gaze? Hanno Hardt (1992), in discussing the initial concerns of communication and media studies during the early forties says that the “basic commitment to enlightenment and the improvement of society qua society was
replaced by a definition of allegiance to special interests that equated the rising demands of the political and economic systems with serving the welfare of society” (p. 81).

In an approach somewhat reminiscent of stimulus-response theory, Lasswell (1948) developed a model for understanding human communication that powerfully influenced communication research. He identified “not only the elements of the communication process--- communicator, message, medium, receiver, and effects---but also labeled the corresponding fields of communication research: media analysis, audience analysis and effects analysis” (p.89). Lasswell insisted on a quantitative approach because “of the scientific and policy gains that can come of it” (p. 87). His later ideas overcame the simplicity of his own behaviorist model and he recognized the close proximity between politics and culture, but he “could not prevail theoretically in the sociological circles that dominated the developing stages of the field” (p.144).

Schramm, an astute academic accommodator, insisted on characterizing communication as a behavioral science and according to him, the “science of human communication had arrived only with the development of ‘audience measurements, public opinion sampling, content study, and the measurement of social effect” (Hardt, p. 86). His 1954 book, *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, paved the way for the field of international development communication. With his “bulls-eye” notion of culture and advocacy of “the clearest possible understanding of the target culture,” he was primarily responsible for the instrumentalist orientation of assessing the impacts of successful communication on target audiences (p. 95). Throughout the 1950’s, his continuous publication of textbooks helped to define the parameters of the field, and diffused the innovation of a U.S definition of communication research with its relentless fascination with instrumentalist and methodological issues.

Lazarsfeld walked a tightrope as administrator of the Bureau of Applied Social Research. He had to keep the Bureau “maneuvering between the intellectual and political purist and an industry from which [he] wanted cooperation without having to sell out” (p. 106). As a self-labeled European positivist and also quite familiar with the critical school, Lazarsfeld was sensitive to the need for accommodating criticism in communication research, but it was of a difference of kind. “According to Lazarsfeld, “administrative research...is carried through in the service of some kind of administrative
agency of public or private character,” while critical research is posed against the practice of administrative research, requiring that, prior and in addition to whatever special purpose is to be served, the general role of our media of communication in the present social system should be studied” (1941a:8-9, in Hardt, p.108). Lazarsfeld, quite aware of his American cultural context, did not pursue the theoretical implications of his critical friends (Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer). The assessment below regarding why he did not is pertinent to the communications field and to scientific research generally:

the prohibition on political self-consciousness” as John Peters has called it, included the terrain of American (mass) communication research and involved the rules of separating facts from values under which expressed commitments and claims of objectivity would clash (1989:217). These restrictions were spread throughout the social science establishment; they encouraged self-denial and deception and may have had a particular influence on émigrés, like Lazarsfeld, whose cultural adjustments remained under scrutiny (Hardt, p. 111).

According to Hardt’s appraisal, Lazarsfeld and his contemporaries “saw the problems of media and society in technological terms, dealing with the inevitability of industrialization, the massification of audiences, and the effects of these ‘mass’ media on people. They adopted a technological rationale...which could only provide solutions consistent with the prevailing theory of society...Furthermore, over time American (mass) communication research has remained insensitive to changing historical conditions which effectively define problems of communication [and] has aligned itself with the social and economic power structure” (p.109).

This discussion hardly does justice to the complexity of these early contributors to mass communication studies and passes over many others. But what is clear in the literature are the multiple constraints and the intransigent nature of the co-optation of any critical agenda. The nature of these constraints, blurred or invisible in the moment of lived experience, become clearer when viewed from a temporal distance. One opportunity is provided by an examination of the Non-Aligned Nations Movement’s transnational call for a new world information order, and the strong and vitriolic reaction
of U.S. media conglomerates in the name of the “free flow of information.” Throughout
the initial years of mass culture and communication research, the media had successfully
presented themselves within the cultural imaginary of “freedom” – freedom of speech, of
the press, of the people, and, through a “rhetoric of compliance with democratic ideals,”
epitomized by the National Association of Broadcasters’ declaration that “American
broadcasting [is] a living symbol of democracy [whose] only proper measure of its
responsibility is the common good of the whole people” (Siepmann, 1950, p. 60). But
what these words obscured -- the deep relationship between the economic engine of
capitalism and mass culture -- was the task Critical theorists set themselves to understand
in the face of the terror this conjuncture had produced in Europe. In the years following
World War II, they thought a lot about the “culture industry.”

**Critical Theory and the Culture Industry**

In 1944, Horkheimer and Adorno published *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which
they sought to understand “why humanity, instead of entering into a truly human
condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism” (Kellner, 1989, p.85). They critiqued
Western civilization, its Enlightenment foundation, and most particularly, the ‘totally
administered society’ indicating “they were forced to abandon trust in the disciplinary
sciences and turn to critical philosophy in part because of the integration of science and
scientific thought into the apparatus of the current systems of domination, fascist and
capitalist” (p. 85). Philosophy too had become implicated and thus needed new concepts
and fresh methods of inquiry, thought and expression:

> There is no longer any available form of linguistic expression
> which has not tended toward accommodation to dominant
currents of thought; and what a devalued language does not
do automatically is proficiently executed by societal mechanisms
>i.e. censorship, editing, the current system of education, publishing,
the media, etc. (p.85-86).

There was a lot to distrust: science, instrumental reason, technology---all
colluding in domination. Thus, Critical theory “defined itself as an attitude and practice
characterized by mistrust, skepticism, reflexivity and ‘negative thinking,’ which made social critique a central part of its theoretical practice” (p.86). Their conceptual categories (commodification, reification, administration) derived in large part from Georg Lukacs’s critique of capitalism, which followed upon Marx’s understanding of “the commodity” as the key unit in capitalist production, and extended this portrayal beyond economics to an ever-expanding “commodification” of social life. Thus, Lukacs introduced the concept of “reification,” whereby the relations between people assumes “the fantastic form of a relation between things” (Bullock and Stallybrass,1977, p.534); and by incorporating Max Weber, saw bureaucracy and administration as intensifying the process of reification (Kellner, p. 53). What was once separate from commodification and exchange such as sex, love and culture becomes ever more integrated and “reified” into the system of exchange, involving the sacrifice of individuality and a “deadening” of social and individual processes. (Hardt, p.139). Critical sociologist, Harry Dahms (1996) explicates Lukacs’ “secret” of commodification and the epistemological dynamic of capitalist social relations:

For Lukacs, the commodity is the ‘cell’ of capitalist social relations...its secret is the establishment of abstract equivalence: not only can all sorts of goods be equated and exchanged with one another by virtue of being commodities, but human activities and relations as well are commodified, i.e. reduced to abstract equivalence. The establishment of equivalence among qualitatively different things and human activities requires that one abstract precisely from those substantive, concrete characteristics that distinguish them from one another. This process of abstraction is a societal one: it is not a mental act performed by individuals, but corresponds to a real social process (p. 183).

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno (1944) amplify the Marxist tenet that in capitalist society “exchange value predominates over use value,” using the “exchange of equivalents” as a strong basis for their critique of Enlightenment rationality. I sketch their argument briefly as it reflects on epistemological issues undergirding scientific technicism and fast forwards to the discussion of mass society and mass culture:
They began arguing...that quantitative, abstract modes of thought are ruled by principles of equivalence and substitution whereby dissimilar things become comparable by reduction to abstract quantities which exclude individual quality on principle....The enlightenment principle that all valid thought and knowledge must conform to principles of calculation, equivalence and systemization is suspect and promotes conformist modes of thought...Every object has its own particularity and uniqueness, which cannot be subsumed in categories, and it is totalitarian to believe that a specific mode of thought can systematize all being. The social implications of this mind-set concern attempts by social organizations and administration to control individuals in ways that abstract from individuality and uniqueness through the imposition of formal rules and regulations...The administrator abstracts from particulars in favor of universal rules and regulations, and thus forces individuals to conform to a system of administration and domination. The result is a leveling off of differences and the production of a mass society....Enlightenment thought moves naturally from being an instrument for the domination of nature to the domination of human beings, and that therefore there is a logical progression from the factory to the prisons to the concentration camps to the totally administered society (pp.96-98).

The concept of the “culture industry,” born in a textual critique of the Enlightenment, was incubated within the political context of German Naziism and the economic convergence of mass culture and mass communication in the U.S. From their exiled North American vantage points in New York, Washington or California, the Critical theorists witnessed first hand the increasing “cultural power of the commercial broadcast systems”, the government’s propagandistic use of mass communications, and the film industry’s influence and use of entertainment:

The Critical Theorists thus came to see what they called the ‘culture industries’ as a central part of a new configuration of capitalist modernity, which used culture, advertising, mass communications and new forms of social control to induce consent to the new forms of capitalist society (Kellner, p. 130)

Their meaning of the term, while not obvious, was nevertheless explicit: “culture industry” was chosen rather than “mass culture” or other terms to “resist notions that
products of mass culture emanated from the masses or the people. They saw the culture industry as involving administered culture, imposed from above, as an instrument of indoctrination and social control...Culture [had] come to function as a mode of ideological domination, rather than of humanization or emancipation” (pp. 130-131).

The power of Horkheimer and Adorno’s conceptualization of the culture industry lies in their linking two conditions of cultural production in modern society: first, its industrial nature or assembly line reproductivity and second, the power to produce a sense of need. The production of goods is closely tied to the production of desire. In fact, the “technological rationale” or the “rationale of domination” itself is the connection between the assembly line and the production of needs. Taken together these concepts help clarify “how capitalism conditions the relationship between work and leisure, especially the deceptive sham of their supposed independence” (Martín-Barbero, p. 42); and points to “the tendencies toward conformity, standardization and deception in the culture industry in terms of its control by monopoly corporations, which themselves are central to the capitalist system” (Kellner, p.132);

The culture industry embraces the ideology of business in its creation of needs; it obtains power from ‘its identification with a manufactured need’ (DOE,1972, p.137) and the promise of escape from the work process through its production of amusement (Hardt, p.140).

And all this theorizing in the innocent days of radio, the press, and cinema, before television became the mechanism of an even more entertaining “domination.” Adorno’s “How to Look at Television” became a classic, and those who thought about such things were beginning to see the importance of culture and communication in understanding social change; and many began to draw from this critical mode of research.

For example, the term “culture industry,” was adopted by Adorno and Horkheimer (and later widely used in theorizing mass society), to resist the notion that mass culture was determined by the masses or by the people, from below, but rather, was imposed from above “as an instrument of indoctrination and social control” (Kellner, pp.130-131). In their conception, entertainment and advertising were mass media
strategies that established a “socio-psychological basis for social integration...and the acceptance of dominant ideologies” (p. 131). “Entertainment” is particularly susceptible to motives of social control because of its veneer of ideological innocence. C. Wright Mills in *White Collar* (1951) believed the media were critical in shaping individual conformity to middle class values and behavior. He saw entertainment as a strategy of manipulation, which was an “especially potent instrument of social control because “popular culture is not tagged as “propaganda” but as entertainment; people are often exposed to it when most relaxed of mind and tired of body. The constant reoccurrence of the same images and messages serves not only to engineer consensus about existing society but penetrates into the realm of consciousness---ego formation and personality.

Herbert Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man* (1962) confirmed the decline of the individual, authentic culture, and oppositional thought. He portrayed the media as a new form of social control that “engendered ‘false needs’ and the ‘one-dimensional’ thought and behavior necessary for the smooth reproduction of advanced capitalism” (p.137). This complex of factors produced a total reification of consciousness that affected the social and psychological dimensions of human existence, and left little room for optimism with regard to the humanizing function of culture, or the transforming capacity of human agency.

As Kellner relates, Habermas “provided a historical analysis of the transition from a form of liberal capitalism that contained a democratic public sphere in which ‘public opinion’ was formed by debate and consensus and in which an educated public critically discussed political and social issues to a form of monopoly capitalism in which public opinion was formed by the mass media, and culture was passively consumed by culture industry spectators” (p. 137).

**Culture Moves Center Stage**

While mass culture theorists were busy with their theoretical work, the people were busy with their lives and social theorists were developing the concept of “mediation” to answer what do people do. Theorists in particular who never lost sight of “the people” were Walter Benjamin and Antonio Gramsci, and later others of the cultural
studies tradition such as Richard Hoggart (The Uses of Literacy, 1957), Raymond Williams (The Long Revolution, 1961), and E.P. Thompson (The Making of the English Working Class, 1963). They read mass culture, not as a degraded version of “authentic culture” as Adorno and early critical theorists still tended to do, but as the site of popular culture. In their work, the people were not excluded from the presence of their time and space/place, nor denied the capacity for reflection, action, resistance, or enjoyment. These theorists do not break from a critical tradition but amplify it, particularly through their attention to people’s lived experience (culture), rather than reified categories of either “class” (on the left) or “stratification” (on the right). I particularly like Thompson’s quote that follows, as it reflects not so much a new lens but a deeper focus and a reverse shot: the people were not the masses (of extras) in the background but protagonists in their own story, spinning webs of significance:

Classes do not exist as separate entities that look around and find an enemy class and begin to struggle. On the contrary, in a structured society, people find themselves integrated socially according to the way they experience exploitation. They identify opposing points of interests, and they begin to struggle for these points. In the struggle they realize they are a class.

(Thompson, 1979, p. 37)

The renewed interest in culture, particularly popular culture, passes through Gramsci. His theoretical contribution moved early Marxist analysis beyond their aspirations for scientific legitimacy. Gramsci’s thinking, specifically his concept of hegemony, shifted the focus of Marxist thought away from scientific determinism and made way for the people (although not until Dialectic of Enlightenment would a sustained critique of the scientific rationale be elaborated). Gramsci’s formulation of hegemony made it possible “to move beyond the conception of social domination as simply an outside imposition without subjects of cultural action” (Martin-Barbero, p. 74). With the recovery of the popular, particularly as a power for political and social transformation, García Canclini advises not to “romanticize” the people again, attributing to them “an unlimited capacity for defiance and an almost metaphysical power to produce an alternative” (p.75). He notes:
there is so much insistence on the juxtaposition of the subaltern and hegemonic culture and on the political necessity of defending the independence of the subaltern culture that the two come to be thought of as two quite separate entities. With the presupposition that the task of hegemonic culture is to dominate and that of the subaltern culture is to resist, much research has had no other aim than to inquire about the ways the two distinct roles were carried out (p. 75).

The Real Debate: Gramsci and Benjamin

Gramsci’s intellectual effort was precisely aimed at overcoming the polarization that García Canclini identifies. With Gramsci, political struggle moved onto the battleground of popular culture. Culture was the site of both popular resistance and hegemonic domination. This was the real debate between Adorno and Benjamin and their different approaches to mass culture. Benjamin’s vision of this “mediation” is far from the distancing moves and melancholic longings of Adorno (who hated jazz and film!) for high culture:

[Benjamin’s] vision of mediation makes it possible to understand the historical relations between the conditions of production and the changes in the area of culture, that is, the transformations of the sensorium changing ways of perceiving and experiencing social reality. For enlightenment rationality this level of experience is obscure, fundamentally opaque and inconceivable. For Benjamin, on the contrary, to think in terms of experience is the only way to study what burst into history with the appearance of the masses and of technology. From this perspective, it is impossible to understand what is happening in the masses without listening to their experiences. In high culture, the key lies in the work itself, while in the other culture the key lies in perception and use...Thus, Benjamin took on himself the task of thinking through the changes which shape modernity from the viewpoint of perception (Martin-Barbero, p.47).

Benjamin wanted to know how people experienced their lives as a result of the new forms of art and technology. It was a question of transformation, not aesthetics or technology. He says, “Within the great historical periods, the mode and manner of sensory perceptions change together with the existence of the people...”[and he attempts]
“to make evident the transformations in society that find their expression in the changes in sensory perception” (p. 48).

For Adorno, the symbol of culture’s highest degradation was cinema. But for Benjamin, “cinema is related to deep alterations in the sensory capacities, alterations experienced by every person on the street of the big city” (p. 52), an enrichment that “blows up the prison walls of the home, the factory and the office” (Martín-Barbero, p. 49), and concepts of national identity as well. Far from having a blind belief in Enlightenment progress, [as when he says, ‘Nothing has corrupted the German workers as much as their opinion that they are swimming with the current. Technological development is for them the forward sweep of the current which they feel is supporting their own efforts to move ahead” (p. 49)], Benjamin saw the role of technology pointing...to the “conquest of an egalitarian sensibility” (Martín-Barbero, p. 48), an optimism Adorno in no way shared:

The capacity to take off the wrappings of each object, crushing its sacred aura, is the sign of a perception which, precisely through reproduction, has created such a growing sense of equality in the world that it establishes a completely new level of sociability (p. 48).

As Martin Barbero remarks, “The new sensorium is expressed and materialized in techniques like photography and film that violate and profane the sanctity of the aura ‘or the unrepeatable manifestation of something held at a distance’....Before, not only works of art but so many other things apparently so near in daily life, were always so far away because social relations made them feel remote. Now the masses, with the help of technology, feel nearer to even the most remote and sacred things. Their perception carries a demand for equality that is the basic energy of the masses” (p. 48).

Crisis of the State, Mass Media, and Development

Martin-Barbero (1993) carries on a discussion of the role of the populace and the media within the crisis of the state experienced in Latin American. The media’s historical role in the Latin American countries, particularly radio and film, connected the historical memory of the masses with its popular iconography to new sensibilities of
nationhood. Radio particularly linked separate and isolated regions into the experience of being part of a nation. I experienced this personally living on an isolated farm in the mountain jungle of Colombia’s northern coast. Even though I was an “other,” not a national of the country but a gringa, when I heard the crackle of the radio or music from the various regions (peoples) across the dials, I felt a visceral connection and relationship to “something” that if I had been a national, I probably would have identified as “my country,” but which in any case I identified as “Colombian” and represents the beginnings of how the political idea of ‘nation’ becomes an ineffable but daily lived feeling or experience:

Before the appearance and growth of radio, the country was a patchwork of regions, each separate and isolated. Before 1940, Colombia could very well call itself a country of countries rather than a nation...radio allowed the country to experience an invisible national unity, a cultural identity shared simultaneously by the people of the coast, Antioquia, Pasto, Santander and Bogotá. (p. 165).

In Mexico, the growth of the cinema from the 1930’s to the 1950’s coincided with Mexico’s popular nationalism and, according to Edgar Morin “until 1950, film was the backbone of mass culture” (p. 166). According to C. Monsiváis (1976b), film was the center of gravity, not because of any artistic or industrial characteristic, but because it reflected and legitimated a collectively lived experience, even as it deformed. The Mexican public “did not go to the movies to dream; they went to learn. Watching the styles and fashions of the actors, the public learned to recognize and transform itself, finding solace, comfort and, secretly, exaltation” (Martín Barbero, p. 166):

Cinema was the living, social mediation that constituted the new cultural experience, and cinema became the first language of the popular urban culture. Beyond the reactionary subject matter and the rigidity of its forms, film connected with the yearnings of the masses to make themselves socially visible. Film became part of the movement to give ‘national identity’ an image and a voice. People went to the movies to see themselves in a sequence of images that gave them gestures, faces, manners of speaking and walking, landscapes and colours than to identify with the plots (p. 166).
Here the **plot** becomes ambiguously mediated and chauvinist and Martín-Barbero reminds us: “Freud has made clear that there is no access to language without passing through the shaping structures of symbolism, and Gramsci has explained that there is no social legitimation without re-semantization through the hegemonic code” (p.166). Therefore, basing his analysis on Montsiváis, Martín-Barbero reveals three mechanisms at work in creating the filmic experience of nationalism:

The first was *theatrical*—film as the dramatic staging and legitimation of peculiarly Mexican models of gestures, linguistic expressions and feeling. It was film which taught people how to be Mexican in the national sense. The second mechanism was *degradation*. That is, in order for the people to recognize themselves, it was necessary to place nationhood within their reach. From then on, the national image is one of being ‘irresponsible, being filled with filial affection for one’s mother, to be an idler, the drunk, the sentimental slob…the programmed humiliation of women, the religious fanaticism, the obsessive respect for private property (Monsiváis, 1976a, p.86). The third mechanism was *modernization*. Often the mixtures of images contradicted the traditional plots and brought up to date old myths, introduced customs and new models of moral behavior and gave public access to the new rebelliousness and forms of speaking…. ‘Film was the apparent guardian of the traditions it subverted ’ (p. 167, italics added).

Martín-Barbero’s prior argument showed how Mexico’s early popular social movements had intervened in the crisis of the state, developing legitimacy and constituting “the worker as a citizen in a national social formation” of national culture (p.163). At this point the “mass” has the “ambiguous political weight of the masses in the city and their explosive charge of social realism” (p.180). The mass media had the familiar political function of forming “the people” from the mass and projecting images of populism that authorized the nation that authorized the state. But after 1960 “strategies of development with its technocratic solutions and encouragement of a consumer society began to replace the worn out populist policies” (p.165), and “mass” came to “connote exclusively the means for homogenization and control of the masses” (p.180). All the while the state was maintaining the rhetoric of the
air waves as “public,” it was handing over its media functions to private interests. Within the rationale of progress, the mass media began to serve the economic function of a “democratizing development.” Again Martin-Barbero is instructive and offers a portrayal of mass media’s inner logic of mediation:

In the model of democratizing development... television achieves its central role in so far as there is unification of consumer demand....If we are able to consume the same things that developed peoples consume, then, clearly we have finally achieved development....what most influenced Latin America was the importation of the North American model of television....the heart of the model lies in the tendency to constitute, through television, a single public, and to reabsorb the sociocultural differences of a country to the point that one can confuse a higher degree of communicability with a higher degree of economic profitability....and something the model already logically implied became explicit: the tendency for television to constitute a discourse that, in order to speak to the largest number of people, had to reduce the differences to the minimum. This required of the audiences the least possible effort in decodification and posed the least possible conflict with the sociocultural prejudices of the majority....No other medium has the potential for providing access to such a wide variety of human experiences, countries, cultures and situations. But no other medium has channeled cultural perceptions to such a degree that, instead of encouraging a collapse of nationalistic ethnocentrism, reinforces it. As the spectacle of daily life is channeled into television, the hegemonic model of television reconstructs reality with a paradoxical control of differences. (pp 180-181).

In short, television becomes the mechanism for the establishment of a global market. Throughout Latin America, rapid growth and diversification gave rise to almost incomprehensible contradictions. “For the left, these contradictions simply made visible the incompatibility between capitalist accumulation and social change. For the right, the contradictions demonstrated the incompatibility of economic development with democracy....Within a few years, the takeover by military regimes (often aided by the United States) in a majority of Latin American countries showed clearly that the interests of capital were the only truly quantifiable objective of development” (p. 178). The media now become, not a mediator between the state and the masses, (i.e. rural and urban,
traditional and modern) but simulate and neutralize the public sphere” as TV aerials in places with no running water exemplify the changed concept of the mass (p.180).

Spatializing the "Natives": Sovereignty and Culture

Transformation of the people’s culture into political nation-states in Europe and North America was a long rebellious process of enculturation into sovereignty and the market system. The social body that had been integrated through Christianity, fragmented through the Reformation, and reconstituted through a secular state had “reached its fullest form in the nation-state conceived by the Enlightenment and its ‘realization’ by the French Revolution, who understand the nation as both the sovereignty of the state and social and economic unity” (Martín-Barbero, p. 87). The enculturation of people into industrial rhythms and a market economy was marked by continual rebellion and movements of popular resistance. Not mindless riots of unruly masses, “the real influence and significance of these movements are found...in the permanent and flagrant abuse by the market economy of what Thompson calls ‘the moral economy of the common citizen’” (p. 94):

The popular classes were convinced that prices should be regulated by mutual agreement, above all in times of scarcity. And that conviction brought into existence traditional customs, rights and legitimate practices in the popular culture….It was a question of the old economic order based on a moral imperative, what ‘should be’, namely, exchange as a reciprocal obligation between subjects. The popular classes refused to accept the new superstition of a natural and self-regulating economy, of relationships between objects....When this economy abstracted from persons, it undermined the very foundation of popular culture, its moral presuppositions and the rights defined by local and regional customs. (p. 94)

Territorial boundaries, separate, enclosed surfaces on colored maps, define a cultural space creating borders that can be traded across; and trading helps to consolidate national identity within and without. Thus sovereignty, as a value, was early agreed upon and is reiterated in international declarations and treaties to this day. The concept
“national sovereignty” has been with us so long it is hard to image social organization without it, weathering early national formation, empire building, and colonial rebellions struggling for the right to it. National sovereignty indicates a state, and inscribes a space, a place, and the identification of peoples and cultures within that place -- the “peoples and cultures” vision of the world that so excited some early anthropological minds to leave their leathered armchairs and go “there.” But the long “revolution” of the people to mass culture, now through mass media and global capital, is beginning to reconfigure the conceptual map of national sovereignty and identity. Popular resistance and new social movements -- women, indigenous, human rights, environmental, and less known, that of Latin American filmmakers -- continue to register their historical opposition to “market abuse,” while developing nations struggle for the sovereignty they won in name and now must win in fact.

The apparent collapse of colonial empires and the appearance or reconfiguration of new independent states throughout the “Third World” has been seen spatially and Akhil Gupta suggests that an argument could be made for “linking the reinscription of space in Europe and the third world with the nature of late capitalism” (1997, p. 188). Ernest Mandel’s (1975) prescience may be noted in his statement that “the growing centralization and concentration of capital was likely to lead to the reterritorialization of space as ever larger capitalist conglomerates ran up against the limits of specially protected but spatially segmented national markets” (Gupta, p.188). Gupta looks at the formation of the Non-Aligned Nations of newly independent countries and the European Community as “imagined communities that transgress the spatial order of nation-states”(p.180). She indicates that a juxtaposition of nationalism within a transnational context allows new questions to be asked about the nature of binding identity to space or place:

Hence any effort to understand how identity and location become tied through nationalism must examine those situations where the imagined community does not map out a national terrain. The displacement of identity and culture from “the nation” forces us not only to reevaluate our ideas about culture and identity but also enables us to denaturalize the nation as the hegemonic form of organizing space” (p.194).
In the struggle to maintain and form national sovereignty, leaders of newly independent countries encountered, “political and economic dependencies, the cultural legacy of former colonial relations” (Hamelink, 1994, p. 24). In the midst of superpowers’ battle to shape the world to their interests, these new states, beleaguered internally (diverse peoples making “the nation”) and externally by forceful business qua Development interests, turned to a transnational coalition of nations to strengthen their efforts toward independence and nationalism.

Beginning in 1955 at Bandung, the strategy of the Non-Aligned Nations for independent development included a prominent focus on communication and culture, combined with efforts at economic linkage during the 1960’s. By the 1970’s, the transfer of technology had increased dependence and debt to such a degree that concerns about the “disparity in communication capacity” and calls for the “emancipation of media” in developing countries strongly opened the debate in 1973 at Algiers (p. 198), where Third World filmmakers cataloged and detailed the role of the filmmaker in the struggle against neocolonialism and imperialism. In 1976 at Tunis it was stated:

Since information in the world shows a disequilibrium favouring some and ignoring others, it is the duty of the non-aligned countries and other developing countries to change this situation and obtain the decolonization of information and initiate a new international order of information.’ The New Delhi Declaration on Decolonization of Information stated that the establishment of a new international order of information is as necessary as the new international economic order” (p. 198).

In 1980, a key media resolution of UNESCO sought:

the elimination of the imbalances and inequities which characterize the present situation,” which derive from “the negative effects of certain monopolies, public or private, and excessive concentrations.” It called for a “plurality of sources and information,” which would come from increasing “the capacity of developing countries to achieve improvement of their own situations, notably by providing their own equipment, by training
their personnel, by improving their infrastructures and by making their information and communication media suitable to their needs and aspirations.”

But because this UNESCO resolution demanded “respect for the right of all people to participate in international exchanges of information on the basis of equality, justice, and mutual benefit,” it was denounced by both European and U.S. press as well as by both houses of the U.S. Congress as inhibiting the “free flow of information.” More generally, knowledge of this crucial UNESCO proposition and its political history has been quietly suppressed here” (Lesage, 1983, pp. 71-72).

The rest, as they say, is history. UNESCO received more than a slap on the hand by the U.S. for being the seditious forum for a debate that had seriously contemplated a fundamental restructuring of the international economic order. Hamelink indicates that 1979 at Manila had really already “marked the point at which the North-South round of negotiations...effectively ended. A coalition of a majority of the world’s states had not prevailed against market rationales now embodied and operating in stateless transnational corporations under the economic configuration and “brand” of “global capital.”

These new configurations of old struggles around nation building and national identity must be kept in mind as we move forward in the present study of the how Cuban and Latin American filmmakers used film as an instrument in the social and cultural process of decolonization and national development. As both a social and cinematic movement, “the distinguishing characteristic of the Latin American Cinema movement was its belief that the development of a new cinema language would grow out of the participation of filmmakers and artists in bringing about change in society. The movement called for the creation of a popular cinema, both in the sense of attracting a mass-audience and of creating, with popular social forces, a cultural expression for the purpose of strengthening popular participation in society” (Agosta and Keeton, 1994, p. 8).

Cuba participated and spearheaded many of these debates concerning the role of intellectuals and artists in social change. The government had been begun to develop a national cinema that played an integral role in the “shaping of revolutionary
consciousness” inside the country, and served as Cuba’s cultural ambassador for the Revolution abroad (Medin, 1990, p. 1). As Cuban cinema began to achieve acclaim at international film festivals, Cuban films not only brought attention to the social agenda of the New Latin American Cinema, but helped to alleviate Cuba’s isolation imposed by the United States embargo. Cuban filmmaker and Latin American film theorist, García Espinosa notes that “TV has more power in a country than cinema, but cinema offers the international image of a country. One of the fundamental roles that Cuban cinema has played is that it has broken…the isolation that the U.S. has wanted to impose on us” (West, 1987, p. 20). Cinema allowed Cuba to maintain relations with other countries, particularly in Latin America, furthering its policies of regionalism and internationalism.

**New Latin American Cinema: social movement and trans-cultural critique**

The notion of Latin America exceeds all nationalisms. There is a common problem: misery. There is a common objective: the economic, political and cultural freedom to make a Latin American cinema. An engaged, didactic, epic, revolutionary cinema. A cinema without frontiers, with a common language and common problems.

Glauber Rocha, *Revoluçao do Cinema Novo*

The regional struggle and the efforts of Latin American filmmakers, beginning in the late 1950’s, to change oppressive social conditions in their various countries is another chapter in Latin America’s activist and creative use of mass media and communication strategies in national development. How did the Latin American and Cuban struggle against neocolonialism and underdevelopment come together with filmmaking to create a unique and enduring social and cinematic movement known as the New Latin American Cinema?:

In the 1950’s a confluence of factors gave rise to conditions that would set the stage for the emergence of the New Latin American Cinema as a movement. Politically, these were tempestuous years characterized by the rise of nationalism and militancy. Massive political changes took place throughout the continent: the *bogotazo* in Colombia in 1949, the unfinished workers revolution in Bolivia in 1952, liberal reforms in Guatemala in 1954 which provoked U.S. intervention, the suicide of the populist Brazilian President Vargas
in 1954, the military overthrow of Argentine President Peron in 1955, and most significantly, the guerrilla war in Cuba which led to the establishment of a socialist regime in 1959. In the 1960s...with the mobilization of the middle classes in support of sweeping socio-political changes, this political turmoil was translated into a kind of cultural effervescence which, when linked to the traditionally *engagé* position of Latin American intellectuals and the growing student activism of the period, set the stage for broad cultural changes which decisively affected the cinema. (Lopez, in Martin, 1994, p. 139)

The representational strategies of the New Latin American Cinema were diverse, highly eclectic, and a response to the historical circumstances and hybrid cultures of each country. Filmmakers, through their manifestos, various writings, and their films, used cinema as a way to dramatically critique dependency and underdevelopment. Ana Lopez describes the New Latin American Cinema as a movement that not only persistently positioned itself as a “response to Latin American underdevelopment,” but managed “to change the social function of cinema in Latin America” (1986, p. 3). Finding inspiration from Frantz Fanon, these filmmakers conceived of cinema as “an instrument for social analysis, political action, and social transformation,” (Martin, 1997, p. 17).

**Ideological and Aesthetic Foundations**

According to Martin, the central question of a Latin American aesthetic was taken up in the declarations, manifestos, programmatic statements, polemical and theoretical writings of filmmakers from across Latin America. These writings constitute “the ideological and aesthetic foundations of the New Latin American Cinema movement” (p. 17) By “aesthetic,” Martin means what Robert Stam described, as “the search for production methods and a style appropriate to the economic conditions and political circumstances of the Third World” (p.17).

Filmmakers such as Argentina’s Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino’s called for a “Third Cinema,” a “clandestine, subversive, “guerilla,” and “unfinished,” cinema that radically counteracts the hegemony of Hollywood and European capitalist production and distribution practices” (p. 17). Not a “Third Worldist” cinema but cinema that suggested a new role, a third alternative. First cinema was Hollywood, second cinema was the European auteur, and “third cinema” was a new, third model, a cinema of
opposition and struggle. “They envisioned a cinema that would be able to represent, inform, analyze and, even radically change the specific, real conditions of their countries. Thus many filmmakers were effectively answering Solanas/Getino’s call to use cinema as (1) a tool for consciousness raising, (2) an instrument for research and social analysis, and (3) as a catalyst to political action and social transformation, exemplified in *The Hour of the Furnaces*” (Rist, 1968, p. 61). It would not be possible to separate this 1968 film, nor any film, from the historical circumstances of its production, a time when many dreamed of revolution. They wrote, “our time is one of hypothesis rather than thesis, a time of works in process – unfinished, unordered, violent works made with a camera in one hand and a rock in the other” (p. 61).

Cuba’s Julio García Espinosa argued for a committed poetics, a new poetics of synthesis, “Art will not disappear into nothing. It will disappear into everything,” he said. (Barnard, 1993, p.71). In his theoretical manifesto, “Imperfect Cinema,” he cautioned “Third World filmmakers not to be enthralled by technically and artistically “perfect” cinema…. [but instead] should use their limited resources to confront the prettified commercial cinema of the developed countries with a radical film culture dedicated to cultural decolonization” (West, 1987, p.20). Cuban filmmaker, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, spoke of an “active cinema for an active spectator” (Martin, 1997, p. 17).

The Brazilian filmmaker, Glauber Rocha, in a powerful metaphor naming cinema “An Esthetic of Hunger” inverted “the social reality of underdevelopment and dependency – themes of hunger – into a signifier of resistance and transformation where violence is the authentic and empowering expression of the oppressed; he inserts the filmmaker allied with the movement, *Cinema Novo*, in the continent’s struggle against neocolonial domination” (p. 17). According to film scholar Ana Lopez, by the mid 1970’s these various terms for oppositional national cinemas had slowly but powerfully coalesced into a particular socio-political attitude subsumed under the far more powerful, enduring, and empowering title of “New Latin American Cinema”:

This attitude can be summarized as a desire to change the social function of the cinema, to transform the Latin American cinema into an instrument of change and of consciousness-raising or *concientización*. Always conceived of as a challenge to the hegemony of the
Hollywood import and foreign control of cinematic institutions and as an active agent in the process of cultural decolonization, the New Latin American cinema is not just a filmmaking movement; it is a social practice intimately related to other movements struggling for the socio-cultural, political, and economic autonomy of Latin America. And it is a social practice that revels in the diversity and multiplicity of its efforts to create an “other” cinema with “other” social effects as a prerequisite of its principal goal to reveal and analyze the “reality,” the underdevelopment and national characteristics, that decades of dependency have concealed (Martin, 1997, p. 139).

Conceptualizing National Cinema

How did these distinct national cinemas come together to become the cinematic movement of Latin America?

Lopez’s response is that “the issue of nationalism is related to the question of influences” (Martin, p.141). In terms of influence she says, “one of the most telling and defining characteristics” of the New Latin American Cinema “has been its ability to transform and improvise upon existing models of cinematic production”:

The emergence of cine clubs, specialized film publications, film societies, and film festivals in the 1950s and early 1960s led to a different awareness of the cultural significance of the cinema. Although most of these organizations and activities were spurred by an interest in the burgeoning European art cinema, this interest served to shift attention away from the Hollywood model to alternative practices such as Italian Neorealism. In fact, in the context of production…Neorealism was a revelation to those struggling to create national cinemas in the face of underdevelopment and the failures of industrial efforts (pp. 139-140).

She goes on to observe that in the classical sense of the term, “Neo-realism constituted an epistemological break for international filmmaking by representing the formerly unrepresented. It explicitly rejected the Hollywood mode of production with its low budgets, non-actors and location shooting; demanded an awareness of the links between
cinematic production and expression; and upheld in Rossellini’s words, “a moral position from which to look at the world” (p. 140).

Lopez notes that the “otherness” of the New Latin American cinema is “predicated upon their inseparability from and their relationship to the dominant, for it is in the nature of cultural production in dependent nations to always to be caught in the struggle for self-definition” (Martin, p.141). Glauber Rocha discusses this dynamic in terms of his country’s national cinema:

But how to create a national film industry? The cinema is an industry which generates culture. American cinema has created a taste for itself, and if Brazilian cinema, in order to develop, wants to follow the easiest path, all it has to do is make use of American formulae. But in doing so, Brazil’s industrial cinema will be nothing more than the propagator of a greater force, that of the dominant culture. This culture might just as easily be French or Russian or Belgian –it would make no difference; but in an underdeveloped country, it does make a difference whether or not the society can obtain a practice generated out of the conditions of its own specific social and economic structure (Martin p. 270).

While cinema as a “national necessity has never been a concern of Hollywood,” Lopez notes that in Latin America, “the importance of nationality in the cinema has been a hotly debated issue almost since the birth of cinema;” and was “identified early on as a crucial site for the utopian assertion of a collective unity identified as the nation” (p.141). Within the various circumstances and conditions of national cinemas throughout the countries of Latin America, “the national” is the turning point, and “cinema” the ground on which a new national subjectivity or nationhood was posited and practiced. “The goal has been to develop through the cinema (and other cultural practices) a different kind of national and hemispheric consciousness by systematically attempting to transform the function of the national cinema in society and the place of the spectator in the national cinema” (p. 142). Lopez again informs:

Furthermore, dependence operates through internal as well as external forces and the national (or, as it is commonly called in this instance, bourgeois nationalism) may be articulated in
the service of those same forces of international capitalism. It is precisely as a movement that stresses a particular set of nationalist positions and that articulates these positions across a terrain much broader than the national sphere that the New Latin American Cinema acquires its revolutionary cultural significance. It does not just represent a national cultural response to the specific forces of development and underdevelopment of a particular nation state, but an attempt to incorporate the importance of the national within the necessarily pan-Latin American nature of any such class-cultural struggle (p. 145).

The meeting of Latin American filmmakers in the 1967 Viña del Mar Festival and their “unity of purpose” at this meeting usually marks the point of coalescence of the New Latin American Cinema in developing alternative cinematic practices in the struggle against underdevelopment in Latin America (Martin, p.149). John King (1990) points out some of the questions they were facing:

…the development of cinema under a socialist state; the relationship between film-makers and the state in a dependent capitalist context; the problems not only of production in conditions of scarcity, but also the possibility of either entering the established distribution and exhibition networks or creating alternative structures for dissemination. (p. 69).

In these defining moments and for the next decade New Latin American Cinema was explicitly political, revolutionary, using the documentary form to call for an end to poverty, oppression, illiteracy, exposing and visually marking underdevelopment, which the documentaries of Argentines, Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino and Cuban, Santiago Alvarez are exemplary. In fiction, films “showed Latin Americans the faces of their peoples and the problems of their nations, that celebrated national characteristics and popular culture, that sought to contribute to the end of all the shared ills of the continent. They were realist, historical, inventive films that took up the margins of traditional filmic practices as their own terrain, that subverted and deconstructed the traditional distinctions and categories of the dominant cinema to tell “other” stories, to show “other” facts” (p. 150).
For the most part the national cinemas within the New Latin American Cinema were “independent films, marginal cinemas on the fringes of existing industries (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico) or artisanal practices in nations without a developed national cinematic infrastructure (Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia)” (p. 150). Cuban cinema was always a distinct exception in that it had the enviable sponsorship of a revolutionary state and played a pivotal collaborative role in fostering continuity for this regional cinematic project.

By 1975, the New Latin American Cinema seemed crushed by military interventions and dictatorships and/or absorbed back into whatever state filmmaking apparatus existed in each country. “The U.S. government had “encouraged and materially supported the militaries in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Chile which one after another overthrew their democratically elected governments. This support continued through years of brutal repression in which tens of thousands disappeared, died, or were forced into exile. Collaterally, the effort to create and develop national film industries collapsed under these circumstances” (Hess 1999, internet site, no page #). But, Lopez counters, while this cinema was “often forced into exile or silenced by censorship and repression at a national level, [it] assumed an increasingly pan-Latin American character” (Martin, p. 151) as changing historical conditions and conditions of film production forced filmmakers to reevaluate their production strategies, while not relinquishing their oppositional politics.

Throughout its history, Cuban filmmakers have played a crucial role in the promotion and process of the movement’s cohesion and self-definition by actively promoting the term and idea of a “New Latin American Cinema,” initiating debates and informal exchanges, and beginning in 1979 (until the present) permanently hosting the New Latin American Film Festival each year in Havana. The festival has helped to solidify the movement’s international presence. It provided the institutional continuity and development of other ventures to increase the production, distribution and exhibition of Latin American films. For example, the Foundation of the New Latin American Cinema was established in 1985 and the following year it opened a regional film school to train continental filmmakers from Latin America, Asia and Africa. The Film and Television School of the Three Worlds at San Antonio de los Baños (outside Havana) is
primarily staffed by Cuban filmmakers but also brings in noted directors to teach student filmmakers from developing countries.

**Women in the New Latin American Cinema**

According to John Hess (1999), during the mid-1970’s when the New Latin American Cinema seemed in decline, “there began to appear fascinating work from small groups of mostly women film and video makers”:

Women’s liberation came slowly to Latin America and particularly slowly in the rather privileged enclaves of film production. Nevertheless, in the early 1980’s women’s meetings were held within the Havana Film Festival and became very lively events. More importantly, the first Latin American women’s film festival, called *Cocina de Imágenes* (Kitchen of Images) took place in Mexico City in 1987. The festival was a major success not just for film and video makers, but as a continuation of the series of feminist meetings that had been held in prior years (e.g., Bogota in 1981, Lima in 1983, and Sao Paulo in 1985. In various countries women had come together to form film and video collectives to deal with women’s issues. Two key examples are Lilith Video in Brazil and Cine Mujér in Colombia. Then in the early 1980’s, the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua and the insurgency in El Salvador created favorable circumstances for a new wave of film and video production, often using the most inexpensive equipment possible. For example, in Nicaragua women worked alongside men in the Taller Popular de Video (Popular Video Workshop) to make tapes about women’s lives and the impact of the revolution on them. (no page number given)

New Latin American Cinema has rarely taken into account “gender specific forms of social and political oppression” (Pick, 1993 p. 66). Even if women do not call themselves feminist, they “have had to contend with historical forms of exclusion and have struggled to participate in public life” (p. 68). Women’s creative struggle to transform patterns of exclusion that inhibit their full participation in processes of social change has had a long history in Latin America. From the 1910’s to the 1950’s, for instance, feminist-oriented interventions in literature by female writers and artists incorporated a “perception of the inadequacies of the traditional places from which
[women] were allowed to speak and act and [a] search for strategies that would relieve them of the burden of patriarchal tradition and fulfill the need for reform….(p.69):

The study of gender within the New Latin American Cinema is foremost a feminist intervention that attempts to go beyond the mere consideration of the place of women in representation. A feminist intervention, as Griselda Pollock suggest, “demands recognition of gender power relations, making visible the mechanism of male power, the social construction of sexual difference and the role of cultural representations in that construction (p. 69).

Pick (1993) notes that the incorporation of women’s issues and the new generation of film and video-makers presented a challenge to the movement because “the agenda of this new generation has evolved at the margins of traditional politics and outside the anti-imperialist rhetoric of cultural nationalism of the 1960’s. Through their films and videos, this generation addressed the relevance of the personal to relocate activism away and beyond the public space of partisan politics” (p. 35). According to B. Ruby Rich:

In this new environment, a cinema which turns inward and which begins to enable viewers to construct an alternate relationship -- not only with their government but with an authentic sense of self -- is an indispensable element in the evolution of a new sociopolitical environment. Slogans, pamphlets, and organizing have been key to political change; character, identity, empathy, and most importantly, a sense of personal agency, now are of equal importance to political evolution (p. 35).

Table 2.1 below provides an overview of the Latin American filmmakers and the countries that used film as a tool in the process of decolonization, an important term and social function in the new lexicon of revolutionary cinematic language.
### Table 2.1 Cinema Manifestos and Metaphors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Manifestos</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARGENTINA</td>
<td>Fernando Birri</td>
<td>For a Nationalist, Realist, Critical and Popular Cinema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARGENTINA</td>
<td>Fernando Solanas</td>
<td>Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Octavio Getino</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>Glauber Rocha</td>
<td>An Esthetic of Hunger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOLIVIA</td>
<td>Jorge Sanjines</td>
<td>Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUBA</td>
<td>Julio García Espinosa</td>
<td>An Imperfect Cinema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUBA</td>
<td>Tomás Gutiérrez Alea</td>
<td>The Viewers Dialectic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**In conclusion**

Cuban and Latin American filmmakers critiqued underdevelopment and dependency through their films, thus creating a visual body of cinematic work that documents the historical moment that their powerful voice and vision evoked “another” development and another kind of modernity. As filmmakers came to know and understand their social realities, they used cinema as a medium of social and development communication. That is, not merely to entertain but to engage audiences in processes of critical reflection for purposes of social change. The following chapter engages the reader in a discussion of the epistemological and methodological rationales used in the dissertation research design and data collection.

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1 Stam, R. (n.d.) Third World Cinema. in Patricia Erens (Ed.), College Course Files, monograph no. 5. University Film and Video Association.
CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

I. Ethnographic and Visual Representation

Introduction

Before returning to graduate school, I had worked in the media for ten years in a variety of contexts including advertising, television, film and video production in the Spanish-language media markets of Chicago, New York and Miami. I worked predominantly with exiled Cuban filmmakers, whose films invariably touched upon the Revolution and the experience of exile.

In 1984, while working as an apprentice editor in New York I sat in on an editing session of a documentary feature film entitled The Other Cuba. Present that night were the editor, Gloria Piñeyro, affectionately called la Madrina or “godmother” (probably for her generosity and god-mothering of many exile films in the editing process), Alberto Roldán, Leonardo Soriano, and Orlando Jiménez Leal, the film’s director. At the time, I did not know Orlando as the filmmaker whose short film PM unwittingly occasioned “Words to the Intellectuals,” Fidel's famous first foray into the realm of cultural politics. Their historical context would sink in years later as I began to do research for this dissertation. At that moment, they were simply friends and filmmakers, and that night I was more interested in filmmaking than history-making. In those more innocent days, I derided the political and nurtured my own utopian dreams of cinema as an untainted avenue (art not politics!) of creative possibility and medium for the projection and communication of alternative social vision/s.

That night, I wrote the note below in my journal – used now as “found material” pressed into service as an unwitting “fieldnote” turned ethnographic “display of self” and back-to-the-future “reflection” on the artful politics of representation:
October 25, 1984

Being present at the editing of “L’Altra Cuba” [The Other Cuba] with La Madrina y el Loco Leal, surrounded by Roldán with Leonardo Soriano sharing the thoughts of their profound solitude. (I like these people very much.) I felt relaxed and happy to be tacitly included in the rather private affair of documentary editing: the meaningful manipulation of the actual world into poetic form.

At first, and at last, I was observing the process: what was included, what was left out – and why. And then I became aware of the political realities passing through the moviola, and how the political reality of Cuba and the revolution formed such a pertinent and explosive, even tragic part of each one’s personal life. The people present have intimately witnessed or felt the film, this celluloid document, in blood, flesh and bone.

Maybe it was when Gloria said, “Watching this I feel sick….” Orlando usually hides any emotional response with his magisterial air and knock-down drag-about energy – a cyclone coming home to roost. Soriano talks when he has something to say, emotional or otherwise. And Alberto Roldán, antennas puestos, is undecided how present to be. His comments seem professional and knowledgeable and sometimes passionate when the moviola presses upon a tender personal reality.

After Orlando prohibited us from talking, Roldán passed me a note saying, “Great sufferings are silent.” I think he was observing Gloria when he wrote that but how apt a phrase for Roldán himself. He didn’t feel as comfortable as he should have. How to bridge this terrible isolation? And then the reality of creative people functioning….

I still feel a shyness, not a shyness really but a quietness within, in the mode of observation/learning. (I guess I know how opinionated I can be when I have an opinion.) Right now I feel curiously freed from opinions and the walls they construct: the inability to see beyond personal perspective.

I feel I have been kept out of “the world” and political alliances by that hand of destiny that can just as easily toss me in, while ever sustaining me like the lotus flower: although I am grounded on this earth (historically) with roots in the mire, my spirit floats on living waters, ever sustained.

Still mired, still floating, still breathing, in 1987, I produced a retrospective of Cuban filmmakers’ work entitled “Cuban Cinema in Exile,” which the late Bill Cosford, film critic for The Miami Herald, described as “a retrospective on a small but remarkable body of work largely distinguished by its country of origin -- which, of course, is no country at all but a state of mind.” The idea of Cuba, not as a country but a state of mind, resonated with me and continues to intrigue me deeply. Ten years later, as a
graduate student, I went to Cuba for the first time in the role of an academic researcher. As a native of Miami, I found the familiar had been made strange, and for me, Cuba had become the ethnographic “there.”

From 1997 to 1999 I attended yearly educational conferences in Cuba designed to facilitate encounters between North American and Cuban educators, where I made friends and met new colleagues. They helped me obtain access to the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) and to connect with filmmaker, Belkis Vega, who became a friend and ethnographically, the “key” person who advised and introduced me to the women filmmakers in my study.

In 1998, I attended the Havana Film Festival (showcase for New Latin American Cinema) sponsored by ICAIC and ascertained the viability of my research proposal. In all I made eight trips to Cuba between 1997 and 2000. The first woman I made contact with was Belkis Vega, a filmmaker who had received “The Coral,” Cuba’s highest achievement in cinema for her outstanding work in documentary filmmaking. We met on a hot day in December on the patio of Havana’s Hotel Nacional, abuzz with people attending the international film festival. Seated at a white wrought iron table as palms swayed from the Caribbean breeze rolling in from the sea, we begin a friendship. Looking back I think, surely, I must have presented a “seriousness but friendliness of tone, purposefulness but flexibility in approach, and openness but conciseness in [my] presentation” such that Seidman (1998, p.41) would have been proud. But in the excitement of those first introductory moments, I was never consciously aware of these research postures.

**Research in Cuba: Access**

Foreign academics in Cuba must secure a Cuban institutional sponsor in order to conduct research, which in my case, was the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC). I had been attending “Quality of Education” conferences in Cuba for three years and had become good friends with Cuban educators affiliated with the University of Havana, and one knew the person at ICAIC that I needed to meet in order to present my request for institutional access. Through these relationships of trust and friendship, I was able to
secure access to ICAIC and receive the necessary institutional sponsorship to conduct my study. The other important aspect to the “access” issue concerned the “women filmmakers,” many who did not work at ICAIC. My rationale for choosing the women filmmakers was that I wanted their “take” on the last 40 years of Cuban cinema, their experiences and understandings of the Revolution and their careers as filmmakers. I developed the interview sample based on the filmmakers’ suggestions regarding who they considered “women filmmakers” or women working in the field and important to contact. Belkis, of course, legitimated my purpose and presence in the field and I have no doubt that her support helped me gain access to this group of creative and busy women.

Participants

As a prominent filmmaker herself, Belkis could identify the women working in film. After the filmmakers had been identified, Belkis would usually call ahead to introduce me, given the filmmakers’ busy schedules and the fact that I was an unknown researcher from the U.S. I am confident that I would not have so easily attained access to these women without Belkis’s introduction and support. When it seemed most of the filmmakers had been identified, my “purposive sample” consisted of approximately 13-15 women between the ages of 30 and 60 working in both film and video, in fiction and documentary, inside and outside of the institutional film studios of ICAIC, and in Havana, where films in Cuba are made.

At the time, I felt I had missed only a couple of women. My definition of a filmmaker was rather loose. It was usually a documentary director (since there were no female feature film directors at ICAIC), although I primarily considered women who other women recognized as working in the field and important to interview. Therefore, included in the group of participants are an editor, assistant director, and journalist. Not until I attended the “Women at the Audio-Visual Crossroads” panel did I feel that I might have included women directing telenovelas in television, or considered young women trying to get work in the field. I did not consider the upcoming “generation” of women graduating from the two educational institutions in Cuba that teach film, the International Film School in San Antonio de Baños and the Higher Institute of Art (ISA). But that is
another study. Nevertheless, I feel confident that this sample of women filmmakers is both representative, purposive, and “almost” a total sample of women directors currently working in film and video. I anticipated that interviews with this group of filmmakers, as “cultural workers” themselves, would provide theoretically rich insights. Besides women filmmakers, I conducted ancillary interviews with other personnel at ICAIC including film directors, editors, archivists, and the new ICAIC Director.

In 1999, preliminary interviews were carried out with enthusiastic feedback and interest from the filmmakers. I described my research and confirmed positively that they were willing to participate and had no objection to being videotaped. In 2000, I returned to continue interviewing and collecting documents and films.

**Ethics**

Interviews were conducted with the population described above and included both open-ended and structured questions. At the first meeting, I explained the concept of informed consent and showed them the form written in Spanish, explained the objectives of my study, and made sure they understood their rights as participants. The consent form was discussed and includes their permission to be videotaped for both the written dissertation and a video documentary. The issue of confidentiality was treated in various ways given the visible nature of filmmakers work and the intrinsically “seen” nature of films and visual documentation; and the fact that the “seen” nature of the study was a motivator in their interest and participation.

Since one aim of this study is to document women’s presence in the development of Cuba’s national cinema, the filmmakers are introduced by name. The issue of confidentiality is addressed by not attributing quotes directly and by constructing a collage of their collective voices, rather than using the artifice of pseudonyms. This has been a challenge because who these women are as filmmakers, their work, individuality and subjectivity is part of the richness and value of the research. Unlike the video, the written dissertation “aggregates” the data within the text so that individual filmmakers, although identified within the context of Cuban cinema, are not attributed in direct quotation. I met with most of the participants at least twice during my fieldwork and
with some women much more. The second meeting primarily served as a “member check” and I either showed the video of their interview or gave them the transcript to read for input or further elaboration or clarification. These are the ways that I addressed some of my ethical responsibilities and ensured that their stories would be accurately represented. Not being able to return to Cuba to receive the filmmakers’ input and comments regarding how my use of “selected shots” fared in the editing process (“writing up”), is a limitation of the study.

In June, 2000 Florida State University’s Human Subject Committee approved this methodology. My research was not funded by any organization or group. I entered the field unencumbered by any research agenda except my own, which in many ways is still being defined.

Data Sources

Throughout the process of fieldwork and data collection, my primary intention was to attend to the phenomenological, idiographic, emic, and sense or meaning by which people inside the culture understood things. Therefore, I was not theoretically laden during my fieldwork, although I did endeavor to uncover my implicit theoretical frames (biases) operating above and below my own consciousness. One theoretical “blinder” for me was the “word” and concept of feminism and even though I was aware of the “www critique” (Western white woman) or criticism of “Third World” women in regards to Western feminism, I had to experience for myself how that might play out “on the ground” and what it meant to use concepts as viewfinders. To the extent it was possible to “bust out” and set myself free, I was in a better position to see what I was looking at; and I understood that the “despotism of the eye” is not dependent on physical vision but also entails being a prisoner of concepts, theoretical frames, and cherished beliefs.
Interviews

Most interview sessions averaged around 90 minutes and were recorded on a miniature digital tape recorder and videotaped on a digital camera. Interviews were both structured and unstructured and conducted in Spanish and transcribed in Cuba by a native speaker.

June 8, 2002
Methodology notes

I discover to my dismay that the interview notes that were transcribed in Cuba are not exact transcriptions but sometimes summaries. So now I'm comparing the interview I have on videotape with my transcribed notes. Fear strikes my heart as I reflect on these methodological dilemmas:

1. **PROBLEM:** I audio-taped my interviews with the filmmakers and the transcriber was to produce a text of the interview. I wanted the interviews transcribed in Cuba because of how Cuban Spanish is spoken and I thought a Cuban transcriber would have an easier time understanding the speech; and because who knew if I could find someone in Tallahassee to transcribe them and if I could, at what price? The cost of transcription in Cuba fit my student budget as well as providing needed income in dollars to a person struggling in a hard economy. The name of a transcriber came recommended to me by another doctoral student who had used her services. It did not occur to me that sometimes the transcriber would summarize rather than exactly reproduce the audio interview. This bothers me because there is a lot in the silences, the drifts of speech, and between the lines.

   **SOLUTION:** Thank God I have the interviews on tape and at least have some kind of imperfect text to work from, that can be fleshed out from the videotape. Looking at these imperfect "data sources" as a source of "truth" I think, well, bottom line, I was there. I have my experience and "self-evidence," yet another "imperfect" source of data. Or certainly, "incomplete." I remember I am not looking to affirm or form a theory, now, but to just see what I can see through the lens - from within the woman behind the camera. The framing, production of codes and categories. (Moving up the ladder of abstraction and wondering about this kind of knowledge in the academic value system. Also, I rationalize that the dissertation is not going to be the perfectly researched project, but learning brought to bear toward an experience of .... what would premier ethnographer, Harry Wolcott say??????

2. **How to work with the data.** I coded half of the transcribed interviews before I compared the video interview to the transcribed text. So now I'm producing a transcript of the videotape - in the process comparing and supplementing the written interview text. This type of transcript will be needed anyway in working with the material for the documentary.
**Visual methods**

Visual methodologies figure prominently in my research both as a source of data and in the presentation of findings. I used visual methods in the following ways:

1) Videotaped filmmakers’ interviews as a record for later analysis.

2) Film elicitation, which employed the technique of showing a clip from the film *Transparent Woman* as an impetus for group discussion in the context of a focus group. By observing where the conversation “drifted,” I hoped to uncover cultural codes that were meaningful to the filmmakers. John Collier, in his slim 1967 volume entitled *Visual Sociology* noted: “Methodologically, the only way we can use the full record of the camera is through the projective interpretation by the native” (p. 49). For the focus group, I used a “facilitator,” a psychologist and member of MAGIN (a group of women in communication focused on gender), who was working in advertising and familiar with the issues surrounding gender. I videotaped while the women talked. My use of this technique was more casual in that film elicitation usually consists of showing a clip or edited film of some event within the respondent’s culture and, by “skillful questioning” uncovering how the person interprets that “slice of reality” whether it be objects, people, ritual, or social relationships presented on the screen. “The same film can be shown to many informants, different questions asked and a wide variety of levels of data obtained” (Hockings, p. 283). Thereby, much more precise data may be collected. In any case, my “conversational purposes” were served well by using the film as a point of reference.

3) Feature films as cultural documents. Both fiction work and documentaries are cultural products by definition. The assumption is that they will be culturally informative as well as reflective of cultural premises and important cultural themes. Since I was trying understand how film was used in Cuba’s national development particularly in relation to women’s representation, I logically turned to various films in Cuban national cinema as an important source of information in understanding the emic, insider, or Cuban point view. In this study, Cubans films will be used illustratively.

Anthropologists are interested in film analysis “largely as a means toward broader cultural study, rather than in film content itself” (Weakland, 1975, p. 245). The use of
feature films as a source of cultural information goes back to the United States during World War II. Unable to obtain access and knowledge of foreign countries through traditional in-country fieldwork during wartime, anthropologists turned their attention to “various means of studying national cultures using resources available in the United States....including histories, novels, descriptive and interpretive accounts by both natives and outsiders, and in particular, study of films produced by the societies in question (Benedict 1946)” Kracauer (1942), for example, examined newsreels and documentaries, then German fictional films from the period 1919-1933 “in search of content trends relatable to, and informative about, the changing social context” (Weakland, 1975, p.237). In the 1960s, Weakland, examining whatever Chinese Communist films were available outside China, produced one of the most substantial anthropological film studies of the time:

My study...was concerned almost from its outset with observing possible relationships between sociopolitical themes in the new China films and basic themes and patterns of the traditional culture. For example, film images of foreign invasion and Chinese resistance were examined in relation to traditional Chinese family patterns (Weakland 1971a).... Contrasts between film themes and traditional cultural themes were observed as well as connections, with the aim of using film study as one means toward clarifying the nature of cultural change and continuity accompanying revolutionary political change. (1975, p. 240).

In film studies of this sort, “film observations are used to clarify and organize observations on the culture more than the reverse, though some interplay ordinarily and usefully occurs” (p. 246)....and film patterns and cultural patterns usually are seen largely in terms of parallels and congruences, rather than inferring cause and effect relationships (p. 246). These studies show some of the ways film has been used as a source of data and information in anthropological studies of culture.

4) Finally, a documentary video produced from this study will include interviews with the filmmakers, footage from the Cuban film archives, and my own videotaped footage that I shot over the course of various visits. Conceived as a form of intercultural
dialog, the documentary will be shown in academic venues and entered in international film festivals.

Written documentation

This includes the film journal *Cine Cubano*, published since the inception of ICAIC (1960-2003), a primary reference available in the Film Institute’s library. This journal, Cuba’s national film magazine, is an important source for accessing the historical thinking and early theorizing of Cuban filmmakers and those from Latin America and worldwide in conceptualizing a cinema of resistance. Other important sources of primary written documentation from the archives of the Cinemateca of Cuba (Film Institute library) include program notes from conferences such as the seminar on the “Diffusion and Evaluation of the Nairobi Strategies Oriented Toward the Future for the Promotion of the Woman,” (1988); publication of film criticism papers presented at the “National Cinematographic Criticism” workshops (1993-1994) held yearly in Camaguey, Cuba; unpublished (to my knowledge) theoretical papers by women filmmakers; published by MAGIN entitled, “Tell me, Mother!: Do you know what gender is?” (1996), this is a document that records Cuban women’s statement on gender in media communications; and finally, the use of reflective and descriptive field notes generated throughout the study.

Focus Group

Not quite a focus group in the strict methodological sense, the four filmmakers were brought together for dinner, to view a film clip, and to discuss issues that emerged for them. The environment was casual but “focused.” I positioned myself behind the camera and “outside” of the discussion. Facilitated by a Cuban women working in the media, the group generated lively and insightful comments on a variety of cultural, personal, and professional topics.
Panel “Women at the Audio Visual Crossroads”

I was fortunate to have attended the above-named conference organized by women from the National Association of Video in Havana on March 25, 1999. The conference addressed the themes highly relevant to my research. I also video taped the panel and the audience discussion, which included many women working in film and the audio/visual world. The audience and panelists were keen observers of their occupational realities and had no hesitation engaging in critical analysis. Although I did not realize it at the time, I would use this panel, which was also videotaped, as a way to triangulate the information and thematics that emerged from the interviews of the filmmakers and other sources.

Representation and Reflexivity

In the new ethnography, issues of validity constellate around representation and reflexivity. When anthropology got reflexive about its project and took the rhetorical turn in ethnographic representation, the metaphor of “blurred boundaries” was being exemplified in the work of Clifford Geertz (1973), Victor Turner (1974), Mary Douglas (1966), and Claude Levi Strauss, inspiring them to challenge the divide between art and science. As a generational front runner of the literary approach, Geertz (1973) boldly asserted that anthropological writings were “fictions” in that they are “made” i.e., shaped by their author’s literary devices and conventions (1973). Others agreed. Clifford and Marcus (1986) would document, in their now classic Writing Culture, how literary processes invent rather than transcribe cultural experience; and there emerged in the field a heightened awareness of literary forms and conventions. More than ever, cultural representation is “tricky” business:

Ethnography is no longer pictured as a relatively simple look, listen and learn procedure but, rather, as something akin to an intense epistemological trial by fire. Boon (1982), for instance, takes ethnography to task for its reliance on unquestioned cultural conceits (“our” not “theirs”). Rosaldo (1989) sternly chides ethnography for its unwarranted claims of objectivity,
whereas Clifford (1988) points to its inevitable but treacherous subjectivity. Clough (1992) indicts ethnography for its gendered silences and partiality. Denzin (1988) faults ethnography for its failure to abandon scientific posturing associated with modernism or essentialism, and Said (1989) considers ethnography’s link to the empire discrediting yet difficult to shed. For these reasons and more, the cultural representation business has become quite tricky. (Van Maanen, 1995), p. 2)

Reflexivity is a rich and variegated word. “Properly speaking, reflexivity refers to the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal the deep connections between the writer and her or his subjects. (see Behar, 1993, 1996; Ellis and Flaherty, 1993; Goodall, 1989a, 1991; Kreiger, 1991; Mykhalovskiy, 1997; Richardson, 1997; Rosaldo, 1989; Rose, 1990)” (Goodall, 2000, p.137). The increased presence of reflexivity in ethnography was a disciplinary response to the various challenges to its truth claims. It was a moral and ethical grappling as well. At a basic level, it is associated with “self-critique and personal quest, playing on the subjective, experiential, and the idea of empathy” (Denzin (1994, p. 569). Reflexivity is an inner disposition or openness to having our concepts “blown,” a tendency toward tentativeness, a capacity or willingness to be surprised, a letting go of “conceptual frames.” Since positivist truth claims have been based on conceptions of reality (illusions of matter), we must grapple with new ways of “sciencing” (knowing) the nature of our embodied temporality, in the fullness of what that might mean.

Harry Wolcott, in John Van Maanen’s 1995 book, Representation in Ethnography, has this to say about cultural representation, noting that the:

….underlying rationale for capturing and reporting detail in an ethnographic presentation: not to recount events, as such, but to render a theory of cultural behavior” (p. 86), Culture is not “there,” waiting demurely to be discovered. Instead, culture – an explicit conceptual orientation that provides the purpose and rationale for doing ethnography – gets there because the ethnographer puts it there….Culture is imposed, not observed, and there is no ethnography until culture makes an entry no matter how tenuously. (p. 86)
Wolcott defends the heuristic value of the concept of culture while agreeing with Clifford Geertz (1973) about the need for “cutting….the culture concept down to size, therefore actually insuring its continued importance rather than undermining it” (p. 84). “Culture” is a multi-faceted concept, shining through the work of Wolcott, Geertz, Gramsci, and others; its allure is doubly alluring for me when used in conjunction with film and national cinema as “cultural documents” that help to understand the multicultures and positionalities that comprise “a nation.” Geertz’s (1973) experience of the elusive nature of cultural interpretation resonates with my own when he says:

Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based, in which to get somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion, both your own and that of others, that you are not quite getting it right. (p. 87)

**Visualism in Representation: Despotism of the Eye**

Under that despotism of the eye (the emancipation from which Pythagoras by his numeral, and Plato by his musical symbols, and both by geometric discipline aimed at, as the first preparatory education of the mind) – this strong sensuous influence, we are restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision; and metaphysical systems, for the most part, become popular, not for their truth, but in proportion as they attribute to causes a susceptibility of being seen, if only our visual organs were sufficiently powerful. (Coleridge in Cutsinger, 1987, p. 68)

Clifford and Marcus (1986) discuss an important critique of representation that applies directly to images conveyed by the written text as it does to visual media (images of those working in visual anthropology, documentary, or ethnographic films). The postmodern critique of anthropology produced a “rejection of visualism” (p. 11) and with some elaboration, the feminist film theorists might call it a rejection of the male gaze. This is the question of authorship and voice as well as a question of identity and subjectivity. Ong (1982) argues that different cultures experience through different hierarchies of senses. The West privileges the truth of vision. Those who have seen (the ethnographers), have said and written. And by “saying” have “said for” or inscribed, objectified the seen (scene). This is Edward Said’s classic “unveiling” of the occidental
mind in the act of capture, the imperial eye (I) knowing and constructing itself through the Other’s “orientalism.” The critique of visualism (“despotism of the eye!” as Coleridge interjects) is deeply rooted in a fundamental cognitive or epistemological situation alternatively coded as Self/Other, Subject/Object, Mind/Matter, but always related to an apparent dualism in the nature of things. As feminists have shown, these dualisms or binary oppositions generate unequal relations of power and are deeply embedded in language and the very structures of Western thinking. I approach the rejection of visualism and the spinning, symptomatic crisis of representation by returning to cognitive terrain, where Romanticism’s unfinished project of developing “transformed vision” may offer more trenchant alternatives and mediate new forms of conceptualization:

A cognitive or epistemological problem, however we express its particular complexities, is always a problem of barriers or dividing surfaces…The labels we use in describing this dividing surface are unimportant. We can speak of the epistemological barrier between the subject and the object of knowledge or, more existentially perhaps, of a dividing partition between the self and the other. But the skeptical feeling….of being cut off is most significant….and distinguishes the modern cognitive anxiety…How can a sense of wholeness and participation be restored to a mind that feels cut off? (Cutsinger, 1987, pp. 12-17)

Perhaps we are nearing a futurity that understands a reality in which the elements are themselves but not themselves; where subject and object, Self and Other are simultaneously themselves and the other. There is indeed a mystery here and I am reminded of what Walter Benjamin said concerning, “the compulsion to become the Other.” Imagination, says Coleridge “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create….It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead” (Cutsinger, p. 73). A deferred discussion of the symbol would disclose how the “power of passing through boundaries and entering substantial unity” is how meaning is made possible at all. The symbolic function is transformative vision. I would like to conclude this section where Coleridge was usually apt to begin - with a technique of
“distinguishing but not dividing” a Romantic understanding of the way we know what we know. The following is a reflection on reason, the banner of the Enlightenment legacy, renewed by the imaginative power of Coleridge’s brilliant mind and spoken through the insight of Owen Barfield:

‘Reason’ for Coleridge is not something to be found manifesting in human beings; it is something in which human beings -- and the whole of nature -- are manifest. It is not merely a part or function of the individual mind. Rather it is that spiritual whole in which the individual mind -- all individual minds -- subsist. It is in fact as much an objective as subjective reality…Our confidence in the reality of the external objects of sense -- if we examine it -- is derived from our immediate experience of the laws of thought within us. He speaks of the mind as distinguished from all other things by being “a subject which is also its own object.” He compares it to “an eye which is its own mirror, beholding and self-beheld. (1967, p. 150)

The despotic eye conceives reality as an aggregate of solidities, defined by their distinct impenetrable surfaces in space. The despotic eye believes in the solidity of the world. A looker on. An on-looker, apart from. The old objectivism. Identity -- I am, I exist, distinct, in space, from you -- is identification based on positionality. Based on impenetrable surfaces. The postmodern feeling of groundlessness is in part based on the despotic eye. The dawning realization (tremendous at first blush) of late moderns, that this ground, so defined, is not out there, is surely another evolution in consciousness. The withering feeling, the contemporary loss of meaning comes, not so much from this realization as from the loss of the means to enter into this new vision. We don’t know how “to think” our way into it, and since the despotic eye is despotic we don’t remember (know) that it cannot be “thought” into, only imaginatively perceived, felt - for vision transformed. Perhaps then the issue of reflexivity might be fruitfully reconsidered as transformative vision. Could George Marcus be intuiting this when he says, “reflexivity is the label in common currency used to stand in for as-yet unrealized alternative possibility in the production of ethnography” (Denzin and Lincoln, p. 568) and knowledge?
While the Romantics were less afflicted by the kind of “alienation” we late
moderns have come to know, their sensibilities and philosophical needs were not satisfied
with the mechanical view of classical physics. This model of reality provided no answer
for the union and participation with life that they felt and sought, as no mechanical whole
could ever be more than the sum of its parts (immanence but no transcendence). Like the
ancient Greeks, the Romantics still experienced the creativity of human thought and
feeling, and considered the task of human perception to be the transformation of human
consciousness. But Richard Haven (1969) describes the dilemma of the Romantics at the
end of the eighteenth century:

The developments of some two centuries of science,
epistemology, and psychology had produced….a universe
of discrete minds and discrete objects which offered little
support for the visions of grey-beard loons. The universe
bequeathed by Newton and Locke might also be said to
reflect the structure of human consciousness, but in a much
more limited sense. Instead of taking all modes of
apprehension as ways of knowing reality, it is limited to one
-- discursive thought. Blake said: “The tree which moves
some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a Green thing
which stands in the way.” For him, the first possibility was
more revealing than the second. But the philosophy of the
enlightenment took into account only the things which stand
in the way. (p. 80)

One of the defining characteristics of our time is the generalized, if unremarked
for its obviousness, awareness of the mind’s role in the production of knowledge.
This is contemporary common-sense. But this assumption of “mental power” is in no
small part due to the Romantics’ acute awareness of feeling and the role of human
consciousness in the creative act. Their project was interrupted, delayed, by the historical
flush of “victorious reason.” Barfield (1944) explicated how the victory of unbridled
reason and decline of the Romantic episteme (evidenced by how we use the word
“romantic” in modern parlance) resulted from the Romantic’s failure to develop a
critique. Along with their revolutionary insights into human freedom -- “if they dreamed
of the rights of man it was because they had already felt the powers of man -- in
themselves,” and along with new conceptions of the good and beautiful, there should
have been also added “a new idea of the nature of truth” (pp. 26-28). A new idea concerning the nature of truth. As Barfield states, we may find abundant convictions, assertions and declamations (as we do in Keats’ Letters when he says, “I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart’s affections and the truth of imagination”), but the question was not posed:

In what way is Imagination true? As a result of what is commonly called the Romantic Movement, a new conception arose of the faculty of imagination. This was conceived not as mere idle fancy but as being actually in some way a vehicle of truth or knowledge. But it was not asked how...[Thus] no satisfactory critique of Romance ever arose...and consequently...Romanticism lost faith in itself. Imagination is still accepted, but mostly as a kind of consciousness make-believe or personal masquerade....Just as Coleridge, who had indeed had a vision of imagination as the vessel by which divinity passes down into humanity –just as he fell back from this kind of imagination into the fantastic dreams of the opium slave, so the metaphysic of Romanticism has gradually fallen sick....is dying.” (pp. 28-29)

These methodological and epistemological considerations will be more fully discussed in the following chapters as they pertain to my thesis regarding the relationship between ways of knowing, especially film, and education and development.

**Methodological Reflections and Limitations**

This reflective commentary focuses on my experience in the field, particularly using a video camera in the context of interviewing. Perhaps the first thing to say is that I tried to do too much too quickly. Access to most of the people I interviewed was primarily facilitated by one woman, who opened the many doors that were opened to me. Through her status as a respected filmmaker, everyone agreed to meet with me and most agreed to be videotaped. Therein lays the rub. The ideal would have been to meet with each woman first and to have developed a more familiar relationship before doing the videotaped interview. The awkwardness of meeting a foreign stranger and being videotaped was alleviated only by the women's familiarity with cameras and
documentary interviewing, their graciousness and openness, and their appreciation of my own obviously difficult situation of having to both conduct the interview and operate the camera simultaneously.

For my part, I did not like having to interview through the viewfinder, rather than face to face. I am not a native speaker of Spanish and I felt that I often missed something that was said when my attention went to the camera frame and framing. I did do some interviews with another person working the camera and felt these were the best in terms of my capacity to listen and connect with the person. At other times, it was frustrating to sometimes miss the thread or subtleties of the conversation during those moments I attended to the camera. This lack might not have been a consideration if I had been working in English, but then I wouldn't have felt such a need to videotape so as to study later what had been said - one typical use of visual methods. But, I was greatly aided by the fact that the women worked in a visual medium, did not seem put off or uncomfortable in front of a camera, and didn't mind having the tables switched.

Each interview was exhausting because of the concentration required to listen in Spanish, to guide and maintain the interview flow, and to be sensitive to the person being interviewed. Besides struggling to hear the language (Cubans speak notoriously fast, cutting off the last vowels in many words). I often struggled with speaking the language and later, in my critically reflective revelries, bemoaned how much I must have tortured these women with my imperfect Spanish. In listening to the tapes, I was chagrined to note how one question often turned into more than one question ("never ask a double question") or how often I left sentences incoherently unfinished. This "lack" on my part surprisingly did not seem to impede the interviews significantly. I became excruciatingly aware of my "gutteral jabs at communication" (as a poet once said) after viewing and/or listening to the tapes. Thus, I could say that videotaping also provided me with feedback on my own performance. That the interviews were so little impaired I believe is due to
the fact that in any act of communication, whether written or spoken, there is something more going on than the words - the words yes, but some other communicative element or dimension is operative. The speech-discursive environment is a realm of feeling and something is always "left over" after the words have been spoken. In a given interview situation, I sometimes knew I wasn't verbally communicating very well but nevertheless I also knew, by their reaction or response, that the person understood me. In that sense, communication is often "beyond" language. I feel the interviews were carried on the wings of sincerity and open-heartedness on both our parts and that this greatly facilitated the trust and level of candidness with which the women participated and communicated. “In any attempt to interpret or explain another cultural subject, a surplus of difference always remains, partly created by the process of ethnographic communication itself.” In other words, “cultural translation, which is what ethnography is, never fully assimilates difference”(Marcus in Denzin, 1994, p. 566).

Another strong criticism that I would level at my performance in the interview situation was that I was too much there, too present, sometimes interrupting or too probing about the issue of feminism. I found it difficult to get out of my own concepts and kept trying to get at why these women did not relate to the word or to the issue of feminism generally, although “gender” was more penetrable. I wanted to understand why. The second time in the field, I held myself much more in check and tried to get at their meaning-making surrounding the issue through more subtle questions rather than my earlier frontal approach.

Along with the distraction of the camera and my garbled Spanish in interviewing, another issue I faced was the overwhelming sense that I needed more time in the field - that my understanding is superficial and therefore how can I claim to have adequately "captured" their meaning? I have found some comfort in the description of portraiture as both a form of research and representation in the work of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (1997), which represents yet another aspect of the feminist concern regarding the researcher’s visibility in the study and the much discussed issue of the participants’ voices. My purpose has been to present the women's perspectives and understanding. My concern is in the analysis and with the valid "production of knowledge" or authorship of "new knowledge" given this sense of not having spent
enough time in the field. Perhaps there is always a lingering feeling of this. Despite the current acknowledgement of partial knowledges and their acceptance, I feel a conservative sensibility in this exercise of "knowledge production."

In the process of engaging and representing what Herbert Blummer (1969) called the “obdurate character of the empirical world” (p. 23), I strive for the qualities of clarity and openness. I find comfort in knowing that knowledge we construct is always partial. Therefore an attitude of openness to other configurations, perceptions, perspectives, representations, interpretations, and conclusions may be warranted, even as here I present my own. By writing, I endeavor to better understand both the obdurate empirical world as well as my obdurate empirical self.

There is also another issue of reflexivity regarding doing research in Cuba, a subtext of the general process of fieldwork - that of the charged political environment between the U.S. and Cuba and how this macro political context was part and parcel of the research situation. My trips to Cuba showed me that the discursive environment to be somewhat like an accordion that opens and closes - sometimes more open than others. I thought this “accordion effect” had to do with Cuba’s authoritarian government but after the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center, I experienced a similar accordion phenomenon again in the politically charged discursive environment of the U.S. -- something akin to the polity collectively judging how much discursive freedom exists at any given moment. While politics played out on the macro level like imperceptible “white noise,” I carried on with my “micro” level fieldwork.

An important limitation to this dissertation research has been my inability to receive the filmmakers’ comments and perspectives on my sense of things in the “write-up,” given the increased U.S. travel restrictions that inhibited me from returning to Cuba. The participation of the filmmakers at this stage of the editing process is important and without their informing eye, I cannot claim the participatory standards I prefer to find in qualitative and feminist research. Despite this limitation, I hope to have provided enough context, detail and participant voices so that readers may evaluate the credibility of the narrative, and/or develop their own understandings and interpretations from the presentation.
**Methodological Notes**

In this section and at various times throughout this research text, I take advantage of both collage and bricolage and the position of a *bricoleur* in qualitative research. Fragmentary and unfinished snapshots from my fieldnotes are presented below as an economical way to present a variety of experiences that impinge or hint towards methodological issues not completely addressed in this study, or foreshadows issues addressed in the study:

(1) Amy shot this interview. We were on Belkis’s front porch because of the light, therefore ambient sound was something to deal with. For me, the ambient sound in Cuba is notable – a loud, vibrant soundtrack of life being lived. I felt comfortable with this filmmaker and with not having to operate the camera. At one point, a woman comes to the fence to sell a dust tray for collecting debris after sweeping – hammered from a large tin can with a long handle so bending was unnecessary. Belkis stopped the interview and got up to buy one. Amy wanted to turn off the camera but I told her to keep shooting and follow the transaction because this seemed to me to exemplify women’s function in the Special Period – to insure survival and keep a close eye on what becomes available -- not letting any opportunity or scarce commodity go by.

(2) This filmmaker was a bit reserved in her interview but in another format (e.g. during the focus group) her discussion and comments were some of the most candid and insightful.

(3) I’m comparing the written transcript to the audio tape and note the conceptual categories “*affinidades y amistad*” (affinities and friendship) that have been left off the written transcript but that I hear this filmmaker refer to in her description of how the creative groups at ICAIC were formed and what filmmakers went with which director – by “*affinidades and amistad*”. As I listen and compare the written transcript to the audiotape, I feel two things – grateful the transcriber eliminated the extraneous vocalizations of speech and just transcribed the substance; and worried that what is substantive or important to me in a speech act has been eliminated – as I find it had been with the important phrase “*affinidades y amistad*”. I had previously questioned my judgment to have the audiotapes transcribed in Cuba. I did this for three reasons: cost, collaboration, and clarity. Cost, it was cheaper; collaboration, I could provide much
needed dollars for the service; and clarity, there was a better chance of transcription precision if the transcriber herself was familiar with the idiosyncrasies of how Cubans speak the Spanish language. I also wondered if there was any “editing” going on – i.e. if the transcriber might not put a more positive gloss on the transcription than was originally intended. This began to concern me when I first realized the transcriptions were sometimes summaries and not literal. But in checking the transcriptions with the video or audio tape, I find that so far, this has not been the case. I feel my decision to have the tapes transcribed in Cuba was a good one.

(4) Well, I was thinking that returning instinctively to the same theme must have some artistic, intellectual merit because I cannot let go of the “transformative, Coleridgean way of knowing” and the “hilo conductor” (thread) of this research... yet this insight, if it is that, is still revealing itself.

(5) Our own self stories – who we tell ourselves we are.... This filmmaker was also a participant in the “women’s chat” or the “focus group” where I tried to use the technique of film elicitation, using one vignette from the film Mujer Transparente as the springboard for discussion. I like the quality, depth, and heartfelt nature of the talk that emerged from this kind of setting; it was a relief from the interview scenario. This was a “naturalistic” setting in the very methodological sense of things. We were at T’s apartment and the women were talking about life and work. Four women participated in the charla de las cineastes (focus group).

(6) This is one of ICAIC’s seasoned film documentarists, who formed part of the 1975 cohort of women that entered as analistas, later becoming assistant directors and then directors of documentary films. She is energetic, dynamic, and I’m told doesn’t suffer fools gladly, although she suffered my Spanish kindly. Whatever light of intelligence I conveyed in this interview was not by speaking the language well, but by silently discursive mechanisms inspired by sincerity and trust. I videotaped and conducted the interview and was “going on automatic.” Her take on things brought me a little closer to my research focus, helping me understand some particularities of film on the island and more of the production environment. Thank god, this filmmaker could carry a long narrative line, because I had nothing to say and had only to listen to hear my questions answered. I was intrigued by areas of significance that emerged. Afterwards,
after the interview, I somehow felt “satisfied”. The animation and inspiration of the creative artist is a pleasure to see irrespective of gender. But, I don’t remember seeing filmmaker and critic’s name on any paper published at the Camaguey Conferences of Critics beginning in 1991. Was she there? And wasn’t it careless of ICAIC to leave a woman’s name off the published list of recipients of “The Coral,” Cuba highest award in filmmaking, at during Havana’s 1999 New Latin American Cinema Film Festival? I remember that the hardest thing about women’s consciousness-raising groups back in the 1970’s was having to face the hard evidence of blatant oppression and discrimination. We wanted to hide from the hard fact of it, somehow to not know what we knew.

(8) The self as knower and methodological tool: I remember that I had to extend my visa in order to “be there” for this meeting of many of Cuba’s most active working women film and media makers. This opportunity presented itself and it seemed as though the muses were gracefully mussing with events, conspiring to enrich my research. I remember hearing about the event for the first time: Amy and I were sitting in a Havana café with Mabel, a young assistant director and member of the organization Hermanos Saez, who told us about the panel she was organizing called Women “Encrucijada.” Amy, a Tallahassee friend and aspiring young filmmaker herself, and I sat in the café in admiration as Mabel described the upcoming event. Amy and I had met Mabel at the Havana Film Fest the year before and we were renewing the friendship we had all immediately felt. Sipping my soda and all the time thinking “encrucijada” meant “crucified” and thinking, my, how bold this young Cubana, using such provocative imagery to evoke the status of women filmmakers in Cuba. That it really translated as “crossroads” then, was a good surprise, but the vociferousness of women attending the panel was not, having seen Cuba’s culture of critique in other open air forums. Sitting there listening to Mabel, I thought of Catherine Benamou’s article and wondered to myself, is Cuban cinema on “the threshold of gender”? We shall see.

Data Analysis and Interpretive Webs of Significance

Going from the “raw data,” that which is closest to the lived experience or “original source” to new levels of abstraction and conceptualization, is for me an
ultimately mysterious process, as mysterious as cooking without a recipe. How does one know how much of this and that to throw into the pot? What is the “proof” in the pudding known only by the eating? How or why does the “taste” become a flavor we savor? What is the mysterious mix of meaning between Self and Other? Oh, if only Harry Wolcott were my neighbor! And I had easy access to his friendly, earthy, unobtuse explanations.

There are many interpretive strategies with which to find and hear my own voice and those of the filmmakers in my study. Feminist strategies, postmodern strategies include a plurality of voices, a self-consciousness regarding intertextuality and an indeterminatedness, lack of closure in the text, and a tentativeness. I used these many strategies throughout the text. As I examine how I worked in the field and the values I focused on throughout this research, I see my effort here has been to portray the findings as a recognizable truth but not some grand theoretical Truth. I see how I have both consciously and unconsciously exemplified a narrative point of view that I recognize in the work of D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (2000). They describe how their inquiry is informed by Dewey’s “theory of experience, specifically with his notions of situation, continuity, and interaction” and how Dewey was their “imaginative touchstone” in formulating their own *three dimensional narrative inquiry space*, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third” (p. 50).

The “temporal” is an important subtext that emerged in the findings of the women’s experience in filmmaking as will become obvious in the presentation of their experiences in Chapter Five. As one of the filmmakers says: “they call us the younger generation, only we’re not so young.” Paul Ricoeur has taken note of “the relationship between the human experience of time and the universality of the narrative. Ricoeur’s (1984-86) thesis is that the coexistence of the temporal nature of the human being and the activity of narrating a story are not accidental but represent a “transcultural form of necessity” (vol. 1, 52). Through narrative, temporality becomes interpretable in human terms” (Van Maanen, 1995, p. 208).

I’ve also listened to Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis in *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997), whose work deserves to be studied and applied
more thoroughly than I have been able to do here. Portraiture, as a method of inquiry, resists the tradition of documenting failure rather than success, especially in education (p. 8). I have tried to emulate their vision of portraiture as a method which combines aesthetic and empirical description and its goal of speaking “to broader audiences beyond the academy (thus linking inquiry to public discourse and social transformation), in its standard of authenticity rather than reliability and validity (the traditional standards of quantitative and qualitative inquiry (p. 14). Particularly, portraiture addresses the important issue of generalization that rings with pedagogical and social import. The portraitist “is very interested in the single case because she believes that embedded in it the reader will discover resonant universal themes” (p. 14):

A persistent irony –recognized and celebrated by novelists, poets, playwrights –is that as one moves closer to the unique characteristics of a person or a place, one discovers the universal. Again Eudora Welty (1983) offers a wonderful insight gained from her experience as a storyteller. She says forcefully: “What discoveries I have made in the process of writing stories, all begin with the particular, never the general.” Clifford Geertz (1973) puts it another way when he refers to the paradoxical experience of theory development, the emergence of concepts from the gathering of specific detail. Geertz (1973) says, “Small facts are the grist for the social theory mill” (p. 23). The scientist and the artist are both claiming that in the particular resides the general. (p. 14)

But Elliot Eisner (1988) remains the scholar who first gave me a ray of hope after reading his article, Freeing Ourselves From Objectivity: Managing Subjectivity or Turning Toward a Participatory Mode of Consciousness? Others too had seen and intuited the importance of grey-bearded loons! Life and spirit, a breath of fresh air in educational inquiry. Eisner’s form of educational inquiry educational connoisseurship and criticism has most often been applied to the school setting but works as well taking “culture” writ large as the educational “setting.” I value Eisner’s theoretical project and his understanding of the imaginative capacity to know, showing how learning in life is linked to the attribute of “appreciation” in both the act of knowing and representation:
Each of these concepts, educational connoisseurship and educational criticism, has its roots in the arts….Connoisseurship plays an important role toward this end by refining the levels of apprehension of the qualities that pervade classrooms. To be a connoisseur of wine, bicycles, or graphic arts is to be informed about their qualities; it means being able to discriminate the subtleties among types of wine, bicycles, and graphic arts by drawing upon, gustatory, visual, and kinesthetic memory against which the particulars of the present may be placed for purposes of comparison and contrast. Connoisseurs of anything – and one can have connoisseurship about anything – appreciate what they encounter in the proper meaning of that word. Appreciation does not necessarily mean liking something, although one might like what one experiences. Appreciation here means an awareness and an understanding of what one has experienced. Such an awareness provides the basis for judgment. (pp. 142-143)

What these research perspectives have in common and why I value them is the satisfying way they illuminate the relationship between art and science, weaving together the “arts and sciences” as the weft and woof of some new cloth in constructing the fabric of knowledge and coming to know. Not only do these analytical frames that draw from the wellsprings of both art and science bring the researcher or educator into a deeper, richer understanding of phenomena, but they support an appreciation of “synthesis” and “analysis” as inseparable processes of thinking that inhabit the remarkable, paradoxical, and ineffable realm of human knowing: the interpenetration of particularity and generality. The individual and the universal. The Self and Other. What is this mystery? How can we employ methodical treatments and imaginative leaps in the production of knowledge? This dissertation endeavors to take some imaginative leaps -- on the shoulders of giants of course and with the help of Eisner (1988):

If connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure. Criticism, as Dewey pointed out in Art as Experience, has at its end the reeducation of perception. What the critic strives for is to articulate or render those ineffable qualities constituting art in a language that makes them vivid. But this gives rise to something of a paradox. How is it that what is ineffable can be articulated? How do words express what words can never express? The task of the critic is to adumbrate, suggest, imply, connote, render, rather than to attempt to translate. In this task, metaphor and analogy, suggestion and implication are major tools. The language of criticism,
indeed its success as criticism, is measured by the brightness of its illumination. The task of the critic is to help us to see. (pp. 142-143)

The human quest for meaning, a persistently metaphysical quest, is expressed through narrative -- storytelling, myths, biography, history, and in the 20th century, through film. As educators we might ask ourselves, what is it about movies that so fascinates the “I” and the “eye” and continues to inspire such great passion, sacrifice, and love.

II. I and Eye: Epistemological Diagnostics

*The romantics rear their hoary heads and demand to speak.*
*Wordsworth whispers in my ear, "We Murder, to dissect."*

Qualitative research is primarily an interpretive practice. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is currently characterized by the dual crises of representation and legitimation. The postmodern crisis of representation, generating profound uncertainties about the adequate means of representing or describing social reality (Lather, 1991), and the attendant crisis of legitimation, or validation of that representation, is often characterized as a crisis of knowing. It is also a questioning of the nature of reality. Therefore, I began by engaging the intertwining philosophical issues of epistemology and ontology as they relate to my goals, methodological procedures, and interpretive strategies in the present inquiry. This philosophical beginning was also a way to declare my values and situate myself within the research. James Clifford (1986) noted that:

Social scientists…as observers of the world…also participate in it; therefore they make their observations within a mediated framework, that is, a framework of symbols and cultural meanings given to them by those aspects of their life histories that they bring to the observational setting. Lurking behind each method of research is the personal equation supplied to the setting by the individual observer. (Vidich and Lyman, 1994, p. 24)
The meeting and relationship of Self and Other is the traditional and continuing source of ethnographic knowledge. Within the present postmodern moment, this relationship is problematized along the lines of power, gender, race, ethnicity, class and other less visited markers of epistemic possibility. Margaret Atwood (1986) asks, How is it ever possible to represent the Other?:

Translation was never possible.
Instead there was always only
Conquest, the influx
Of the language of metal,
The language of either/or,
The one language that has eaten all the others.

This dissertation resists the long shadow and hegemonic worldview cast by positivist science. Since my central thesis focuses on the relationship of ways of knowing to cultural renewal, this section elaborates theoretical and analytical grounds for a richer sense of what it means “to know.” The first part briefly summarizes the postmodern crisis in “knowledge production” (also known as academic research), as a context for questioning the poststructural “death of the subject.” (The patient lives.)

I then discuss subjectivity, drawing upon the forgotten markers of epistemic possibility first developed by the Romantic critics as a protest against the “language of either/or.” This section suggests an argument for rethinking the subject/object divide as part of the complex of issues implicit in validation of the self, the primary instrument of knowing. With its sustained attention to epistemological explorations, I continue to lay the groundwork for understanding ways of knowing as agency, the relationship of art and imagination to education, and spinning a theoretical web for understanding utopian dreams as a source of transformative vision in life and the lives of Cuban filmmakers and their cinema.

**Knowledge in Post Production**

This study hinges on two illusions: reality and its cinematic representation.
We live at a time woefully in need of evidence. The present crisis of knowing may be characterized as an aggravated condition of epistemological doubt concerning the ontological status, meaning, materiality, and reality of things “out there.” Underlying this postmodern crisis of representation is the perennial philosophical quest and questioning of the nature of reality. Truth claims about the nature of reality continue to be explored with Newton unconsciously rattling in our bones (and why not? don’t we still feel the force of gravity?). We assign matter an ontological validity, it is “real.” We base knowledge on the assumption of the certain and real ontological status of “the world.” That the world is real and can be positively known (knock knock) is the existential and epistemological assumption of positivist science.\(^1\) Positive knowledge produced Results!

But the implications of quantum mechanics and relativity theory have shaken loose the certainties and assumptions of Newton’s modern science. A monolithic worldview has cracked. The postmodern West has begun to tie the hermeneutic circle with the pre-modern, ancient sages of the East. The potentially transgressive notion that reality is an illusion (long surmised by the East) has marched into Western consciousness through postmodern sense and sensibility in the form of “the text and nothing but the text.” Words have swallowed up the subject, theoretically. The subject is dead. Through quantum and now postmodern thinking we have a technique, model, theory, rationale, explanation, for conceptualizing how the materiality “out there” is an illusion -- an insight the East never abandoned. Ancient sages have long referred to material reality (which in quantum physics can only be inferred) as maya or “illusion” to mark the inconstancy and mystery of the apparent world constantly made and unmade by time.

Described by physicist P.W. Bridgman, "the structure of nature may eventually be such that our processes of thought do not correspond to it sufficiently to permit us to think about it at all….The world fades out and eludes us….We are confronted with something truly ineffable. We have reached the limit of the vision of the great pioneers of science, the vision, namely, that we live in a sympathetic world…comprehensible by our minds" (Tarnas, 1991, pp. 358-359). As Richard Tarnas paraphrases, "Reality may not be structured in any way the human mind can objectively discern" (p. 359):
Hard matter no longer constituted the fundamental substance of nature. Matter and energy were interchangeable. Three-dimensional space and unidimensional time had become relative aspects of a four-dimensional space-time continuum. Time flowed at different rates for observers moving at different speeds. Time slowed down near heavy objects, and under certain circumstances could stop altogether. Subatomic particles displayed a fundamentally ambiguous nature, observable both as particles and as waves. The position and momentum of a particle could not be precisely measured simultaneously. Scientific observation and explanation could not proceed without affecting the nature of the object observed. The notion of substance dissolved into probabilities and “tendencies to exist.” Nonlocal connections between particles contradicted mechanistic causality. Formal relations and dynamic processes replaced hard discrete objects. The physical world of twentieth-century physics resembled, in Sir James Jean’s words, not so much a great machine as a great thought. (p. 356)

The possibility of an indeterminate and incommensurable reality, underscored by the “new” physics, detached the knower from any solid ground. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) offer the familiar litany of postmodern assumptions:

Postmodern theoretical trajectories take as their entry point a rejection of the deeply ingrained assumptions of Enlightenment rationality, traditional Western epistemology, or any supposedly "secure" representation of reality that exists outside of discourse itself. Doubt is cast on the myth of the autonomous, transcendental subject, and the concept of praxis is marginalized in favor of rhetorical undecidability and textual analysis of social practices. (p.143)

Postmodern uncertainty found its representational “fit” in the practice of Jacques Derrida’s (1976) theoretical discourse of deconstruction, a radical “treatment” and criticism that severs any certitude between a text and its meaning. The relationship between meaning and language is lost on a floating ground of signification. In deconstructive criticism, “knowing” is imprisoned by language (endlessly deferred meaning) and a text that can mean anything and everything. What are we to make of it
all? Marcus and Fischer (1986) note wryly the "ironic condition of knowledge - it doesn't believe in itself!"

Lyotard (1984), in his exploration of *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, says that postmodern knowledge…refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" (p.xxv). The characteristically human preoccupation with “imponderables” is not a uniquely postmodern ability to tolerate them but one that reverberates throughout the history of human consciousness. In the Romantic morning of modernity, the poetic imagination of John Keats espoused an attitude of "negative capability" -- the capacity to be "in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Brinton, 1967. p. 1116). In that less ironical age he could confidently assert, "I am "certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination" (p. 1208).

In the twilight of modernity, at a historical moment more characteristic of our own, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1944) in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* also employed another "negative" capability in their search to understand "why humanity, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism” (p.xi). They critiqued Western civilization, its Enlightenment foundation, and most trenchantly, a specter within modernity they termed the ‘totally administered society,’ an Orwellian image they used with unequivocal disdain. These theorists “were forced to abandon trust in the disciplinary sciences and turn to critical philosophy in part because of the integration of science and scientific thought into the apparatus of the current systems of domination” (Kellner, p. 85):

> There is no longer any available form of linguistic expression which has not tended toward accommodation of dominant currents of thought; and what a devalued language does not do automatically is proficiently executed by societal mechanisms (i.e. censorship, editing, the current system of education, publishing, the media, etc. (pp. 85-86)

From the beginning, Critical theory defined itself as an attitude and practice characterized by mistrust, skepticism, reflexivity and ‘negative thinking’, which made social critique a central part of theoretical practice….” (p. 86).
For Horkheimer and Adorno (1944), the self-destruction of the Enlightenment project rested squarely on the shoulders of positivism, which had become “part and parcel of existing processes of production and social domination, and thus should be mistrusted” (p. xiv). But it took the "second wave" of feminism in the early seventies to substantively shake and bring to cultural and academic awareness the patriarchal domination of the knowledge apparatus by foregrounding the analytical category of gender. As Braidotti et al. (1995) note, "gender as a notion…offers a set of frameworks within which feminist theory has explained the social and discursive construction and representation of differences between the sexes. As such, ‘gender’ has been the feminist answer to the universalistic tendency of critical language and of the systems of knowledge and scientific discourse at large” (p. 37). Tania Modleski (1991) also points to:

Showalter’s strong defense of women and women’s experience, combined with her forceful critiques of male critics who seemed to be coopting feminism and rendering women silent and invisible, were inspiring to those feminist critics struggling to theorize a viable and theoretically sophisticated notion of the female as social subject at a period when the very idea of the subject was undergoing a series of philosophical challenges. (p. 5)

Against the background of these dilemmas, grappling with the nature and validation of knowledge looms like an heroic, or anti-heroic, struggle carried on by dreamers - thinking we're awake - to describe our dreams (research) in a language still primarily, if not necessarily, bound by realism. Marcus and Fischer (1986) see the consequences of this experimental moment in research for the individual scholar as twofold:

First, [s]he has assumed responsibility for defining the significance of [her] own particular projects because the general theoretical umbrella of justification of the field no longer adequately does this. Theory and purpose in research are thus far more personalized, and this defines the experimental quality of both ethnography and other
related kinds of writing in contemporary genres of cultural criticism. And second, cultural critics focus in on details of social life to find in them a redefinition of the phenomena to be explained in uncertain times, and thus to reconstruct fields from the bottom up, from the problem of description (or really of representation) back to general theory which has grown out of touch with the world on which it seeks to comment. (p. 118)

The call for responsibility in defining significance and a "redefinition of the phenomena to be explained" prompts my philosophical effort to frame the issues of interpretive inquiry in a way meaningful to me. Interpretive research depends on the self or subject to do the interpreting, to value and validate the particularistic meaning that individuals give to their experience. My purpose therefore, is to resist that particularly murderous notion - the death of the subject - by an argument focused narrowly on a critique of Derrida's conception of the *logos*. Modleski (1991) provides a feminist context for the poststructural challenge to notions of identity and the subject:

From Jacques Lacan, for whom the individual subject is produced by language, to Louis Althusser, for whom the subject is produced by ideology, to Jacques Derrida, for whom the subject is a regulatory fiction produced in and through discourse, poststructuralist writings have been read by many as sounding the death knell of the humanist notion of identity, a term that invariably carries with it an assumption of gender and a heterosexual imperative: one is always either male or female…. (p. 15)

She goes on to say that “once ‘the subject’ is called into question in such a radical way, and once gender and sexual difference are seen in some sense as “arbitrary” (as linguistic difference was for Ferdinand de Saussure, the intellectual ‘father’ of all these male theorists), it is easy to see how a ‘man’ can be a ‘woman” (p. 15). This dynamic is also reminiscent of Luckacs’ analysis of the epistemological dynamic in capitalist social relations; in this case, the establishment of abstract equivalences for biological differences. “It is also easy to see why poststructuralist theories have appealed to feminists. Since feminism has a great stake in the belief, first articulated by Simone de Beauvoir, that one is not *born* a woman, one *becomes* a woman (for if this were *not* the
case it would be difficult to imagine social change), thinkers like Lacan and Foucault have provided the analytical tools by which we may begin the arduous task of uncoming women” (p. 15):

However, as feminists are increasingly pointing out, the once exhilarating proposition that there is no “essential” female nature has been elaborated to the point where it is now often used to scare “women” away from making any generalizations about or political claims on behalf of a group called “women.” (p. 15).

In the case of this study of women’s experience in Cuban filmmaking, these issues carry relevance, where there the “rights of women” and social identifications with “women” are strong, but barely cross over into any identification with “feminism,” or being “feminist,” even when the confluences are obvious. “For many women the phrase “women’s experience” is shorthand for “women’s experience of political oppression….” (p. 17). On the other hand, Denise Riley, in her book, Am I That Name, writes of the “exhaustion with reiterations about ‘women’ which must afflict the most dedicated feminist” (Modleski, p. 17). Riley says, “[to] interpret every facet of existence as really gendered produces a claustrophobia in me; I am not drawn by the charm of an always sexually distinct universe” (p. 16). However, Modleski notes that, “although women have had to take up the term “women” emphatically to rescue it from opprobrium, they have done so in opposition to patriarchy’s tendency to “saturate” us with our sex; and in fact all the great feminist texts in history have decried this tendency, from Wollenstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Women to Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own to Beauvoir’s The Second Sex and beyond” (p. 17).

Subplot: Dealing with the Deconstructive Episteme of Doubt

The demise of the Subject, of the Dialectic,
And of the Truth has left thinkers in modernity
With a void which they are vaguely aware must
Be spoken differently and strangely. (Jardine, 1982, p. 61)
Derrida’s language theory of deconstruction was influenced by Jacques Lacan, whose theoretical work positioned the subject as an ephemeral flash in the linguistic pan, a mere moment in the discourse. A French poststructuralist and psychoanalyst, Lacan posited three stages in the development of the self: "mirror," "symbolic," and "the Real." The last stage, or the Real, is always unattainable and entails the notion of glissement, in that whenever we attempt to understand who we are, we have only words (signifiers) that slide off other signifiers (Derrida's "chain of signifiers"). Within this poststructural episteme, knowledge of the self is essentially unattainable and unknowable -- forever alienated. Nietzsche, foreshadowing our predicament said, “As knowers we are unknown to ourselves.”

For postmodernity theorist Fredric Jameson (1991), the decentered psyche, or death of the subject, is "the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual" and entails as well other finalities:

The end of the bourgeois ego, or monad, no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego --- what I have been calling the waning of affect. But it means the end of much more --- the end, for example, of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brush stroke (as symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction). As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older anomie of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. (p.1)

Lacan and Jameson "share a central problematic: the indissociability of what Lacan calls the "spirit" that motivates an enunciation and the "letter," at once spirit's vehicle and its betrayer...[or] what Jameson calls "the mystery of the incarnation of meaning in language" (Helming, 1996). Derrida inherits this same problematic. It is not my intention to examine the many moves deconstruction makes to bring about the dislocation or relocation of meaning from the self to the text (the now clichéd assertion - nothing outside the text), but rather to respond to this problematic by a close focus on the interpretative reduction of the logos to language. I resist reducing the self to a language
theory, or any theory, and though I feel dangerously out on a limb, I intend to pick my bone with Derrida for just such reduction.

This next section explores an alternative context for understanding the *logos*, which endeavors, from another point-of-view to energize embodied knowing and (*gasp*) the possibilities of certitude. While the postmodern critique against the possibility of certitude in knowing may be academically or theoretically generative, as knowers, it is “unempirical” to categorically preclude or negate by premature closures, the practical possibility of certainty in the actually lived experience of what it means “to know.” To give a mundane example of the practical import of what it means to know (i.e. without a doubt): if my child gets lost in an airport and then found again, is there any doubt in my mind that the child is mine? I know it. It is self-evident. The next section sets forth my best argument for another way of knowing as the basis for a bit/e of certitude, implicit in the self-evident act of knowing (“we hold these truths to be self-evident…”).

**Self-evidence**

Has no one made the wide-eyed observation that Derrida’s deconstructive project is based on a mis-conception -- a too literal attribution of the *logos* to words? “As portrayed by Derrida, the logocentric system always assigns the origin of truth to the *logos* – to the spoken word, to the voice of reason, or to the Word of God” (Leitch, 1994, p. 25). Contrary to Derrida I argue that *logos* does not refer to *words* -- written, spoken, or thought -- of any kind, but to that which cannot be conceptualized or known through language. The *logos* points to something beyond language and to a way of knowing beyond thinking -- to a non-conceptual experience within the human body, being realizable because we live and breathe, and defined here (necessarily broadly) as "the ineffable." While the ineffable, inexpressible by nature or definition, can be neither spoken nor written, nevertheless, it may be practically experienced or known by any living human being.

While "the Word" (*Logos*) has been translated and interpreted as the biblical and literal "word of God," it may also be understood to refer to the primordial vibration, or breath of life. The biblical text reads, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The *logos* refers not to words but to the
"sign" of life -- the breath. Breath, understood as the sign of life, is also a direct experience of life. Without the incarnating logos, the body is a corpse, but when the Word is "made flesh" the human body is animated with life -- breath -- presence -- consciousness. Thus the logos is neither linguistic nor philosophical -- but primarily and simultaneously both a physical and non or meta-physical link to the self and to consciousness. We need not think to breathe. The breath is automatic and felt (usually unconsciously). Experience of the breath is certain, direct knowing -- undeferred meaning. While we use words to talk around and about the logos, the ineffable experience of the Word is unmediated by the mind, cannot be grasped through language, is autonomous of concepts and, in recognition of the temper of our times, is not amenable to commodification. Coded as the "Word," the ineffable logos, may also be consciously felt by directed focus, a "letting go" (not loss, not a death) of the ego self. Inwardly directed focus is a way of knowing and basis for the research posture I explore in the following discussion on subjectivity and imagination.

By the use of feeling as a function of knowing, experience of the breath (logos) and its intimate link to life (also logos) opens to a non-conceptual knowledge of the ineffable (also logos). Historically, experience of the ineffable has been communicated (embodied) through poetry, a language form considered more nearly suited to representing the inexpressible (the Unrepresentable as Jameson might think of it). When consciously perceived, the logos is re-cognized as part and parcel of who/what "one" is. The unitive experience is not to be confused with a totalizing experience, i.e. grand narratives as historically conceived. Poets, in their effort to represent the experience, write about this "knowing" as something familiar - a recognition, remembrance, memory, a feeling of "home." The ineffable experience of life and individual embodiment is personal. And universal, transcultural and assessable. The breath is self-evident and offers a non-conceptual, experiential basis for truth, an "origin of truth" experienced within each living human being. In this very focused sense, the center is still within, the center is still, within.

This experiential, empirical, and embodied conception of the logos is the basis for saying that although the world may be incomprehensible to the mind as quantum physics might seem to indicate, and less real than once we thought, the logos offers to our
self-consciousness an autonomous, free, unalienated sphere of experience and meaning present (presence) imminently knowable within the human body. (The experiential character of "Know thyself" unveiled.) As long as we are struggling through the philosophical bind of post/modernist "transcendental signifiers," I prefer the empowering logos to say, Lacan's phallus. There is no lack. No need for knowledge brokers or academic disciplinarians, or for that matter, even literacy. Meaning, the origin of truth, in its living embodiment, and particular, temporal, universality -- can be felt and known by any living human being. Embodied self-consciousness is the universal sine qua non of human knowing. The possibilities of this alternative conception of the logos tends toward a universal and humanist "ground of being" in which the affirmation of life (self), individual meaning, and human freedom is rooted. Without a free and autonomous self what would be the purpose for the emancipatory project/s historically and "theoretically" engaged in? Liberation for what -- and for whom? The self is more than a liberal notion of the rational individual derived from Enlightenment political theory but it cannot be less. The self is not an abstraction; it always inhabits particularity, struggles with the concrete. The subject is characterized by embodiment and self-consciousness. Self-consciousness evokes a possibility – a self-evident feeling of appreciation for the immeasurable, incalculable value of one human life, and its intrinsic meaning to the individual living it.

**Subjectivity, Imagination and the Apperception of Oneness**

The standard scientific preoccupation with objectivity is currently eclipsed by methodological preoccupations with subjectivity, "how to handle it, restrain it, account for it" (Heshusius, 1994, p. 15). Educational researcher, Lous Heshusius, talking about the subject/object dichotomy, rejects the notion that subjectivity can be "managed," that it is desirable or even possible to maintain distance between the knower and the known - the illusion of objectivity. She rejects procedural mechanisms such as the "formal, systematical monitoring of self" (Peshkin's "tamed subjectivity," 1998, p. 20), or the "rigourously subjective" (Jackson, 1990, p 154), or Goetz & Lecompte's "more self-conscious attempt to control for observer bias (1984, p.9), as misguided efforts that
unconsciously prop up the still-dominant Cartesian subject/object dualism of positivist research (Heshusius, 1994, p. 15).

These efforts to grapple with subjectivity highlight the difficulty we have thinking in non-dualistic terms and outside the mindset of "control." Schachtel (1959) noted that control, whether of subjectivity or objectivity, may also be seen “as a protective device to neutralize the other's impact on the self by intellectualization and by the idea of constructing and then maintaining distance,” (p. 228). Heshusius (1994) underscores the notion that cultures that do not objectify nature in their perception of reality such as Eastern, Native American, and aboriginal cultures also have no need to "subjectify" it (p. 16). Unlike the alienated mode of Cartesian knowing, there is no necessity for psychic distance. She is not the first to re-cognize that "before the scientific revolution the act of knowing had always been a form of participation and enchantment…. The very act of participation was knowing…direct somatic, psychic, and emotional participation" (p. 16). While this "participation mystique" is usually considered regressive, a form of naïve realism, Richard Tarnas (1991) indicates the possibility of a "mature participation mystique" as the psychological and social necessity of the present age (p 443).

In this Tarnas echoes philosopher and educator, Rudolph Steiner. Steiner theorized that human beings, through the course of evolution and precisely in order to develop the powers of rational thought, had to lose most of their early capacity for “clairvoyance.” He taught that the “spiritual task” of the modern age was to reclaim humanity’s latent capacity for "supersensible perception" -- by strengthening the power of individual human cognition and feeling in education and within an arts-based curriculum. His creative pedagogy developed knowing through healthy feeling and imaginative thinking:

It is during the school age years when the child lives and knows the world through its imaginative, feeling life that a powerful image-making capacity is developed – or not. It is this vital picture-making capacity that gives life and insight to logical and conceptual thinking. The primary task of education in the school age years is therefore, to educate and nourish the imaging power of the child, and to lead them over into the development of strong,
flexible, and insightful conceptual capacities
which developed imagination alone makes
possible. 1988, p. xvi
Steiner recognized the “importance of the image in all thinking” (p. xvii) and
therefore stressed the importance of an education that was thoroughly artistic in nature.
John Dewey (1934) in Art as Experience spoke of “art as the primary model for all
knowing, and of the importance of conceiving ‘education as an art’….and his own
recognition of the centrality of the artistic-imaginative experience” (Sloan, 1988, p. xvii).
discusses the relationship of art to societal expectations. Apart from conventional
expectations that art be beautiful, she calls upon James Hillman, psychologist and
philosopher, who suggests that the transcendent (and therapeutic) function in the
perception of art has much to do with its capacity to provoke imagination, wonder, and an
“aesthetic” response of spontaneous appreciation. In an article entitled “The Repression
of Beauty,” Hillman (1991) discusses the effect of the exquisitely beautiful on the living
organism:

you draw in your breath and stop still. This quick intake
of breath, this little hshshs as the Japanese draw between
their teeth when they see something beautiful in a garden –
this ahahah reaction is the aesthetic response just as certain,
inevitable, objective, and ubiquitous, as wincing in pain and
moaning in pleasure. Moreover, this quick intake of breath is
also the very root of the word aesthetic, aesthesis in Greek,
meaning sense-perception. Aisthesis goes back to the Homeric
aiou and aisthou which means both “I perceive” as well as
“I gasp, struggle for breath…aisthmoai, aisthanomai,”
I breathe in (63). (Giroux and McLaren, 1994, p 102)

Philosopher and philologist, Owen Barfield (1898 -1997), considered the history
of words to be a key resource in “seeing” (living into) and tracing the evolution of human
consciousness. He theoretically elaborated imagination and poetry as means of
cognition. Barfield’s study of the imagination and his literary approach to "unitive
consciousness,” conjured by Coleridge's exclamation, "O! the one Life within us and
abroad!" resonates with Hespusius's "participatory consciousness." Hespusius advances
the thesis that the "essence and starting point of the act of coming to know is not a
subjectivity that one can explicitly account for, but is of a direct participatory nature one cannot account for. Polanyi's (1966) concept of tacit knowing is precisely the knowing that we know but cannot tell. We "extend our body to include [what we come to know] - so that we come to dwell in it" (p. 16). This in-dwelling is kin to McClintock's sympathetic knowing, to Berman's bodily or "somatic knowing," which always exceeds what the rational mind consciously knows. "The body does not end where it ends" as Heshusius succinctly declares (1994, p. 3).

Barfield's lifelong study of Romanticism examines a convergence in Eastern and Western ways of knowing. According to him, the Romantic project degenerated because it never developed a critique. In other words, the poets and philosophers did not ask an important and "critical" question. Answered, the question would have provided a powerful and weighty ballast to the hegemonic development of rationalism. Unanswered, it sowed the seeds for the decline and degeneration of Romanticism. The unasked question was: “How, or, in what way is the imagination true?” (p. 28). Barfield understood that the characteristic of imagination as distinct from scientific reason as a way of knowing, "is that the subject should be somehow merged or resolved into the object" (p. 30). His study of Eastern and Western ways of knowing offers insights into an issue often referred to, but insufficiently examined in the current "ways of knowing" literature; that is, the actual "mechanics" of overcoming the objective-subjective divide. How might this be realized?:

In the East this resolution of the subjective-objective duality, the 'I am that' or Tat tvam Asi, is a very ancient maxim indeed. The West may resolve the duality in theory, and there are passages in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason which suggest he had done so. The Eastern Sages, however, exhorted their disciples to make 'I am that' a personal experience. With them it was not the abstract conception of a Transcendental Unity of Apperception but a single and highly concrete proposition ('I am that'). And in the Greek expression 'Know thyself!' we really find the same principle embodied. This was no exhortation to introspection, but rather, in modern jargon, an exhortation to make the unconscious conscious. If 'I' in my true self - that is, if you choose, in my unconscious self - am that (the apparently objective), then it is only by knowing that and by knowing it imaginatively that I can 'know myself'. We begin in this way to see the Romantic conception of
imagination, not as something entirely new, but rather as the emergence in the West, and of course in an altered form, of an experience which the East had cultivated for ages. (p. 30-31)

This kind of knowing Evelyn Fox Keller identified as "A Feeling for the Organism" in the title of her 1983 biography of Barbara McClintock. This was a distinctive way of knowing that McClintock, a Nobel laureate in physics for her work in the genetics of corn plants, operationalized in her fieldwork by "listening to the plant.” Participatory consciousness exists when there is a deep recognition of the kinship between the knower and the known, the self and the other, and "results from the ability to temporarily let go of all preoccupation with self and move into a state of complete attention” or focus (p. 118). In describing for others the “how” of this “way of knowing” McClintock would say, "I am not there!" (Heshusius, 1994, p. 17).

Barfield (1967), never content to let his reader away with some vague notion of the epistemological distinctions he is at pains to illustrate, says this way of (not) “thinking” or the quality of mind Barfield termed "chastity of thought," is also reminiscent of Goethe's method of observing nature -- a method, which in Goethe’s time was as much rejected by the scientists of the day as the results of his method were scientifically embraced (p. 32). In this way, Barfield (1967) returns to the epistemological task of elucidating the convergences and differences between the Eastern and Western attitude of mind, as a way to “get at” or understand the “truth” of imaginative knowing:

[The] imagination is not content with merely looking-on at the world. It seeks to sink itself entirely in the thing perceived…. But now, take the bare expression, "I am that', we shall probably note a certain difference between the tone in which it must have been uttered long ago by the Eastern Yogi and the tone in which it is uttered today by the Western devotee of imagination. There would be a difference of emphasis. For the Yogi, desirous of advancing further along the path of wisdom, the important thing is, or was, to feel 'I am that' - there is indeed such an entity as I myself and I can find it by looking at the outer word. That is his discovery. For the Westerner, on the other hand, as he develops his imagination, the novel experience is to feel "I am that". There was never any doubt about there being an entity 'I,' he feels, but the
great discovery, the advance in wisdom, is the realisation that this 'I' is not shut up inside this physical body as if in a kind of box, as he naturally supposed. No, it is out there in the flower and the stone. 'I' am not merely the seer but the seen. I am that. (p. 39-40)

Imagination as a way of knowing appears to involve “a certain disappearance of the sense of 'I' and 'Not I.' It stands before the object and feels 'I am that'" (p.30): This reflexive being and not-being presence (or absence) of the self is precisely the methodological research problematic of Western empirical science.

The imagination in its highest working becomes “sympathetic” freeing one from self-consciousness and self-interest and enabling one to enter into the experience and feeling of other persons and even into animals and inanimate things. …Sometimes it appears that when the imagination is most fully roused the senses fail (“the light of sense goes out”), and the imagination achieves a direct intuition of one’s own nature and of transcendent truth inwardly possessed…..In its most general significance, “imagination” denoted a working of the mind that is total, synthetic, immediate, and dynamic. (Brinton, pp 43,18).

The Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment is depicted in many ways. But the way that has most engaged Barfield, because of its potential for generating fresh thinking, was the particular moment in history when the “East” meets the “West” (never so easily or neatly categorized or “otherized”). While the meeting of these two “epistemes” is noted to have contributed to the vitality of Romanticism as a literary or aesthetic movement (colonizing loot), the encounter also pointed to a way of knowing that could have developed into Romanticism’s critique of positivism (a lost transformative moment). Working this conceptual terrain, Barfield (1967) elucidates the historical peculiarity and significance of the encounter between East and West. He returns again, as we will now, to the question of how imagination is different from any other capacity or faculty of human experience.

“What then is the really characteristic thing about this ‘creative imagination’ for which the Romantics claimed so much” (p. 30)? This cognitive ground that we now revisit with Coleridge, may be stereotypically characterized by what the “spiritual East
and the material West have to offer each other, [as] the Romantics strove to transform their vision -- to see anew. What Coleridge wants to convey is not prepositional knowledge, so the path to understanding is maieutic, a suspension of cognitive habits, or disbelief. Belief is the barrier at “the physical edge of things” (Cutsinger, 1987, p. 49), just as the first, naive film viewers would shrink back at the spray of water in a film, or from an oncoming train, because “they didn’t always see the screen as a screen, a barrier, as it were, between them and the pictured world. But they soon learnt eagerly to accept the screen’s power of illusion. This illusion hangs on the peculiar relationship which arose between the camera and the audience, which the development of narrative cinema came almost exclusively to depend on: the camera as an invisible surrogate for the human observer that enables the audience to see without being seen, to feel that it is present but disembodied within the projected view – a condition which nowadays is largely taken for granted” (Chanan, p. 12).

**Persistence of Vision Meets the Suspension of Disbelief**

Coleridge warns of the obstacles at work in approaching transformative vision, obstacles at work in the very everyday physicality of our bodies. “We have no need to be taught conceptually or formulaically that most basic of Newtonian principles: that two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time: the feeling is in our bones” (p. 49). Bernstein (1990) notes, “Contemporary thinkers in the Anglo-Saxon world cannot underestimate the extent to which their thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and even feelings have been shaped by empiricist, scientific, and pragmatic traditions – even when one is reacting against these (p. xxii). This is Coleridge’s “lethargy of custom.” Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria* advises against facile interpretation of the imaginative capacity:

> They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition, who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar; those only, who feel in their own spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucrum for antennae yet to come. They know and feel that the potential works in them, even as the actual works on them (BL 1:241-242). (Cutsinger, p. 48)
As Cutsinger (1987) says, this kind of “sensitivity to the potential within and actual-on can be acquired only if a person opens himself to a dimension of knowledge so primary or primordial as to be almost instinctive, though a dimension he must still choose and willingly enter, where as yet unactualized possibilities and empty spaces are allowed a contribution to his being as great as the occupied places of existing objects” (p. 48). With transformed vision we begin to see the image as the idea, much the way Goethe went about his observations of the natural world. While Kant could not escape the common-sense solidity and substance of the Newtonian worldview and knowledge limited to what could be known through the senses (con-tact), Coleridge, “an accomplished Platonic flyer” (Cutsinger’s phrase!), extends the possibility of knowing to beyond the hard, impenetrable surfaces of the physical world. Cutsinger asks, exactly what was it about Newton’s theory that Coleridge so railed against? Here the argument approaches the subterranean waters of the current crisis in representation and the rejection of visualism. Cutinger analyses why the Romantics so opposed the “mechanistic materialism” of Newton:

First of all, physical sight is made a criterion for everything that follows. A thing must conform to the requirements of ordinary, empirical seeing in order to play a role in Newtonian physics. We know that this sight is a physical seeing, secondly, because Newton associates it with “bodies.” And his concern for obtaining “sensible measures” justifies our thinking of the “bodies” as concrete, material objects, as does also his calling them immutable. Therefore…if the idea of space is to be given any meaning, it must be a meaning consistent with the nature of the concrete, impenetrable things. Space must be viewed as a function of matter; the arena or region or container around us that we think of as empty must have a nature compatible with the containment of physical objects. It must be conceived as the sum total of all such objects and of all empty places that could be occupied by such objects…Finally, space is understood with respect to place. Space, and therefore the substratum of the entire world around us, is believed to be a composite of occupied and unoccupied places, of material objects and the “distances” between them through which they can be “transferred. (pp. 55-53)
Coleridge’s experience of the “oneness” or the unity of transformed vision, opposed the limitation of empirical sight and picture of the universe as “an aggregation of many irreducible individual places…the too great assurance of solidity…[and] too unreflective a willingness to stop short at surfaces” (Cutsinger, p. 54). Surfaces could not be treated as ultimate facts. “For to think no more deeply than surface is to neglect the obvious: that a surface is what is only because there is something on the other side inside of it” (p. 55). Transformed vision is predicated on the apperception of oneness, words intriguingly out of sync in social science discourse but never far from human experience.

Could anthropologists have culled their capacity for making the familiar strange from Coleridge? This was a favored technique of his to move his audience beyond the “custom of lethargy,” the common sense dependence on empirical contact and the realism of appearances, into the act of reflection and into his basic theme: “that unity was the principle or form of…transformation” (p. 65). He employed a discursive style intended to suggest the inward dimension of reality and how it may be known. “I can prove to others only as far as I can prevail upon them to retire into themselves and make their own minds the object of their steadfast attention.” He supposes that the reader would find “a pleasure in referring to his own inward experience, for the facts asserted by the author” (pp. 59-60). At every point along the way Coleridge points toward “the true criteria of reality: unity, interpenetration, a space constituted by mutual interiorities…”(p.60).

But what is this “unity,” this character of “oneness”? It certainly was not an accumulation, an aggregation, an addition of the many, an undifferentiated identity, not parts nor wholes nor any cumulative “whole.” It was not a “manyness” that depended on the possibility of empirical visibility and upon the conceivability of positions and distances” (p. 67). It was not, loosely speaking, an Enlightenment concept but a unity that preserves multiplicity and diversity. He constantly advised: distinguish, make distinctions without dividing. According to Cutsinger, to explain “oneness,” Coleridge used the concept of “polarity” and with it “interpenetration,” as well as “symbol” and with it “translucence” (p. 67). I will deal briefly only with polarity since it goes to the very marrow of feminist theorizing oppositional binaries.
Coleridge’s conceptions of the nature of duality may inform feminist thinking on this knotty problem. For Coleridge, “the essential duality of Nature arises out of its productive unity” (Barfield, p. 154); it is not sexual difference that gives rise to duality -- where feminists seem to begin their theorizing -- but rather the notion of polarity that he finds so informing:

EVERY POWER IN NATURE AND IN SPIRIT
must evolve an opposite, as the sole means and conditions of its manifestation: AND ALL
OPPOSITION IS A TENDENCY TO BE REUNION.
This is the universal Law of Polarity or essential Dualism.
(Cutsinger, p. 68, his italics)

Barfield parses Coleridge:

Polarity is dynamic, not abstract….Where logical opposites are contradictory, polar opposites are generative of each other -- and together generative of a new product. Polar opposites exist by virtue of each other as well as at the expense of each other…. Moreover each quality or characteristic is present in the other. We can and must distinguish, but there is no possibility of dividing them.

But when one has said all this, how much has one succeeded in conveying? How much use are definitions of the undefinable? The point is, has the imagination grasped it? For nothing else can do so. At this point the reader must be called on, not to think about imagination, but to use it. Indeed…the apprehension of polarity is itself the basic act of imagination. (p. 155)

On the one hand, polarity may be understood as a relationship where unity as been robbed of unity or harmony, as in the word ‘polarization.’ This is not the case, however, with the interpenetration underlying dynamic polarity” (Cutsinger, p. 68). If we turn to polarity’s etymological roots it refers to magnetism, and Coleridge informs:

The polar forces are the two forms, in which one Power works in the same act and instant. Thus, it is not the Power of Attraction and the Power of Repulsion at once
tugging and tugging like two sturdy Wrestlers that compose the magnet; but the Magnetic Power working at once positively and negatively. Attraction and Repulsion are the two Forces of the one magnetic Power.” (p. 65)

There is opposition. There is a dynamic tension within this unity. “Each polarity, while being a duality from its own point of view, remains nevertheless a unity” (Barfield, p. 157. Coleridge uses polarity to represent, to elucidate the idea of oneness inherent in duality. While polarity is perceivable in part (we can see the results of magnetic force), the interpenetration that defines, participates in, is constitutive of, “oneness” is not observable, even though apprehendable and capable of being experienced, i.e. known. Cutsinger notes how Coleridge used the concept to turn the “sense of surface inside out,” by pointing toward our resistance, our “lethargy of custom” to go beyond the “despotism of the eye.” Positivist science and materialist philosophy demand that everything that is, be capable of being seen (p. 68).

Coleridge’s attempts to speak the unseen, the ineffable, to speak about an experience of certain undefinability. But at critical moments he (perforce) breaks off – mid-sentence, mid-knock, never giving an “explanation,” never able to capture for conceptual consciousness (or his audience) the illusive quarry because it is knowable only in feeling, not in thinking; and he often marks that impossibility in the text. I take many cues from this poet and argue that the real reflexive turn in any critique of representation turns on a deepening capacity of the mind for new, transformative vision and imaginative knowing; for feeling as a valid way of knowing -- and its legitimation and inclusion in the “production” of knowledge.

New vision is predicated on a potential, a possibility, an experience of the apperception of oneness -- the imaginative capacity that is both a material and spiritual power. The Romantic impulse unveiled to individual self-perception and released (represented) to collective knowing (collective consciousness), an experience of potential, a heroic vista of an unlimited human potential (for the most part, a masculinist heroics well critiqued by feminist scholars.) Set against the narrative backdrop of a finite existence, the Romantic critique of Rationalism was grounded in another way of knowing
that, rooted in "structures of feeling," was validated by the intrinsic importance of one individual life, as a source of meaning, authority for evidence, and basis of certitude.

In literature, Raymond Williams (1961) describes "structures of feeling" as making the experiential quality of life come alive. The structure of life is narrative - a story that begins, has a middle, and end/s. Narrative itself (no matter the content) carries within an implicit intimation of mortality that perhaps accounts for our endless fascination with the narrative form. In painting, we scan for a figure on the horizon. The fascination of film is figural: it is the human reflection we seek and what it means to be a human subject. In other words, we fascinate ourselves.

In the Cuban film, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, the central character, Sergio, looks around and asks himself, What meaning has this for me? The heroic view of unlimited human potential deeply imbedded in the Romantic soil/soul of humanist and utopian aspiration strongly persists in the cultural and philosophical ambiance (sensorium) of Cuban post revolutionary development; and imbues Cuban cinema with a stubborn modernism in the representation of national identity. The next chapter examines the historical and social context of film practice in Cuba from the 1897 arrival of the first camera/projectors in Havana to the revolutionary beginnings and development of a national cinema and film industry in 1959.

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1 Tarnas elaborates:
A certain irreducible irrationality, already recognized in the human psyche, now emerged in the structure of the physical world itself. To incoherence was added intelligibility, for the conceptions derived from the new physics not only were difficult for the layperson to comprehend, they presented seemingly insuperable obstacles to the human intuition generally: a curved space, finite yet unbounded; a four-dimensional space-time continuum; mutually exclusive properties possessed by the same subatomic entity; objects that were not really things at all but processes or patterns of relationship; phenomena that took no decisive shape until observed; particles that seemed to affect each other at a distance with no known causal link; the existence of fundamental fluctuations of energy in a total vacuum (Tarnas, p. 358).
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CHAPTER FOUR – HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

The human voyage consists of reaching the country written in our interior
and promised by a constant voice. – Jose Martí

Beginnings of Film in Cuba

People in Cuba began watching moving pictures in 1897 with the first “views” or
“shorts” of the Lumière brothers’ cinématographe machine, brought to the island by
Frenchman, Gabriel Veyre. The cinématographe functioned as both a projector and
camera. The Lumières' strategy was to send agents around the world to show the “views”
and to film scenes from the countries they visited. Film historian, Michael Chanan
(1985) notes that as a condition of Veyre being allowed into the Cuba, the Spanish
authorities required that he film views of the state – “military propaganda scenes, views
of the artillery in action and of troops on the march” (p. 29). Since the film-views were
developed on the spot, not only did the Cuban public see people playing cards, the arrival
of a train, a Spanish artillery in combat, and a line of parading horses, they saw, for the
first time, glimpses of their own local images in “moving pictures.” From January to
May of 1897, Veyre stayed in Havana entertaining habaneros with the “views” he had
filmed with the “Cinématographe Lumièrè.” By the time he left for Latin America in
August, Veyre had filmed enough “shorts” to be able to change his film program twice
each week and lower the entrance fee from thirty to twenty centavos - staying ahead of
the competition that was fast arriving to this port town.

In March, the Edison Viascope arrived but the projected image was blurry and the
pictured fluttered excessively. In April, Dickson's Biograph was introduced from North
America, with a projection system similar to the Cinematograph but with better images,
some colored by hand. That same month, another French system of projection was
inaugurated, the Cronofotograph Demeny. By August, Cuban film entrepreneurs had
decided upon a more perfected model of the cinématographe, installing the ‘New
Cinematograph Lumière.’ These businessmen charged thirty centavos to watch their film program that changed every Monday and Friday on Havana's old “fashion days” -- thus reinforcing a long-standing identification between entertainment and fashion from the days of Havana's colonial salons.

In 1898 Alfred Smith and Jim Blackton arrived in Havana from New York, bringing the Edison Vita graph to film images of the Cuban-Spanish-American War. War frenzy in the United States was being fomented, even instigated, by intense competition among the mass press dailies. The slogan of William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal “Remember the Maine, to hell with Spain” epitomizes the sensationalism with which U.S. war sentiment was publicized at the time. Upon returning to the United States with their footage, Smith and Blackton heard that the Spanish naval fleet off Cuba had been sunk by the U.S. navy. In his autobiography, Smith describes how he and Blackton, after returning to New York, had faked film scenes of this naval battle to satisfy a press and public clamoring for images:

The smoky overcast and the flashes of fire from the 'guns' gave the scene remarkable realism. The film and the lenses of that day were imperfect enough to conceal the crudities of our miniature, and as the picture ran for only two minutes there wasn't time for anyone to study it critically. Deception though it was then, it was the first miniature, and the forerunner of the elaborate 'special effects' techniques of modern picturemaking. (Chanan, 1985, p. 26)

Chanan indicates that it was easy for audiences to be deceived by the faked war images as well as to be uncritical consumers of the war. He attributes the beginning of film's early ideological roots to the context of “stimulated” manipulation and naive public reception. Film technology was new and the public had little basis for comparison. Photography contributed its ideological charge as a “collector of facts” and “vehicle of nineteenth-century empiricism” to the new technology of moving image creation; and the very authenticity of photographs created a sense of the “exotic” in their facile independence from any explanatory context or lived reality (1985, p. 28). What was to be known was visible. But the apparent transformation of the (far-away) exotic into the
(nearly) known was merely the assumption of knowledge. Chanan notes, Thomas Hobbes observed that “power is the reputation of power.” Therefore, it was sufficient:

for early audiences to be presented with the crudest images, little more than the reputation of the reputation, and they were engaged by them. If [war] scenes like these became a genre, an established term in the vocabulary of screen rhetoric, this is because they functioned first and foremost not on the level of information but like religious icons: they aroused the devotion of an audience to an idea….The audience stimulated their production not merely economically but also, through their ready surrender of self to the content of the image, on the level of symbolic exchange. (p. 30)

The 1898 War of Independence freed Cubans from the Spanish but left them with a continued and deeply resented U.S. presence. Under intense pressure from Washington, the Cuban Constitutional Assembly was forced to accede to the rankling Platt Amendment as a condition for the formation of an independent Republic. The European press (London Saturday Review of May 2, 1902) had this to say about Cuban “independence”:

It is true that the American troops and officials have been withdrawn, the American flag hauled down, and a republic of sorts inaugurated. But it is not true that the republic is independent in the management of its internal affairs, while so far as foreign relations go, it is undisguisedly under the thumb of Washington. The republic has been obliged to cede naval and coaling stations to the United States; it has no power to declare war without American consent; it may not add to the Cuban debt without permission; even its control over the island treasury is subject to supervision. Moreover, the United States retains a most elastic right of intervention. (in Chanan, p. 33)

Around 1905, the first film distribution chain was established by Santos and Artigas, who represented the French distributors, Pathé and Gaumont. Despite the continued and increasing North American presence in Cuba, films from French and European distributors were the predominant and preferred cinema until World War I.
Historically it had been European, particularly French, influences that had held sway culturally. During colonialism, the Cuban Creole bourgeoisie had traditionally looked to Europe for inspiration and affirmation, sending their children to the continent to be educated and affecting in their own salons the cultural consumption of European literary and fashion trends. During this period, culture was “on par with linen sheets and silk shirts - the very antithesis of culture as…an active agent and expressive force within society” (p. 41). Culture and the symbolic value of culture became reduced to a social commodity “which could be circulated and cashed in, in order to acquire social status” (p. 42). Women, “as the most leisured sector of the leisured classes” played an important role in this process (Chanan, p. 39):

The model…for the sociocultural role of women was already well-established in London, Paris and other European cities. There, women exerted vigorous leadership in the bourgeois salons in the manner corresponding to the nature of the bourgeois family: the wife presided over the gathering, introduced the guests and led the conversation. The daughters of the family were among the performers because playing an instrument was an accomplishment which demonstrated their eligibility for marriage. The discussion of fashion was a topic of the salon because different styles of dress were deemed appropriate to different types of event. The Cuban bourgeoisie simply copied all this, though rather than fashion being an extension of the salon, the salon became an extension of fashion, a place to show off dresses brought back from trips to Europe like trophies. (p. 41)

The emergence of the cultural and artistic movement of modernismo (circa 1890) marked a reaction to the “dependency and conformism of the creole bourgeoisie.” With modernismo, a creative force was established that created an “entirely new aesthetic synthesis,” that asserted the “needs and possibilities of cultural self-determination,” and whose “anti-materialistic sentiments were almost a determining characteristic” of the movement itself (p. 42-43). However, when film arrived:
The *modernistas* find their antithesis in the materialism of the film pioneers, that new kind of image-maker who now emerges like the poet's shadow, the double who represents exactly what the *modernistas* fear within themselves - submissiveness to the material interests of their class. And all the more so in Cuba, where it seemed to the writer Jesus Castellanos in 1910 that materialism had become the main preoccupation since the emancipation from Spanish rule. For defenseless against the influence of North American commercialism, and exposed like nowhere else in Latin America to the penetration of the new advertising and publicity businesses, Cuba is once again the country where the reality of Latin America is least masked. (p.44)

Therefore, it is not surprising that the first Cuban films were commissioned publicity films or that the techniques of modern marketing were used extensively to attract audiences. The beginning of film in Cuba is marked by an “ideological fusion” between filmmaking and marketing. In 1898, the first publicity short shot by a Cuban, actor José Casasus, was sponsored by a beer company. In 1906, Enrique Díaz Quesada - the most prolific Cuban filmmaker of the silent era - made his first short entitled, *Palatino Park (El Parque de Palatino)*. Showing Havana's major entertainment park, the film was commissioned by the owners of the park for a publicity campaign in the United States (Chanan, p. 35). Díaz Quesada made other shorts of city-scapes and inaugurated a series of filmed actualities called *Cuba by Day (Cuba al Día)* (Douglas, 1996. p.18). By 1913 he had produced his first feature length film, *Manuel Garcia or the King of the Cuban Countryside (Manuel García o el Rey de los Campos de Cuba)*, about a nationalistic, anti-Spanish bandit. According to Chanan, it was not until the advent of cinematic narrative and a greater degree of technical development during film’s second decade that the possibility of a national cinema could even be conceived. Often the desire to acquire respectability for the new medium “expressed itself in the choice of patriotic themes” (p. 44). Early filmmakers such as Ramon Peón and Enrique Díaz Quesada had a national cinema in mind when they drew upon historical and folkloric sources for their films.

Another publicity film called *Cinema and Sugar (Cine y Azucar)*, made by Manuel Martínez in 1906, was commissioned to raise finance capital for the Manati
Sugar Company. Just as it would not be possible to understand the history of Cuba without examining the role of sugar in its national development, “it would not be possible to understand the peculiar susceptibility of the Cuban film pioneers to commercial sponsorship without considering the effects of the pursuit of sugar on ideological and cultural dispositions in nineteenth-century Cuba” (p. 37). Based on slave labor and the deeply troubled social relations that the slave economy produced, sugar was the export crop most responsible for the economic and social deformation of Cuba. (p. 37). After the 1959 revolution, Cuban filmmakers would examine this topic extensively in many feature films including *The Other Francisco (El otro Francisco)* and *The Last Supper (La Ultima Cena)*.

The early development of the Cuban film market is tied to the foreign exploitation of Cuba’s sugar industry. At the beginning of the 20th century, most of Latin America's rural populations, whose labor was “largely extracted by the quasi-feudal means inherited from the Spanish conquest, still existed outside a cash economy” (p. 47). But unlike the rest of Latin America, Cuba possessed “an extensive rural proletariat” of wage laborers attached to the sugar mills of the large plantations (p. 47). Railways, built to get the sugar out to market, also served to get film in to the countryside and to audiences with a bit of cash to spend on “spectacles.” Film followed the railroads and a constant supply of new films reached the provinces, thus encouraging the shift from exhibition in itinerant “film tents” and other temporary venues to permanent cinemas or theaters. After making the first Cuban short in 1898, José Casasús purchased film equipment from Pathé and with two electric generators left for the province of Las Villas, taking film to the interior of the island. Douglas notes that with the arrival of film, some of these provincial towns saw not only film but electric lights, for the first time (p. 15).

Beginning in 1906 and 1907, the establishment of theaters for film viewing spread from Havana to the interior provinces initiating the beginning of a material basis for the early diffusion of film, and the later development of a “film culture” throughout the island. But, as Chanan notes, “the emerging pattern of exploitation in the film industry didn’t require that the dominating country actually own the cinemas, it was enough for them to dominate the mentality of the economically dependent tribe of Creole capitalists. In Cuba, as in other Latin America countries, the cinemas came to be owned by the
commercial classes, the same local business people who later also set up the multitude of small commercial radio stations.” (p. 48). Despite the diffusion of film exhibition throughout the country, the activity and business of filmmaking remained (and remains to this day) in the capital city of Havana. Through an intensive and extensive use of marketing strategies “cinema soon became the most widely distributed and available form of commercial entertainment in Cuba” (Chanan, p. 48).

Marketing strategies of the day ranged from giving out movie coupons in cigarette packs to sponsoring beauty contests. In an effort to attract women to those darkened rooms of flickering images, some theater owners in 1908 initiated “white Mondays” reducing ticket prices to ten cents from the usual fifty cents and later including other promotional strategies, such as giving women perfumed soap, taking photographs of children who attended with them, giving out hand fans, and for the most avid fans - a drive in an automobile. (Douglas, 1996, p. 22). “White Mondays” were designed to attract not only women of the bourgeoisie but working women. While the best industrial jobs for working women were in the cigar factories where they could make $3.60 a week, the majority of women at the time usually labored as domestics, seamstresses, and clerks. “In 1905 a woman who washed and ironed a hundred pieces of laundry -- a good day's labor -- would make about $2.70 a week, a cook $7.20, a maid $5.40” (Smith and Padula 1996, p.13).

From the earliest days of cinema in Cuba, women occupied the imagination of promoters and filmmakers alike. *The Countryside or The Cuban Woman (La manigua o La mujer cubana)*, another Díaz Quesada film produced in 1915, was said to have been the biggest success of the silent era (Douglas, p. 34). Literally, “manigua” means the countryside’s rural “scrubland” but during Cuba’s War of Independence the word also signified the “Country” and the place/s where the war was fought. This film may be the earliest cinematic identification of women with the Cuban nation.

**Film Pioneers and Development of Infrastructure**

The new invention of moving pictures and the technology of filmmaking reached Cuba at approximately the same time as it reached the rest of the world. In other words, by some measures there was an historical moment when Cuba was not “underdeveloped.”
By 1900, Cuban firms were either the representatives of European film distributors, or were distributors themselves. The Cuban firm of Santos and Artigas remained the most prominent distribution firm throughout the era, also involving itself in all aspects of the film business - production, exhibition, distribution and even equipment sales. In 1905, Enrique Díaz Quesada and businessman Francisco Rodríguez founded The Moving Picture Co. to distribute and as well as exhibit films. Photographer and lab technician, José G. Gonzalez, later teamed up with them to rent and sell film equipment, cameras, and projectors. With Díaz Quesada's first short publicity film in 1906, a filmmaking career began that would span the early history of silent film in Cuba. The next year he made Cuba's first short fiction film called, *A Duel on the Shores of the Amendares (Un duelo a orillas del Almendares)*. In 1910 he and his brother established Cuba’s first film studio and developed a consortium with Santos y Artigas to produce movies.

During the “silent” era, many devices were used to evoke sound and atmosphere including live musicians and phonographs with records “synchronized” to the moving picture. In 1907, the great Cuban pianist, Ernesto Lecuona, began his working career by accompanying the moving pictures in the Havana theater, Fedora. He was 12 years old. By 1916 there were so many musicians working in the theaters that the musicians' mutual aid society stepped in to negotiate their salaries and contracts. In 1928 Cuban audiences watched the first “direct” sound film (i.e. sound recorded directly onto the raw film stock); Hollywood’s, *The Jazz Singer*, had songs, music, and inter-titles, but there was only one line of spoken dialog uttered by Al Jolson to his mother, “You ain’t seen nothing yet.” Therefore, the first real film “talkie” as we know them, *Lights of New York* (1928), screened in Havana in 1929. For a few years after the advent of sound silent films continued to be made.

Filmmakers of a later generation often looked to Ernesto Capparós, another early pioneer of Cuban cinema, for their cinematic roots. Capparós, who had directed some of Cuba’s first sound shorts, in 1937 directed Cuba’s first talking feature film, entitled *The Red Serpent (La serpiente roja)*. Made with few resources and based on a popular radio program about the adventures of a Chinese detective, *The Red Serpent* was a success. Another of his films, *Prófugos* (1940) was the occasion of the first gala movie premier “Hollywood style” in Cuba. Besides directing, Capparós was involved in the
organization of a film technicians union and a producers’ association for the promotion of Cuban filmmaking. (Douglas, p. 73).

During the first decade of cinema, the U.S. had been busy waging the “patent wars” while European distribution companies were gaining a foothold in Cuba. French, Italian, and other European films, were a predominant presence on Cuban screens until the advent of World War I, when the reduction of film production in Europe opened the door to U.S distributors, who quickly came to dominate the Cuban and world market with Hollywood productions. The first North American company to open shop in Havana was Paramount in 1916, followed by Fox Film in 1918, United Artists in 1921, Warner in 1925, and Columbia Pictures in 1931.

Distribution was the key mechanism that permitted the rapid vertical integration of the North American film industry, and the monopolization of all aspects of the industry - production, distribution, and exhibition. Because the U.S. internal market for movies was so large, U.S. producers could recoup their investment domestically. They could, therefore, supply the foreign market with films at a discount, flooding theaters with Hollywood films to the detriment of Cuban filmmakers, who had to make a profit in their home market while competing for exhibition space on their own screens.

Dependency and the Distribution Trick

In order to understand the mechanisms of dependency that operated within the film sector of Cuba and inhibited the development of Cuban film production, a brief description of the distribution practices of Hollywood is in order. Against this background, the development of a revolutionary national Cuban cinema and movement for a “New Latin American Cinema” would play out.

In the 1920’s, the North American film industry began to learn the tricks of distribution based on the peculiarities of film as a commodity of symbolic, rather than physical, exchange. That is, film is “consumed in situ not through the physical exchange of the object” (Chanan, p. 50). This characteristic led to the distribution practice of film rental displacing the previous outright sale of a film to exhibitors and greatly contributed to “forms of concentration and monopoly which [arose] within the industry” (p. 51). At
the time, the U.S. was the world's largest internal film market, so that not only could films be “exported without having to divert the product away from the home market (unlike many commodities, especially in underdeveloped countries, where the home market must be deprived in order to be able to export), U.S. distributors were able to supply the foreign market at discount prices that undercut foreign producers in their own territories” (pp. 53-54). As Chanan explains, the rental system was “designed to provide the distributor with a guarantee plus a percentage, which makes the percentage ‘excess’ [or surplus] profit” (p. 52).

In 1926 before a Harvard Business School audience, film industry leaders addressed the question of “how we are trying to lessen sales resistance in those countries that want to build up their own industries.” (Chanan, p. 52) The basic mechanism of capitalism as it courses through the film sector is revealed in this Harvard Business School lecture:

We are trying to do that by internationalizing this art, by drawing on old countries for the best talent that they possess in the way of artists, directors and technicians, and bringing people over to our country, by drawing on their literary talents, taking their choicest stories and producing them in our own way, and sending them back into the countries where they are famous. In doing that, however, we must always keep in mind the revenue end of it. Out of every dollar received, about 75 cents still comes out of America and only 25 cents out of all the foreign countries combined. Therefore, you must have in mind a picture that will first bring in that very necessary 75 cents and that secondly will please the other 25% that you want to please. If you please the 25% of foreigners to the detriment of your home market, you can see what happens. Of course, the profit is in that last 25%. (p. 53)

That is, the “surplus profit,” and the key is surplus profit. “Because it is not ordinary profit but surplus profit that attracts investment capital, and this is ultimately how Hollywood came to dominate world cinema. They gleaned a surplus profit from the market which gave them the backing of Wall Street, which was already becoming the most substantial modern fund of investment capital in the world” (Chanan p. 53).
basic dynamics of this system is in place today - a system that has weakened both strong national cinemas of the industrialized West such as France and England, and inhibited development of national cinemas in countries of the so-called Third World.

The above description should be futuristically read with “globalization” between the lines, as the film sector begins to show/sow the seeds of confluence between capital and the industry of film and entertainment as the cultural motor of globalization. That is, financial capital, now a globalized capital, needs a mechanism of cultural diffusion for economic expansion. As the art form of modernity, film morphed into the art form of late capitalism and Hollywood, very early on, becomes that mechanism of global economic and cultural expansion.

_Early Genres: Newsreels and Commercial Spots_

The Cuban film infrastructure continued to develop during film’s second decade:

By 1920 there were 50 cinemas in Havana and more than 300 in the rest of the country. The average number of seats in a Havana cinema was 450, with a total of 23,000 seats for a population of half a million…There were large areas of the country where people were out of reach of a cinema, but for the majority of the population the evidence is clear: the market for cinema in Cuba was not only more intensely developed than over most of Central and South America, penetration was roughly as intense as in many regions in the metropolitan countries where film had been invented. (p. 48)

In 1920, the first silent newsreels debuted. They included news, high society notes, and commercial announcements (Douglas, p. 42). In 1924, heralding what would become a strong Cuban tradition in this genre, Jorge Piñeyro began producing the newsreel, Actualidades Habaneras, in conjunction with the newspaper, _La Prensa_ (p. 47). A year later he opened the film lab, “Laboratorios Cinematográficos Piñeyro,” and in 1928 initiated a second newsreel, _Noticiario Liberty_ (Liberty News), which became a training ground of sorts for other newsreel producers. Piñeyro and his lab were also involved in the production of Cuba’s first sound animation (1937) and in 1941, with
Fernando Mier, founded Educational Films of Cuba, to shoot 16mm educational films (Douglas, p. 83). Other newsreels of the era included *Noticiario OK, Noticiario Royal News, Santiagueras, Noticiario Nacional*, and the newsreel of the Communist Party, *Noticiario Gráfico Sono Film*, which by the time of its dissolution in 1948 had accumulated an historical record of the Cuban worker and union movement in images which, unfortunately, was subsequently lost.

By 1919, Ramon Peón, another notable Cuban film pioneer, had returned from the U.S. (where he had been working as a news cameraman) to found DeLuxe Film Corporation, a company that made commercials in the form of short comedies (Douglas, p. 41). Peon “was associated with most of the attempts to set Cuban film production on a regular basis between 1920 and 1939” (Chanan, p. 60). He entertained an enthusiastic movie-going public with passionate love stories, whose silent classic in this genre, *Our Lady of Charity* (1930) (*La Virgen de la Caridad*) one commentator noted, was “the last promising picture to be made in Cuba in a long time. After 1930 there was a remarkable decrease in the quantity and quality of film” (Mesa Lago, p. 436). Peon was recruited by Hollywood in the early 1930s to “direct” (Chanan says “supervise” would be a better word) Spanish language versions of the North American talkies. These Spanish language remakes were “essentially a sales device for selling the talkies, for goading Latin American distributors to convert to sound” (Chanan, p. 59). After his stint in Hollywood, Peon returned to Cuba and in 1938 founded PECUSA, the first filmmaking enterprise structured around industrial-style production. His company produced about six films, musicals and melodramas patterned after the Hollywood rage.

…Cuban films of the 1930-1958 period mimicked U.S. models, particularly the musical and the detective forms. Cuban music and dance were frequently exploited, combined with thin melodramatic plots in which, in the words of Cuban film critic, Rodriguez Aleman, Cuban problems were avoided and instead the public was presented with “a false Cuban reality plagued by maracas, rhumba dancers and by completely unconcerned people, always happy or conversely involved in futile dramas” (Hernández, p.363).

“The coming of sound gave Latin American producers the opportunity to enlist local popular music, and employ musical artistes with a commercial track record already
proven by radio and records” (Chanan, p. 61). From the late 1930s to the late 1950s, and particularly during the war years with the decrease in U.S. production, Argentine and Mexican films began to flood Cuban screens. “Large audiences, made up mostly of poorly educated people loved these foreign films in Spanish, [while] the competing Cuban films of the period were box office failures” (Matas, p. 437). Other factors that inhibited the development of an “indigenous” or local film industry included the political and economic turmoil of the 1930s that saw the crash of a one-crop sugar economy and people taking to the streets “in hunger marches, strikes, and anti-government demonstrations” (Baker, p. 38).

In 1919, *La Noche* was the first newspaper to run a section called “Moving Picture” devoted to film. Although “Lady Godiva’s” column (pseudonym for columnist Ramón Becali) offered movie facts, plots and commentary on the world film scene, historian Douglas notes that this first foray into film journalism was essentially a social chronicle catering to the Cuban bourgeois social register. Another decade would pass before José Manuel Valdés Rodríguez initiated serious film criticism in the Cuban press, abandoning the social chronicle for an analysis of cinematic form and content (p. 53).

A professor, early film promoter and critic, Valdés Rodríguez organized film screenings and discussions in his home – a precursor to the film clubs that would proliferate during the 1950s. In 1932, he organized the first conference in Cuba on the art and social phenomena of cinema, and was also responsible for the first film course taught at the University of Havana in 1939 entitled, “The cinema: industry and art of our time” (Douglas, p. 72). But without formal training facilities in the country or strong national leadership a fledgling “national” film industry in Cuba was slow to develop.

**Conditions of Cinema in Pre-Revolutionary Cuba**

During the late 1940’s and throughout the 1950’s, cine-clubs were formed as members of the film-going public--film lovers, buffs, critics, and amateur filmmakers--increasingly and enthusiastically focused on the medium itself. Cine clubs and new film publications were started and these informal forums and *de facto* “educational delivery systems” nurtured a strong film culture.
World-renowned cinematographer, the late Néstor Almendros, in his book *A Man With a Camera* (1985), provides a narrative description of the film scene in Cuba at the time he arrived in Spain in 1948 to attend the University of Havana. In Cuba at the time, there were no film societies and no film magazines with the exception of American fan magazines. And yet, he says, “paradoxically, at that time Cuba was a privileged place to see films:

First, unlike the Spanish, the Cubans knew nothing about dubbing, so all the films were shown in their original versions with subtitles. Second, since this was a free market with almost no state controls, the distributors brought in many different kinds of films. I got to see all the American productions there, even the B movies that had trouble getting to other countries. I also saw Mexican, Spanish, Argentine, French, and Italian films. Around six hundred films were imported each year, including some from the Soviet Union, Germany, Sweden, etc.’

In those days before the Batista dictatorship, the censors were very tolerant compared with Spain and even the United States. (After all, Havana, not Copenhagen, was the first city in the world to show pornographic cinema openly.) The commercial theaters had old films like Dreyer’s *Vampyr* on their double bills. Havana was paradise for a film buff, but a paradise with no critical perspective.

In Cuba I eventually got to know people of my own age who were as interested in the cinema as I: Germán Puig, Ricardo Vigón, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and Carlos (Figueredo) Clarens among others. In 1948 we organized Havana’s first film society, and at its opening we showed Renoir’s *La Bête humaine*, followed by Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky*, films we found at the local distributors. Later on, through Germán Puig, who had been to Paris, Henri Langlois began sending us 16mm copies of the classics of silent film from the Cinémathèque Française. A nucleus of people who were beginning to be seriously interested in film formed around our club. We paved the way for other film societies later on, and we can pride ourselves that ours was the first to be founded in Cuba and perhaps in all Latin America (p. 27)

By 1949, Valdés Rodríguez had founded the Department of Cinematography at the University of Havana. Many generations of filmmakers who later came to
prominence within the nascent development of Cuban national cinema, and many film
lovers were formed by the screenings, debates and discussions in Valdés Rodríguez’s
popular film courses. As a film critic and professor at Cuba’s most prestigious institution
of higher learning, he stands at an important nexus between education (formal, non-
formal and informal) and the historical development of a cinematic culture in Cuba.
Alfredo Guevara, founder and director of ICAIC during most of its history recalls the
“beg, borrow and steal” “policy” and passion of Valdés Rodríguez and how he “went to
the USA in 1941 armed with a letter from the University to Nelson Rockefeller, as result
of which the Museum of Modern Art started sending them films” (Chanan p. 78).

Film Clubs

The decade of the 1950’s saw an increasing development of media
communications and film infrastructure, the formation of new film clubs, niche film
businesses designed to fill specialized markets, the organization of film labs, and even
attempts at state subsidies for filmmaking. In 1951, university students formed a radical
cultural society called “Nuestro Tiempo” (Our Times), which promoted artistic and
cultural activities. The Film Club of Havana, of which Almendros had been so proud,
joined efforts and integrated with Nuestro Tiempo, and began a radical program of film
screenings and debates; they also started to publish an important critical cultural
magazine with the same name, Nuestro Tiempo² (Douglas, p. 128).

The Nuestro Tiempo group played a “central role in Cuban cultural politics” of
the decade of the 1950s. According to Chanan, its “united front approach to cultural
politics made it possible to create a bond within the cultural movement of the 50’s
between artists and intellectuals of different political extractions” (p. 80). Harold
Gramatges, president of Nuestro Tiempo explained its importance:

Nuestro Tiempo fulfilled an historic role during
the Batista dictatorship. Formed at the beginning of
1950, [it] brought together young people who were
pursuing their artistic or cultural activities in dispersal
and in hostile surroundings…in a domineering republic
consisting in a regime of semicolonial exploitation and
misery, the art-public relationship was limited to a
privileged class…and aided by the presence of a number of members of the Young Communists, Nuestro Tiempo embarked….with considerable impetus on what was designated the job of a united front [trabajo de frente-unico] …the task of proselytizing among the youthful masses… We organized ourselves into sections: film, theatre, puppetry, music, dance, plastic arts and literature…[we] produced publications on cinema, theatre and music, and…

the magazine Nuestro Tiempo. (Chanan, p. 79)

Partly in reaction to the “ideological work” of Nuestro Tiempo, the Catholic Church in 1952 also began to set up film clubs working the cultural terrain on behalf of youth. This increased cinematic activity in turn stimulated the development of yet more cine clubs so that by 1957 there were forty-two such clubs around the island (Chanan, p. 81).

The importance of the film clubs (or cine-clubs) in the promotion of a strong cinematic culture in Cuba becomes evident in historical perspective. These film clubs were a characteristic and indispensable element in the development of cinema in Cuba prior to the Revolution and a forum for film education after the Revolution. Given the social and political context of the times, these gatherings of film enthusiasts to view and discuss movies were a hotbed of pleasure, revelation, realization, and critique. This is not to imply that all film clubs possessed these “activist” qualities, but the film clubs Nuestro Tiempo and Visión were focused on cinema’s potential for promoting social change. In her chronology and notation under April, 1956, Douglas (1997) indicates:

The first function of Cine-Club Vision, in the theatre Apollo, had the objective of awakening the cultural, social and political restlessness of the youth. Besides the film club they offered expositions, conferences, edited a bulletin and created a theater group. Some of its members joined ICAIC in 1959: Luis Costales, Manuel Octavio Gómez, Manuel Pérez, Nelson Rodríguez, Gloria Argüelles and Norma Torrado. (p. 141)

Here again the influence of Valdés Rodríguez is notable as a “mentor of the oppositional film culture which was developing during this period” (Chanan, p. 78). The university had continued to be an important site of political organization and protest since the days of Argentina’s University Reform Movement. The influence of the protest movement in Argentina on the university of Buenos Aires in particular was already well established. (Chanan, p. 77) Chanan writes that “the roots of
the sense of protest against cultural imperialism in Cuba go back to the revolt of the Cuban intelligentsia in the 1920’s, which was spearheaded by the University Reform Movement. Its mood is portrayed in Enrique Pineda Barnet’s historical feature *Mella* of 1975, a dramatised biography of the student leader Julio Antonio Mella who became one of the founders of the Cuban Communist Party” (Chanan, p. 73).

Valdés Rodríguez took exception to the representation of Latin American people in Hollywood films and their treatment of the black, which he felt was having a detrimental effect on race relations in Cuban society. Chanan notes that the “intellectual and artistic rebelliousness in Cuba found its voice not only in the University Reform Movement but also…in the artistic movement of Afro-cubanism, which expressed itself most strongly in music and poetry….and began as a quest for the roots of a Cuban national culture…”(p. 75). In Cuba’s historical development, the Indian population had been wiped out by the “first wave” of Spanish colonialists and a large African slave trade had developed to supply workers needed for the plantation economies of Cuba and a region marked by a slave economy. Slavery and sugar were part and parcel of Cuba’s colonial past and part of the collective memory of Cuban nationalism, more so as black slaves and black participation were decisive in the struggles for independence during the nineteenth century. Valdés Rodríguez declared:

> The first act of the Cuban patriots of 1868 – the majority of them were slave owners – was to declare their Negroes free. So in both wars of independence…Negroes and whites fought for liberty, shoulder to shoulder, against the tyranny of Spain, their old enemy…But things are changing, owing to the Hollywood pictures and to the Cuban youth in America. In American films, Negroes are cowards, superstitious, dumb… This depiction of their race has evidently affected the Negroes confidence in themselves…. (p. 75)

In the post-revolutionary development of national cinema in Cuba, historical themes would be returned to again and again in such films as *The Last Supper, Cecelia, The Last Charge of the Machete*. In the later development of Cuban cinema, this too frequent focus on the historical would become a point of criticism and the desire for more thematic diversity would become the challenge. People’s attraction and the public’s
relationship to film continued to develop in Cuba throughout the 1950’s in tandem with the political dynamics evident in the Batista regime and popular awareness of its corruption. Film and filmmaking became a site of resistance both domestically and in the context of a more radical analysis of Batista’s and Cuba’s relationship to the United States. According to Chanan, film came to occupy its “key position in radical cultural consciousness in Cuba because of its special nature”:

-- an industrialized art and agent of cultural imperialism, on the one hand; on the other, the indigenous art form of the twentieth century and the vehicle of a powerful new mode of perception -- because of this dual nature, film readily and acutely synthesized the whole range of cultural experience for a whole generation. Cinema was at the same time an instrument of oppression and an object of aspiration. What happened was that the monopolistic practices of the Hollywood majors and their local dependents not only created a frustrated cultural hunger among aficionados of cinema in Cuba, but, combined with their own attempts at making films, this turned cinema into a battlefield of cultural politics. The cine-club movement represented a breach in the defenses of cultural imperialism, and in this battlefield lie the origins of ICAIC. (p. 81)

ICAIC and the Development of a National Cinema

This section presents the development of ICAIC as a vanguard cultural institution. I follow an emic or insider trail in the effort to understand Cuban cinematic production through the reportage and editorial perspective of Cine Cubano, a film journal published by ICAIC, along with other primary source documents such as news articles, conference papers, articles in film journals, and especially interviews. Beginning with an overview using a Cuban critic’s periodization of ICAIC production, I then set forth the initial sources of Cuban cultural policy. Within the context of the two major genres, documentary and fiction feature films, I then examine the cinematic mechanisms used to change the social function of film and filmmaking in Cuba.
Periodization

Although there have been many periodizations of Cuban cinema, during the 1993 “First National Workshop of Cinemagraphic Criticism” held in Camaguey, Cuba, film critic Raul Rodriguez Gonzalez offered a “scientific” periodization of Cuban cinema, which serves as a brief summary overview. It is presented here not for its “scientific” claim but because of its valued insider perspective. To this periodization I add the decade of the 1990’s, presented in the context of globalization.

1. Between 1959 and 1968 – filmmakers were involved in looking for new styles and other objectives than those that characterized film production prior to the founding of ICAIC. They first looked to Italian neorealism, the French new wave and free-cinema, and surrealism – having rejected social realism as a useful model for the new Cuban socialism. This period climaxed with the 1968 production of Memories of Underdevelopment and Lucia. Both films placed Cuban cinema in the lexicon of respected world cinema. Rodriguez Gonzalez attributed the combination of a new film language with new national content in these films to account for how they became a kind of paradigm of new Cuban cinema, or as he says “lo cubano en el cine” (p. 24).


3. Between 1980 to the present (1993) – characterized by scrutiny and polemic around the “crisis of Cuban cinema” and especially within the economic crisis of the state as the beginning of the Special Period (1989) began to be felt. Films of this period include: Se permute, Hasta cierto punto, Plaff, Papeles secundarios, Mujer transparente, Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas y Adorables mentiras.

Overview: Between 1959 and 1968

In the following excerpt, Manuel Octavio Gómez, one of the first film directors of ICAIC, describes those early days in an interview with Latin American film scholar, Julianne Burton (1978). His experience exemplifies early linkages with film clubs, early
uses of the documentary genre, and serves as a point of later comparison for the experience of women filmmakers working at ICAIC. He says:

During the guerrilla insurrection, it was impossible to have any kind of organized film production aside from sporadic interviews and reports from the Sierra. But with the Revolution, one of the first groups organized by the Rebel Army was the National Board of Culture. Julio García Espinosa was selected to direct the film section, and since he had been giving us a class in film direction at the time, he called upon certain members of [Cine Club] Visión to become part of that section. We only produced two documentaries *Esta Tierra Nuestra* ("This Our Land") by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and *La Vivienda* ("Housing") by Julio himself --- before becoming part of ICAIC as soon as it was organized several weeks later.

I began my career as assistant director on those two documentary shorts and, after making two short educational films on my own, served as assistant director to Gutiérrez Alea on ICAIC’s first feature film *Historias de la Revolucion* ("Stories from the Revolution," 1961). My real apprenticeship in cinema began with these experiences, since my earlier preparation had been rather vague and unsystematic. It was an eminently practical kind of training: I learned how to make films by making them.

The very first films I made were what we call educational or “didactic” documentaries. Each had a specific goal: teaching the peasantry the importance of boiling their drinking water, for example, or introducing the concept of agricultural cooperatives. These were purely instructional films, with no pretensions to anything more; so no background research was necessary. (p. 17)

Coming down from the mountains, the revolutionary leaders were aware of the immediate need for shaping a revolutionary social consciousness in people; it was one of the crucial lessons learned in the Sierra and their lives had depended on it. They also knew from experience with the peasantry that revolutionary consciousness “could not be developed merely by means of propaganda or indoctrination but must arise fundamentally from revolutionary praxis” (Medin, 1990, p. 6), such as armed struggle or participation in militant and/or mass action and mobilizations. The New Left was also familiar with this ‘bodily’ process of becoming politically conscious (i.e. transformative learning) and termed it “politicization.” Freire called it “concientization,” the Cubans
called it *toma de consciencia* (consciousness-raising), as did radical women of the time. Later, theorizing this lived experience and projecting it as a revolutionary thesis, Castro and Che Guevara both realized that:

revolutionary consciousness did not have to be inherent in the masses, it was also possible for a few people to initiate revolutionary action (the guerilla-focus theory). However… one of the basic tasks of the guerrilla-focus consisted precisely in the creation of revolutionary consciousness. Guevara was to write in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (Socialism and man in Cuba) that “the guerrilla struggle in Cuba had developed in two different spheres: the still-slumbering masses, who had to be mobilized, and, in their vanguard, the guerilla band, the driving force behind mobilization, generator of revolutionary consciousness and enthusiasm for combat. This vanguard was the catalyzing agent that created the subjective conditions necessary for victory. (Medin, p. 6)

In his book, *Cuba: The Shaping of Revolutionary Consciousness*, Tzvi Medin (1990) underscores a point similar to “culture industry” theorists, Adorno and Horkheimer: that culture was not a mere “reflection” of the economy whether capitalist or socialist:

> The important point is that social consciousness did not begin to take on its new aspect in reflection of the new socio-economic structure; rather, it was being molded from above in a process parallel to the development of the new socioeconomic system. It was a case of explicit and conscious development by the revolutionary leader, not a superstructural reflection of economic conditions or the automatic reproduction of a consciousness that already predominated. (p.7)

The indispensable economic corollary for the context of revolutionary cultural politics moved quickly beyond “liberal representative” to “radical participatory” forms. As Medin (1990) indicates, “the problem of shaping revolutionary social consciousness did not arise merely as the consequence of taking power, but rather as a corollary to the conception of political power as a means to convert insurrection into socioeconomic revolution – or, at least, given the ambiguous political situation of those first months, to
institute a radical reformist populism” (p. 6). He provides a view of the political context for development of the Revolution’s cultural policy:

If the intention had been merely to reinstate a democratic regime conforming to the Constitution of 1940, the need to reshape the Cubans’ conceptual world would not have existed from the beginning. That need became increasingly acute with the gradual creation of a new socioeconomic reality within Cuba’s historical evolution, at a time when the country was also beginning to occupy a new position on the checkerboard of international relations, moving into open confrontation with the United States and increasingly close contact with the socialist countries. The structural revolution and the close collaboration with the socialist bloc in an atmosphere of U.S. aggression constituted the basis and the indispensable condition for the development of a new social consciousness. (pp. 6-7)

The role of film in Cuba’s national development is the story of how the cultural institution of ICAIC mediated a social revolution and reflected/projected a new “sensorium,” primarily through its production and exhibition of documentaries, feature films, and weekly newsreels. During the first decade of Cuban cinema, (when, as the new director of ICAIC, Omar González says, “we were rich and didn’t know it”), two important films marked Cuba’s entrance into world cinema. The year was 1968. (Havana, not Paris and not yet May). In April of that year -- a year of radical mobilizations worldwide -- ICAIC released “Memories of Underdevelopment” by director, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (affectionately called “Titón,” he would become Cuba’s most beloved filmmaker), followed in November with Lucia by Humberto Solás, another important director in the historical trajectory and creation of Cuban national cinema.

Gutiérrez Alea’s “Memories of Underdevelopment” (Memorias de Subdesarrollo) depicted for an international audience the feeling of bourgeois bewilderment in the face of radical social change, while the films of Solás (and other “men’s films about women” see Tables 4.1 below and 4.2 at the end of chapter) would begin the cinematic engagement of a pantheon of screen women energetically employed (like their incarnate sisters in “non-traditional” occupations) in the re-construction and representation of a new Cuban identity.
Table 4.1  Film Portrait of Women in Cuban Cinema

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Film Title</th>
<th>Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Manuela</td>
<td>Humberto Solás</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Tulipa</td>
<td>Manuel Octavio Gómez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Lucía</td>
<td>Humberto Solás</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Portrait of Teresa</td>
<td>Pastor Vega</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Cecelia</td>
<td>Humberto Solás</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Amada</td>
<td>Humberto Solás</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Habanera</td>
<td>Pastor Vega</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Maria Antonia</td>
<td>Sergio Giral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Mujer Transparente</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>Hector Veitia-Tina Leon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adriana</td>
<td>Mayra Segura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Mayra Vilásís</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>Mario Crespo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Ana Rodriguez</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D’Lugo (1993) remarks that, “the ethos associated with a revolutionary national identity was elaborated in fictional films through an insistent focus on the narrative destiny of female characters” (p. 155):

The mobilization of “female narratives” on behalf of the nation were, of course, much more complex than merely the structuring of stories about women. The underlying objective of such films was to develop a form of address to, and identification by the Cuban audience through the mechanism of a new revolutionary mythology rooted in the female figure. (p. 155)

Years before the 1968 international debut and success of these two feature films, documentary films and newsreels under the direction of Santiago Alvarez had been engaging Cuban audiences (a population of avid movie-goers) in the visual representation (and “processing”) of tumultuous revolutionary social change. By 1964 his films were gaining international attention. The documentary genre defined the “classic” or “golden era” of Cuban filmmaking from 1960-1969 and the filmic innovations of Santiago Alvarez defined the documentary, which were admired by the new Latin American filmmakers as the “Cuban school”: 
The innovative display of secondary footage, rhythmic editing with dramatic variations in pace, graphically innovative titles and eclectic musical selections (in preference to any spoken narration), superimposition and other experimental montage techniques characterize his early films. Material and political circumstances encouraged Alvarez, like his spiritual ancestor, Dziga Vertov, to create the essence of his art on the editing table. As circumstances changed and more resources were put at his disposal, he shifted from black and white to color and began making longer films in which primary footage predominates. More recent films are characterized by more traditional cinematography, longer takes and less experimental editing, and the frequent use of voice-over narration. (Martin p. 127)

According to Chanan, the first documentaries produced in the 1960’s were primarily of three types:

…didactic films aimed mainly at the campesino, dealing with agricultural methods (films on the cultivation of rice, tobacco, and the tomato), the dangers of negligence in handling drinking water, or the advantages of the cooperatives and schools and other facilities established by the Revolutionary Government. The second group is made up of films recording the principal mass mobilizations of the year. The third group….includes films that record various other aspects of the revolutionary process or which deal with aspects of Cuba’s social and cultural history….For the most part the subjects and themes of the films in all three groups were chosen according to the needs of ideological struggle in the revolutionary situation. (p. 98)

Julianne Burton, noted scholar in the field, provides yet another categorization of the Cuban documentary of five thematic categories, which I set out below to contextualize the environment in which women filmmakers were working:

Films which deal with domestic politics promote governmental policies and encourage popular participation and mass mobilization. Historical films chart various aspects of the formation of national identity through the five centuries of the island’s recorded history. Documentaries of a cultural nature may be either national or
international in their focus. Films which take *international relations* for their theme might focus on Cuba’s role in international affairs, analyze the developed sector, or express solidarity with other Third World nations. Finally, “*didactic*” documentaries, highly technical or scientific in nature, are generally produced by specific agencies rather than ICAIC. (Martin, 1997b, p. 128)

As an aside, Chanan notes the importance of film to researchers, and says that historians of the Revolution “would do well to watch these films carefully: they serve as an excellent guide to what many, if not all, of these issues were, and at the same time indicate the lines that were being drawn at each moment for the next phase” (p. 98). He also sees them as evidence for “how closely the leadership at ICAIC was integrated from the outset with thinking at the center of gravity within the revolutionary leadership” (p. 98).

Focusing on the relationship of ICAIC to the revolutionary leadership, it is important to not lose sight of the fact that throughout its 40 year history, ICAIC was managed by filmmakers not functionaries, even though the case has been made that the creative freedom that ICAIC enjoyed was due to affective ties Alfredo Guevara had with Castro rather than his ties to Party ideology and early Party affiliation. In any case, the cultural autonomy and cultural policy of ICAIC is a story in which Guevara (no relation to Che) figures prominently, as ICAIC’s director for 40 years, now retired (in 1999).

ICAIC was Cuba’s veritable “culture machine” involving movies, music, graphic arts, literature, and poster design, supporting, employing, and protecting a wide array of artists. Throughout its history, Guevara successfully mediated a relatively independent and autonomous creative space in which artists could create and critique. Except for about a decade in Paris (1982-1991) as Cuba’s cultural ambassador, Guevara maintained the directorship of ICAIC from its formation in 1959 through the Special Period. Julio García Espinosa, a founding film director, assumed the ICAIC directorship during Guevara’s absence and until he returned from France in 1991. The circumstances of these comings and goings revolve around Cuban cinema’s “political challenges” that will be discussed in Chapter Six, but which Paulo Antonio Paranaguá describes thus:
In May 1991, the authorities in Havana restructured the organization of film production: ICAIC was to merge with the television studio and with the Armed Forces studio under the direction of Enrique Roman, the former editor of the paper *Granma* and president of the Cuban Radio and Television Institute since 1990. ICAIC, the first cultural organization created by the Cuban revolution, would thus lose the autonomy it had vigorously defended for all that time. Consequently, the filmmakers mobilized to contest such a decision while ICAIC’s president, Julio García Espinosa, tendered his resignation….In spite of the surprise and the inequality of the existing forces (their numbers), the mobilization of the filmmakers, ICAIC workers and artists in general was such that the reorganization [which had been] publicly announced and decided at the highest level was suspended – and event almost unheard of under Castro. Alfredo Guevara, fired ten years ago under pressure from the “hardliners” (dogmatists) and neo-Stalinists, was recalled to head ICAIC again. He had in fact made of it a center of resistance to Stalinism, capable of contributing to the affirmation of individual and collective identities, to the emancipation of women from *machismo*, to the fight against bureaucracy, to the advantage of equality and openness. (pp. 167 & 190)

When Guevara went to Paris, he no doubt needed a break from the years of constant brokering to balance the freedom of artists within ICAIC with the *nomenklatura*’s functional guardianship of the Party line. Guevara’s integral, creative, and defining presence cannot be ignored, nor perhaps even yet be told. García Espinosa’s tenure also merits further study and appreciation. In any case, while women filmmakers may take issue with the role of ICAIC in the struggle for their equal rights, the delicate balance and tensions of this unusual relationship between the Cuban state and its creative class is a story alluded to in this research but which deserves to be treated in greater depth in a future study.

*Sources and Scenes of Cultural Policy*

*Law No. 169*

Six months before the Education Law (Dec 1959) was formulated, the law of the Congress of Ministers of the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Cuba creating the *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* (ICAIC) was published in the
Official Gazette Tuesday, March 24, 1959. It began by stating: “Film is an art.”

Guevara would wave this first “given” (or “por cuanto” as in, “Por cuanto: El cine es un arte” or “Given that: film is an art”) before the Cuban public and political bureaucracy for the next 40 years. Guevara made this first given the bedrock principle in the ideological waters of revolutionary cultural politics and qualified this target message in the many articles that were published in Cine Cubano, ICAIC’s national film magazine, reaching not only a general audience but also the nomenklatura (socialist society’s term for their version of politically correct culture police). In a 1963 issue of Cine Cubano, he remarked that art was a fundamental question of principles but it could not be “decreed” nor even assured by revolutionary law. Art could be assured in certain measure by a revolution and in its revolutionary spirit.

The law goes on for many “givens” finally coming to the last, where the concept and word “education” and its relationship to film (implicit and explicit in all the preceding “givens,”) is finally enunciated: “Given that: Film is the most powerful and suggestive medium of artistic expression and dissemination and the most direct and extensive vehicle of education and popularization of ideas” (Cine Cubano, No. 140, 1998).

Words to the Intellectuals

During the first 1993 Camaguey critics conference, film critic, Arsenio Cicero Sanristóbal rhetorically (?) asked, what was the use of a postmodern film critic in Havana? He then reminds the audience of an incident in revolutionary Cuban history which became the deal breaker for many in the creation of Cuban cultural policy:

For us film has had important social and political scope. Film proposals, national and foreign, have served as matters for extra-cinematic confrontation and they have not always been able to count on lucid critics to defend them. No one should -- or can -- forget that it was a national documentary film, as early as 1960, that provoked the rupture of the Cuban intellectual and the balkanization that led to the meetings at the National Library and from there to Fidel Castro’s “Words to the Intellectuals” that many consider the indelible stamp of Cuban cultural policy for these past three decades. (p. 14)
During the early days of the Revolution, a short documentary film, *P.M.*, by Saba Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jimenez Leal, became a cause célèbre when the newly formed ICAIC refused to allow its theatrical release in Cuban cinemas. Rather than call this the Revolution’s first act of film censorship, Chanan (1985) suggests “it is more enlightening to see it as the dénoument of the incipient conflict between different political trends which lay beneath the surface during the period of the aficionado movement in the 1950’s” (p. 105). The intellectual discourse and debate that this incident provoked did not end until Castro pronounced upon the matter, words that still remain implicit in Cuban cultural politics: “within the Revolution everything; against the Revolution, nothing (*dentro de la Revolución todo; contra la Revolución, nada*). In retrospect, most agree that it was not the film, *P.M.* but the extra-textual, political context of the moment that defined the situation, occurring as it did in the politically charged and “heroic” atmosphere following the Bay of Pigs invasion. As Guevara says,

> we knew through our intelligence services, that we were going to be invaded. So there were the mobilizations of the people, the creation of the militia, the military training, the civil defense. In this heroic climate there appeared a film which did not reflect any of this. It showed the Havana of the lower depths, the drunks, the small cabarets where prostitution was still going on, where there was still drug trafficking….In only fifteen minutes [it] showed a world inhabited by the mainly black and mulatto lumpenproletariat. Obviously it wasn’t made out of any feeling of racial discrimination, but the presentation of these images at this time was nonetheless questionable. In short it presented black people in roles associated with the state of oppression from which they were in the process of liberation… I reacted to the film like an offended revolutionary. Today, I would manage a thing like that better. (Chanan, 1985, p. 101)

Noteworthy for this study is the epistemological landscape that undergirds these diverging political trends brought to light in the context of the *P.M.* censorship. The filmmakers at ICAIC “had begun to sense…that the camera was not the unproblematic kind of instrument” previously supposed (p. 103).

It does not -- to paraphrase the French film theorist Serge Daney -- involve a single straight line from the real to the visible and thence to its reproduction on film, in which a simple truth is faithfully
reflected. They were learning this, at ICAIC, from the way, in their own films they had to struggle to keep abreast with the pace of revolutionary change. Daney says, ‘in a world where “I see” is automatically said for “I understand” such a fantasy has probably not come about by chance. The dominant ideology which equates the real with the visible has every interest encouraging it. At ICAIC they were beginning to perceive that revolutionary change required a rupture with this equation, which meant among other things being constantly on guard against received aesthetic formulae. (p. 103)

The conscious search for new criteria and cultural values in cinema crystallized in these days instigated by these events. Film was the context for the enunciation of a new cultural policy, whose form of spoken speech produced a casual enough, directive enough, vague enough, interpretative enough, policy statement that permitted the necessary degrees of freedom in which filmmakers and other artists created for the next 40 years. Although not uncontested, ICAIC as an institution of filmmakers, has guarded the autonomy of the artist and the practical and symbolic freedom of ICAIC within the political context of Cuba; producing various debates throughout the years and instigating national dialogs around films and social issues, such as Retrato de Teresa, Cecelia, De Cierta Manera, Hasta Ciento Punto, Guantanamera. The ideological constraints of a socialist revolution and the market constraints of a capitalist economy constrain the artist in different ways. Not until the 1990’s during the Special Period would Cuban filmmakers feel the constraints of the market when the Cuban state could no longer support its filmmakers and they had to search for “market” solutions for financing.

**Between 1969 and 1979**

The last year of the decade of the sixties saw two important events, the formation of the Experimental Sound Group of ICAIC (*Grupo de Experimentación Sonora del ICAIC*) under the direction of composer, Leo Brouwer. Its double purpose was to compose music for films and contribute to the enrichment of popular culture by more rigorous study of musical form and content. This group was the founding nucleus for the movement known as the la Nueva Trova. Also in 1969, Julio García Espinosa wrote one of the most important and influential film manifestos of the New Latin American cinema, entitled, “Imperfect Cinema.”
In the 1970’s economic dependence on Moscow increased and Cuba moved into a more Soviet style sensorium of authoritarianism, planning, and bureaucracy. This would begin to seep into the cultural realm and culminate in (or instigate) the Congress of Education and Culture in 1971 and carry over to the 1975 First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, where cultural policy were important agenda items. These years are sometimes referred to as the institutionalization of the Revolution. In 1976, Cuban Minister of Culture, Armando Davalos had this to say about the state of Cuban cultural politics:

> We insist in that the political culture of the Revolution has already been approved. The same is contained in the words of Fidel to the intellectuals, pronounced in 1961; the conclusions of the Congress of Education and Culture, in 1971; the precepts of the Constitution of the Republic that refers to the national culture and very especially in the Thesis and Resolution about the Artistic and Literary Culture of the First Congress of the Party. It’s not about the elaboration of policy that is already accorded by our Party and by our people. It’s about applying a fundamental policy in line with the Marxist-Leninist principles of our Revolution. (p. 1)

In the 1970’s, ICAIC inaugurated a cinematic cultural extension program through television. Three programs, *24 X Segundo* ("24 Frames per Second") were created as an instrument to teach film viewing and to form a public capable of valuing, interpreting, and analyzing films. This very popular show with critic Enrique Colina began in 1970 and continues to this day. Another television program *Cine Debate* ("Film Debate") with host Rodriguez Alemán enlisted the participation of filmmakers, writers, historians and other intellectuals. A third program created in 1973, *Historia del Cine* ("History of Film") had the purpose of “analyzing film as a socio-cultural phenomena to develop the knowledge and capacity for appreciation of large sectors of the public” (Douglas, p. 179). It began with José Antonio González as host and continues today with Carlos Galiano as the on-air commentator. Throughout the years, Cuban television focused on the film medium with such programs as *Tanda del Domingo* ("Sunday Show"), *Cine en Televisión*, ("Film on Television"), *Noche de cine* ("Film Night"), *Cine vivo* ("Film Live").
In 1973, the Department of Educational Film (CINED) under the Ministry of Culture was founded to produce didactic films for the educational system and occasionally for television. This new film studio freed up ICAIC from the overtly educational or didactic type of documentary production and created other institutional sites for filmmaking. In this decade two film pioneers died, in 1971, José Manuel Valdés Rodríguez, the pioneer of film education in Cuba; and in 1974 Sara Gomez, filmmaker and director of ICAIC’s only feature film directed by a woman. The film she was working on at the time of her death, *De Cierta Manera*, was not released theatrically until 1977.

In another periodization Julianne Burton describes “the phase that stretched from 1975 to 1983 [that] corresponds to the broad institutionalization in the wake of the resolutions taken during the first National Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1970”:

In this period, management operations became more complex and the administrative structure of the Cuban Film Institute was centralized to streamline its industrial base. The formation of a National Ministry of Culture which incorporated ICAIC under [Alfredo]Guevara’s continuing direction as one of its five vice-ministers,” Burton states, “marked the symbolic loss of the privileged autonomy the Institute had enjoyed since its founding. Lest the motivations for the economic reorganization and redefinition of ICAIC appear to have come largely from outside the agency, it is important to note that these directives coincided with internal concerns to lower costs and increase productivity which date from the beginning of the decade. (Pick 1993, p.49).

By 1975, the film studios of FAR (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* – Revolutionary Armed Forces) had become more flexible in opening its doors to civilians and women based on an increased production demand.

At ICAIC, a group of young women recruited from the University were beginning their careers as analistas:
Co-productions with filmmakers from the New Latin American Cinema, for instance, increased in this period. Designed to take better advantage of the technical infrastructure and the human resources available, co-productions were also aimed at projecting the work of the Film Institute outside of Cuba. This strategy, however, entailed a marked decrease in feature films, and only ten fiction films were produced between 1976 and 1982. When Julio Garcia Espinosa took over the ICAIC in 1982, Paulo Antonio Paranagua pointed out, “He intended to secure its continuity and renewal by promoting young directors” and to revitalize the “style and content” of Cuban cinema. (Pick, p. 50)

In 1979, Havana hosted the first Festival of the New Latin American Cinema with the objective of contributing to the “rescue, affirmation of identity and defense of national values of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean” (Douglas, 1997, p.189). The year 1979 also saw the release of the film “Portrait of Teresa,” which was seen by 1.5 million spectators and became the catalyst for a passionate polemic in all social sectors around the issues of women’s right to work, machismo, and the struggle of women for equal rights.

**Between 1980 to 1989**

Perhaps the cinematic event of 1980 was the critical and period piece, *Cecelia*, an epic extravaganza based on the beloved national novel, *Cecelia Valdez*. Although it was the target of much polemic after its release, years later the film garnered millions in foreign sales. In 1982 Julio Garcia Espinosa assumed the directorship of ICAIC. Guevara went to Paris.

By 1983, the first wave of new films by documentary directors who had been promoted to the ranks of feature filmmakers (no women) were being viewed by the Cuban public. The film production of this generation of new film directors included such films as *Se permuta* and *Plaff*, part of a longer list of films that critiqued everyday reality through comedy. *Se permuta* showed the creative and humorous ways Cubans found suitable housing in a state-owned and restrictive housing system. But the fight waged against sectarianism in the 1970’s continued to raise its head and in the 1980’s many “considered that Cuban cinema had lost its ‘creative breath’ in favor of a growth in numbers and popularity” (Douglas, p. 197).
By 1984, UNEAC (the writers and artist’s guild) was calling for a meeting of film, radio, and television critics and invited an international group from other countries. One of its objectives was to create a sub-section of film criticism within UNEAC. The following year a workshop attended by the Minister of Culture, Armando Hart, was sponsored by ICAIC for the purpose of producing better scripts and a specialization in scriptwriting. Pick (1993) notes:

This weakness of dramatic design was not limited to *Up to a Point*. It was recognized as a widespread problem of contemporary feature film. As a matter of fact, Gutierrez Alea himself stated in a seminar given during the 1982 International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema that issues of scriptwriting could not be resolved outside an overall strategy. He suggested a policy review that takes into account the need to increase production, diversify the thematic pool, and recognize the creative input of scriptwriters.

This concern for the scriptwriters has to be understood in regard to the production methods that characterized the period from 1975 to 1983. While more scriptwriters were hired, their contribution was predominantly seen in terms of a much-needed training and corrective for a production process predominantly centered on the director-screenwriter. The methodology that guided the making of *Up to a Point* indicates to what extent Gutierrez Alea sought alternatives to unresolved procedural systems. In an interview he explained that shooting began with a provisional script, a kind of blueprint. Admitting the risks involved, Gutierrez Alea and his co-scriptwriter Juan Carlos Tabio, used an approach similar to documentary filmmaking whereby the result of research motivates narrative and formal choices. This process set the stage for a complex interplay of documentary and fictional elements, a self-reflective quality that is rooted in the mode of production itself rather than in the film-within-a-film structure. (p.50)

In 1985, despite another promotion of men into the ranks of feature film directors, no woman was promoted, although this year the ICAIC analistas do begin directing documentary films.

In 1986 another restructuring of ICAIC makes it financially independent of the Ministry of Culture, recuperating in part some of the Institute’s old autonomy and creating or reorganizing six new departments based on function (e.g. exhibition,
This year the International School of Film and TV is inaugurated outside Havana, along with the foundation of a film section in the Association Hermanos Saíz for promoting young assistant directors, scriptwriters, and others working in the country’s four film studios (ICAIC, ECIFAR-TV, ICRT, and CINED), who had not been able to produce their first works. Some of these young filmmakers came from the amateur film movement that had been nurtured in the provinces the local film clubs.

In 1988, ICAIC reorganized itself into three “creative groups” under the direction of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Humberto Solás, and Manuel Pérez. Organized along lines of “afinidades artísticas and personales,” all directors of short or feature films could belong. Those who wanted to stay “independent” discussed their work directly with the ICAIC management (Douglas, p. 209). According to Douglas, at the end of three years the creative groups had produced 19 “fiction films which has proved in practice the efficacy of this new form of organization” (p. 219). But it’s not clear from her description if these were all feature length films or also included shorts.

One of the most important events of the decade for the future of Cuban cinema was in education -- the creation in 1988 of the Department of Radio, Film and Television at the Institute of Art (Instituto Superior de Arte). Although the International Film School had opened the year before, it was a school for all developing countries and operated on a quota system that allowed few Cubans to attend. But the new Department of Radio, Film, and Television, began to open the educational doors to the next generations of professional Cuban filmmakers.

In March of 1989, ICAIC transformed itself again, restructuring and eliminating the new Departments created in 1986. By the end of the year the Berlin wall had fallen, the socialist bloc was tumbling, and an economic “Special Period” in Cuba was about to announce itself in a neo-liberal economic drum roll that the Cuban people resisted, one way or another, with their bodies -- either by braving the watery straits or braving the specter of a tremendously reduced caloric intake that had to be “resolved” each day. The wall came down in December, 1989. In January of 1990, after 30 years of uninterrupted weekly production, the Noticiero ICAIC Latinoamericano, under the direction of Santiago Alvarez, ended. Across Latin America the 1980’s saw the beginning of a move
“away from the aesthetics associated with notions such as ‘third cinema’ (Solanas & Getino) or ‘imperfect cinema’ (Julio García Espinosa) or ‘the aesthetics of hunger’ (Glauber Rocha). In the process, the genres rarely attempted in the 60’s and 70’s have made a reemergence, visual styles have shifted, and the more radical demands made by filmmakers on their audiences have been widely attenuated” (Chanan, 1998).

**The 1990’s and Beyond**

In a reassessment of the “representational space in recent Latin American cinema” in the 1990’s, Chanan (1998) opines that the filmmaking conditions that prevailed in the 1960’s and 1970’s have not basically changed in the last 35 years, citing Brazilian film critic Paulo Emilio Salles Gomez who states, “underdevelopment is not a stage or a step, but a state, a condition, and while the cinemas of the developed countries never passed through this condition, those of the third world have never left it” (p. 2). The Marxist militancy of the early years of the New Latin American Cinema has abated. As Chanan (1998) notes the political character of this cinema was “never primarily a matter of party line but lay in its depth of understanding the political space represented on the screen…. [and] retains a certain utopian streak as well as a deep social conscience” (p.3).

In 2001, on the 42nd anniversary of ICAIC, the Cuban newspaper *Granma* interviewed the new director of the Cuban Film Institute, Omar Gonzalez, where he looked toward a future of “more growth, thematic diversity, of genres and styles, technological modernization, experimentation and profound and sharp film criticism” (2000, p.11).

**Summary**

In the post-revolutionary “early years” of Cuban cinema, later known as the golden era, developing a national *cinema* and a national film *industry* were basically similar concepts. The important emphasis was *lo cubano* and feeling of *lo nuestro* (“ours”). Of course it was a cinema with revolutionary pretensions and aspirations, born of the times. Working at the creative edges of this historical moment, the sensorium of the Cuban revolution like other revolutions was euphoric, effervescent, dynamic, in flux, spontaneous, and inspired by visions and possibilities of individual human and national
development. Not only did Cuban cinema project a lofty “utopian vision” but it pushed its viewing public, a national audience, into a practical and communicative grappling with many social questions, silently undergirded by one particular unspoken question of ultimate, intimate, and mundane significance -- the question Sergio asks in *Memories of Underdevelopment* -- what is the meaning for me?

The visual depiction of national culture in Cuban cinema forms an integral way in which film, or the representation of historical events in film, reflects and preserves historical memory, whether the film be documentary or fiction. The memory is in the reading and viewing, that is, in the person, not on the screen or in the objective, materiality of the film itself. Memory is subjective reception and subject-dependent in its interpenetration of subject and object. (The mystery emerges again!) Even before the appearance of the modern nation state, visual images were used to delineate what was supposedly Cuban (*lo cubano*). With the beginning of modernity and its new industrial art form, the cinematic depiction of national culture became and remains an integral part of how Cuba imagines itself. In Cuba’s post revolutionary development, the cinematic image of women was an iconic representation of Cuban nation building and the mechanism of identification with the new social order. The next chapter provides an opportunity to hear women filmmakers express their experiences and participation in national development through their cultural work and the creation of a national cinema.

Table 4.2 below is a thematic guide to Cuban cinema that I found in the archives of the ICAIC film library. The document is dated 1983 and provides a historical overview of films that were categorized under “Women.” It offers a brief glimpse and insightful look into the issues of topical concern to filmmakers throughout the years and a cinematic perspective into the processes and nature of the Revolution’s efforts to promote social change, particularly regarding the varied use of women’s representation in the development of a new society. The table and list of films also provides an important insight into the values and perspectives of a society in the transition into socialism. These films were meant to perform a transformative function, and they succeeded in bringing to the Cuban public, now configured as “an audience,” a vision of “the new man.”
Table 4.2  Thematic Guide of Cuban Cinema, ICAIC Production 1959-1980

**CATEGORY: WOMEN**

### 1960s

**Sewing and Teaching** – 1962 Idelfonso Ramos 10 min/BW/Doc
Girls from rural areas of the whole island come to the capital to learn sewing and later teach it to other girls in the countryside. At the same time they learn to read and write and study.

**She** – 1964 Theodor Christensen 35 min/BW/Doc
Different aspects of women’s life in contemporary Cuba.

**Small Chronicle** -1966 Humberto Solas 11 min/BW/Doc
Excerpts from the life of a woman who, after losing her own daughter, dedicates her life to revolutionary work.

**Manuela** – 1966 Humberto Solas 41 min/ BW/ Fiction
The story of a young woman fighting in combat in the Sierra Maestra.

**Cultivating Tomatoes** – 1967 Santiago Villafuerte 17 min/BW/Doc
The many stages of cultivating tomatoes with a beacon system, applied to the so-called salad tomato, and the role of women in this type of work.

**Lucia** – 1968 Humberto Solas 160 min-BW-Fiction
The film tells the story of three women while describing three key periods in the development of the Cuban nation and its struggle for freedom.

### 1970s

**Operation Piccolino** – 1970 Alejandro Saderman 19 min/BW/Doc
Women’s work as drivers of these small farm tractors.

**Portrait of Teresa** – 1970 Pastor Vega 103 min/Color/Fiction
The Revolution generated deep changes in all aspects of social life, including the home. This story narrates the crisis of a couple of humble origins in which the wife’s desire for emancipation confronts husband’s macho intolerance.

**The Tanias** – 1971 Santiago Villafuerte 10 min/BW/Doc
The movie shows the women’s brigade of sugar cane harvesters, “Tania La Guerrillera,” their impressions, their activities, their dexterities, and their strength.

**Attending the Circle** – 1972 Melchor Casals 20 min/BW/Doc
The work of the assistants in the children’s circle.

**Pre-Natal Care** – 1972 – Sara Gomez 10 min/ BW/Doc
How pre-natal care and the clarification of prejudice about pregnancy and other doubts favor the birth of a healthy child.

**Health Brigades FMC** – 1974 Luis Felipe Bernaza
The participation of Cuban women in works related to public health through activist from the FMC.

**Beauty From a Different Angle (Women and Sports)** – 1974 Luis Felipe Bernaza 8min/BW Doc
An analysis of some prejudice, remnant of the past, related to the participation of women in sports.
Table 4.2  Continued

**Alicia** – 1975 Victor Casaus 75 min/Color/Doc
Some aspects of the development of the artistic career of prima ballerina Alicia Alonso are shown through interviews archival documents and ballet excerpts as well as her work at the Nacional Ballet of Cuba.

**Amelia Pelaez 1897-1968** – 1975 J.C. Tabio 10 min/Color/Doc
The works of Cuban artist Amelia Pelaez are shown chronologically. In parallel, one sees an “appreciation circle” of primary school children created by the National Library for her paintings.

**The Smile of Victory** - 1975/Miguel Fleitas 18 min/BW/Doc
While visiting Cuba in 1975, soon after being freed from prison, Vietnam heroine Vo Thi Thang speaks about her participation in the actions and how she was tortured in Saigon’s jails.

**30th Anniversary of Vietnam Independence** 1975 Miguel Torres 10 min/BW/Doc
Special report of ICAIC News dedicated to the 30th anniversary of Vietnam independence, an interview with heroine Nguyen Thi Binh.

**Thanks to Life** – 1976 Victor Casaus
This documentary combines Violeta Parra’s embroidery on burlap, pictures of her and interviews with her daughter Isabel, in order to show significant moments of the life and artistic work of this outstanding folklorist.

**Lactation** – 1978 Mariso Trujillo 14 min/Color/Doc
The importance of breast feeding in the development of the new born baby to prevent diseases as well as to the loving interaction between mother and son.

**Haydee Santamaria’s Conversation I and II** – 1978 Manuel Herrera 74 min/Color/Doc
Haydee Santamaria talks about her brother Abel (fighter of Moncada and martyr of the Revolution and about the whole insurrection period. She also narrates anecdotes of her work in foreign countries and in Cuba during the fight against Batista’s dictatorship.

**That Long Night** – 1979 Enrique Pineda Barnet 102 min/Color-Fiction
Some aspects of the lives of revolutionary fighters Lidia Doce and Colodomira Acosta. They were prisoners and messengers of the Sierra Mestra’s guerrillas. Their capture, torture and heroic death in the hands of Batista dictatorship’s police.

**There’s No Saturday Without Sun** – 1979 Manuel Herrera 92 min/Color/Fiction
This comedy describes the work performed by a communal woman worker in order to overcome the resistance of some peasant families who, rooted in old habits and beliefs, don’t want to abandon their poor and unsanitary dwellings, nor move into the new houses the Revolution built for them in the villages.

**1980s**

**Legend and Exploits of Cayita** – 1980 Luis Felipe Bernaza 29 min/Color/Doc
This documentary is about the life and works of Cayita Araujo, a teacher of revolutionaries. For almost a century, she dedicated her intelligence and her courage to fighting for the cause of the Cuban people.

**Celia, Image of the People** – 1980 Santiago Alvarez 20 min/Color/Doc
A special feature on heroine Celia Sanchez, who fought with the guerrillas of Sierra Maestra and was one of the chiefs of Oriente’s clandestine operations. She died in January 1980 after having dedicated her life to serving the Revolution.
Rita – 1980 Oscar Valdes 19 min-Color-Doc
A biographical synthesis of a great Cuban artist Rita Montaner. Her pictures, her records, and the opinions of people who knew this many-sided interpreter of Cuban music.

So Are You, Woman – 1981 Constante Diego 10 min/Color/Doc
Five old Cuban songs about woman, interpreted by genuine representatives of this genre.

Up to a Certain Point – 1983 Tomas Gutierrez Alea 88 min/Color/Fiction
A love story springs up between a woman worker at the port and a script writer who’s doing a research for a movie against machismo. The movie shows how a man who’s trying to express his awareness regarding machismo very often will be unable to act accordingly.

Amada – 1983 Humberto Solas 105 min/Color/Fiction
Havana 1914. It is the outbreak of World War I and Cuba goes through moments of anguish and frustration. In this setting, a passionate love springs up between Amada, a conservative bourgeois woman who clings to her obsolete values and Marcial, a young anti-conformist man who will try, to no avail, to snatch Amada away from an already meaningless world.

Woman in Front of a Mirror – 1983 Marisol Trujillo 17 min/Color/Doc
Through the personal experience of dancer, Rosario Suarez, from the Cuban National Ballet, the movie deals with women’s problems when they confront the need for motherhood and an intricate everyday life after the birth of the first child.

The Operation – 1983 Ana Maria Garcia 40 min/Color/Doc
In Puerto Rico, more than a third of all fertile women have been sterilized, many ignoring the fact that the operation is irreversible. The movie analyses this problem within the context of population control and the policy applied by Puerto Rican and the U.S. governments regarding these facts on the island.

Woman by the Lighthouse – 1984 Marisol Trujillo 26 min/Color/Doc
Testimony of a woman who lived with her husband in different lighthouses of the Cuban archipelago, becoming herself a lighthouse keeper after the triumph of the Revolution.

Habanera – 1984 Pastor Vega 101 min/Color/Fiction
A woman psychiatrist, who helps in solidarity her patients as well as her family and social circle, is confronted by an attitude which is the consequence of the conflict appearing in her own life.

Mama Goes to War – 1984 Guillermo Centero 17 min/Color/Doc
Will and decisiveness in Cuban women are shown here when they confront physical, psychological and social stress related to their military training for the territorial troops militia.

When the Sea was a Dream – 1985 Guillermo Torres 8 min/Color/Doc
How the first brigade of fisherwomen of Cuba was created, initiated by a group of women workers in the fishing industry in Puerto Padre, province of Las Tunas.

After the Ball is Over – 1985 Gerardo Chijona 10 min/Color/Doc
The world of women models and club dancers and the conflicts between their professional and their private lives.

When a Woman Doesn’t Sleep – 1985 Rebeca Chavez 17 min/Color/Doc
Different stages in the life of Panchita Rivero, an exceptional woman who struggled against poverty and discrimination. She became a physician in 1920 and has been the witness of a whole epoch.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movie Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wanting to Tell You</strong></td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>13 min</td>
<td>Color/Doc</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mamaita</strong></td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>10 min</td>
<td>Color/Doc</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A Little of Consuelo</strong></td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>16 min</td>
<td>Color/Doc</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>She Sold Coquitos</strong></td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>13 min</td>
<td>Color/Doc</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Woman of the Border</strong></td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>17 min</td>
<td>Color Doc</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Another Woman</strong></td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>50 min</td>
<td>Color/Fiction</td>
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<td><strong>Angelucha</strong></td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>16 min</td>
<td>Color/Doc</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Champions</strong></td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>17 min</td>
<td>Color/Doc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>That Woman of So Many Stars</strong></td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>17 min</td>
<td>Color/Doc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Time in the Gaze</strong></td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>18 min</td>
<td>Color/Doc</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rigoberta</strong></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>15 min</td>
<td>Color/Doc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tina’s Moments</strong></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>20 min</td>
<td>Color/Doc</td>
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Through the testimony of women older than 60 years of age, the movie shows what the Revolution meant for them and how it is obviously nourished by the anonymous dedication of people like them.

Everyday life of an old woman who due to her own vitality and her human qualities became a promoter of popular culture.

Consuelito Vidal, a popular radio and TV anchor and cinema actress, talks about her career and her times.

Through the case of a young technician in metal casting, the film shows the discrimination still suffered by Cuban women in certain areas of work life, as well as the role of the individual will when trying to overcome obstacles that hinder personal realization.

A group of Nicaraguan peasant women organize a cooperative to cultivate the land while their sons and husbands fight the counterrevolution.

Juan, a man of action, returns to his village after participating in a fight against bandits revolting in the region of Escamby. He’s appointed the administrator of a store a job he ignores and dislikes as he feels it belittles him and limits his personal freedom. He enters a crisis that involves the store, his wife, his mistress, and his environment. Eugenia, his wife assumes the man’s social responsibilities deciding to express her independence as a human being.

Angela Ramos is a Peruvian intellectual, the first woman journalist and militant of the Peruvian Communist Party, and collaborator of Amauta y de Jose Carlos Mariategui. She talks about her work and her attitude as a woman committed to her times.

The development of women’s volleyball in Cuba. The rigor and discipline of training made these women world champions, and the difficulties they confronted in their personal life due to the need to surrender to a life of sports.

Important episodes of Adela Azcuy’s life, one of the few women who reached the grade of Captain in combat during Cuba’s War of Independence against Spanish colonization in the 19th Century.

Utilizing the resources of fiction cinema, the parable of writer Onelio Jorge Cardos is transferred to the life of actress Silivia Planas.

Through the personal history of a young Guatemalan Indian, Rigoberta Menchu, militant revolutionary, the movie shows a fresco representing Guatemala’s current reality and fight for freedom.

The vision of Tina Modotti, photographer and participant in the most transcendental revolutionary events of the first decades of this century, and who is one of the more relevant, controverted, and unknown women of these times.
Table 4.2  Continued

*One More Among Them* – 1988 Rebeca Chavez 27 min/Color Doc
Recreation of a period during the life of Tamara Burke, from 1961 until 1967, when she meets Ernesto “Che” Guevara. She works for the revolution in Cuba and then falls in Bolivia with Che’s guerrillas.

*At Haydee's* – 1989 Mayra Vilasis 11 min/Color/Doc
For the 30th Anniversary of the House of the Americas, homage is paid to its creator, Haydee Santamaria, through the evocation of some of the intellectuals who were closest to the institution. Archival images and other pictures complete the testimony.

*Solitude of the Department Head* – 1989 Rigoberto Lopez 20 min/Color/Fiction
A woman in crisis reflects on her own behavior through the years. Trapped in contradictions she expresses how she abandoned ethical values in exchange for a privileged and easy life.

**1990s**

*Maria Antonia* – 1990 Sergio Geral 111 min/Color Fiction
Maria Antonia is a sensual, hard and violent woman who lives marginally in the Havana of the fifties. Her indomitable passion for Julian, a young, ambitious and womanizing boxer who longs for fame, will take her to a tragic destiny that neither true love nor the practices and beliefs of the African religion Yoruba can help her escape.

*Mujer Transparente* – 1990 Hector Veitia, Mayra Segura, Mayra Vilasis, Mario Crespo, Ana Rodriguez 82 min/Color/Fiction
Five stories about five women on the edge of a choice. “Isabel” is a married woman with an established family who is offered a promotion to be Department Head. From this moment she begins to question her life and her status as a domestic object at home. Her new job gives her some perspective about the possibility of a new life. “Adriana” is an old spinster educated traditionally, who tries to escape her solitude by inventing a love story with a telephone repairman. “Julia” finds out that her husband is cheating on her after many years of marriage. From this moment she begins to reconsider her matrimonial relationship and how sterile her life has been. “Zoe” is young, rebellious and immature. A fellow university student visits her with the intention of making her fulfill her responsibilities at the university. During the visit she realizes he has double standards and is a liar. “Laura” struggles with doubt as she waits to see her old girlfriend who lives in exile. The current reality invites her to raise many ethical/political questions.

*Spinsters at Dusk* – 1990 Guillermo Torres 12 min/Color/Fiction
In the early 20th Century, three sisters take a stroll in the woods where they have walked since they were small, like an eternal ritual. One day, the appearance of a small child threatens to break the daily balance of their lives, in a debate that unfolds the best and the worst of each one.

*Color of Woman* – 1990 Nora de Izcue 26 min/Color/Doc
Cecilia Cartagena, a black woman from the Peruvian Coast represents the history of generations of injustices suffered by black women. Nevertheless, her testimony is full of hope for a better world for her descendants.

Women’s gymnastics requires discipline, emotional balance, technique and courage. The combination of these elements produces a true art of form and movement.
Table 4.2  Continued

My Hair is White, My Skin is Black – 1997 Marina Ochoa 20 min/Color/Doc
Four moments in the life of a simple 95 year old woman. Maria de los Reyes Castillo, “Reyita” is the granddaughter of a slave, daughter of a free womb, born with the Republic. These moments are unveiled in a simple way, from the deepest part of her feminine heart and from the firmness of her will.

Translated by Susana Tassara

1 In contrast to the growth of Cuba’s other mass media, radio and television, which employed approximately 8,000 in various technical and professional capacities, and in 1960 ranked first in Latin America for the number of television receivers. The growth of this media sector was primarily due to the use of Cuba as a testing ground for North American technology, which provided locals with the technology and "on-the-job" training. Strictly in terms of media infrastructure, Cuba was not “underdeveloped” at the time of the Revolution, even if colonized.

2 Douglas notes members of the Film Club of Havana included besides those previously mentioned by Almendros: Roberto Branly, Adrian Garcia, Rine Leal, Placido Gonzalez, Julio Matas, Jaime Soriano, Rodolfo Santovenia, Maria Lopez, Paulino Villanueva, Emilio Guede.

3 The University Reform Movement began in Cordoba, Argentina, initially as a protest against the elitism of the academy, and later mixed in with a growing concietization of students’ (as a class) hostility to Washington’s doctrine of Panamericanism, along with a generational unease toward a process that would later be called “underdevelopment.” This student movement and base of solidarity spread rapidly throughout the Latin American student population.

4 Some terms: In the U.S. film industry, “feature” films usually refer to fiction feature films released theatrically. Documentary films may also be “features” if released theatrically, implying “feature length;” even so, these films are usually referred to as documentaries rather than feature films. If not approximately 2 hour in length, a film may be a “documentary short” and/or a fictional short – “shorts.” Film has variously over time been called actualities, shorts, moving pictures, pictures, flickers, flics, movies, cinema, and more… Trying to “define” these terms may be a case where the precision of definition and effort to be conceptually clear may muddy the waters and “darken counsel.” I will say that I use “cinema” primarily to mean a body of work identified with a person, a movement (whether aesthetic or political), a country, as obviously in “Cuban cinema.”
CHAPTER FIVE – FINDINGS

WOMEN AND FILM MAKING CULTURE

Cuban cinema is like a national sport in that the Cuban public is a tremendous fan of Cuban films. Sometimes it’s crazy. Sometimes the films aren’t even that good yet they have a tremendous public. There’s a certain nationalist feeling I think with this cinema and the truth is they have international success. I think too, that in the case of the documentary, which created a “school” imagine a public that every week had film news, a documentary – 3 or 4 a week, 5, 6, 10 documentaries shown each week in the theaters. It’s a privilege that not many people have had in the world. Moreover, we have a public that relate to American films, French cinema, Italian, Swiss. We saw Fellini, Godart, Vizconti, Buñuel, Saura, and what did it cost? One peso! We had all the opportunity and the access from the economic point of view. We saw all the best cinema from around the world.

--Cuban filmmaker, female

Introduction

Prior to the Special Period in Cuba, film production happened in the studios of a number of state organisms (the army, Cuban television, various ministries – education, agriculture, fishing), for the training or promotional purposes of the institution. But only ICAIC had the specific institutional mandate to develop a film industry and national cinema. Since the early 1990’s, as a result of the economic constraints necessitated by the “Special Period,” ICAIC is now the only film studio producing feature films in Cuba. The Special Period (those desperate years beginning in 1990 brought on by the Soviet withdrawal of subsidies from the Cuban economy, were especially difficult for Cuban women.) As one woman described:

We were left…. as they say in Cuban argot, we were painting and they took the ladder out from under us. We were left holding the paintbrush, and it was a precipice. We fell, fell, fell….There was a shortage of everything…fuel, money, food….The country had debts. A shortage of everything. There was no light…the power failures were historic…Those glass display cases were empty, full of paper and magazines, without underwear, a blouse, without a piece of soap to bathe…. I think that history one day will have to recognize the power of this pueblo to resist. This country has resisted what you cannot even imagine, because everything was lacking: meat, chicken, eggs, soap to wash oneself….It was a desperate crisis.¹ (Holgado Fernández , p. 17)
Since women are primarily responsible for ensuring the survival of the family, particularly with regard to food consumption and caloric intake, the Special Period hit women -- as housewives, mothers, primary care givers, and workers -- the hardest (Holgado Fernández, 2000). Years before, Cuban filmmaker, Humberto Solás had intimated the social and crucial role of women for survival and national development in his film, *Lucía*. Solás said this film was not about women (the three Lucias) but “a film about society;” noting that, “within that society I chose the most vulnerable character, the one who is most transparently affected at any given moment by contradictions and change” (p. 155). During the 1990’s, as the economic effects of the Special Period were beginning to be drastically felt, the relationship of Cuban cinema to women filmmakers’ lack of access to production resources grew increasingly complex. The presence and visibility of women on the screen seemed to move in tandem with their absence and invisibility off screen behind the scenes, as either directors, producers, in management, in opportunities or creative spaces provided them to present their own work or influence their own representations, or in the acquisition and access to resources for professional development.

This chapter presents data from the primary sources of: interviews, a focus group, and panel discussion on women’s film work, and a textual discussion of the film, *Transparent Woman (Mujer Transparente)*. My intention is to present these findings in the words of the women themselves, as important protagonists in the story of Cuban cinema, from their experience and point of view, from women working both within and outside of ICAIC. The women begin the story by describing their educational and professional formation as filmmakers and their experiences in various institutional contexts. A composite collage of their collective voices is crafted from the filmmakers’ interview narratives and presented from their point-of-view. To present a collective story that does not identify the speaker nor attribute quotes directly is a structural choice necessitated by the requirements of my research protocol. Re-presentation is always a form of authorial editorializing….just as the “objective” eye of the camera is always filtered through the filmmaker’s subjective choice of shots. I use textual markers such as bold type to indicate when there is a change in the person speaking, just as close attention
to the standard notation of open and closed quotes will inform the reader when a shift in
the speaker occurs in the text.

One purpose of the study is to identify Cuba’s working female filmmakers. The
first section briefly introduces the participants with the objective of evoking “context”
and the “locality” of their lived experience, rather than a summary snapshot of their lives.

I. Interviews with Filmmakers

The Protagonists

The filmmakers often used the word “protagonists” or protagonismo (protagonism) in conjunction with their situation to connote the idea of social
participation, leading role, or leadership. From a scriptwriters perspective, the
protagonist is the central character propelling the dramatic action.

Becoming a filmmaker

BELKIS VEGA

Filmmaking is more akin to becoming an artist than getting on a career path.
Belkis describes her efforts to become a filmmaker, making (incremental) choices that
she felt would bring her closer, or prepare her better for the possibility of making films,
which for a middle class Cuban woman, was as remote as becoming an astronaut. She
studied information design and in 1973 tried to work in the field, but it was difficult so
she returned to the university to study art history because “me daba un nivel de cultura
general para poder realizar cine” (“it gave me a general cultural level to be able to direct
film”). In 1975 she began working in the film studios of Cuba’s Armed Forces. She now
works both in Cuban television and independent projects, is a professor, and sought after
lecturer in Europe and the U.S.
GLORIA ROLANDO

During her university years Gloria worked in the National Library and in her fourth year (1973-1975) went to a rural zone in Cuba known for its revolutionary spirit, the Escambray, where she lived and worked with the campesinos, who previously had lived separated and isolated and now were integrating themselves into a new agricultural cooperative in the context of a national plan of social transformation (under the “plan Escambray”). She says, “we taught but we also learned.” In 1976, she finished her last year at the university and was selected to enter ICAIC, on the basis of “my curriculum, my file”). They gave all entrants a “motivations test” to find out what our expectations were for entering ICAIC. “I remember the question asked: What do you expect entering ICAIC? I remember I put that I wanted to know the language of film. I knew the language of music but I wanted to know the language of film. I didn’t know anything about film. I hadn’t been in the any of the “interest circles” for film. I came open to this world and was selected. I don’t know if was my resume or my interest, but I was selected.”

REBECCA CHAVEZ

When I asked Rebecca how she began in filmmaking she said she began “as a cine club as a spectator.” After entering ICAIC she first worked as a film critic and then began working with noted Cuban documentarist, Santiago Alvarez. She studied history and journalism at the University of Havana in Santiago de Cuba and during her university days she remained affiliated with the University Film Club. Upon graduation she worked as a journalist for 6 or 7 years but as a “second beat” she covered film and cultural events. “It wasn’t easy. Not being from Havana, which is where film is made, it was a little complicated getting close to the world of film. There wasn’t in that moment (I’m talking about the 1970’s) as there is today, the explosion of television and telecentros in the provinces.” So after graduation she moved to Havana, where she worked in journalism and for cultural magazines until finally she went to ICAIC as a film critic. There she was a critic, wrote for Granma and for provincial newspapers. They did “cultural extension” work until 1980 and then she started working with Santiago Alvarez as his assistant director. She worked in the ICAIC news department for 8 years. Then
began to make documentaries for herself at her own risk, ("hacer documentales por mi cuenta y riesgo").

TESSA HERNÁDEZ

While not technically a “director” but an assistant director, Tessa has worked at ICAIC for 24 years. She was part of the 1976 cohort of women (“jovenes” or young people) that entered ICAIC to fulfill their “social service” requirement for receiving a free education from the state. Like many of the women filmmakers, she studied art history, which was an educational and cultural factor in their selection to work at the Cuban Film Institute. I interviewed Tessa to find out what her experiences were as an assistant director and to get at the problems women might face in advancing their careers. In a follow-up interview with her a year later on the set of a feature film, where she was working, I found her “directing” cast and crew and saying “Action!” — the stereotypical identifier of the director. Tessa, the assistant director was saying “Action,” but the (male) director said “Cut!”

ANA RODRIGUEZ

Ana studied art history at the university like many of the others and began working at ICAIC in 1975, also in fulfillment of her social service requirement and payment for receiving her higher education free from the state, as an “analista” along with 10 other compañeros (9 women and 1 man). Before working at ICAIC, her contact with film was as a “simple spectator.” In her on-the-job training at ICAIC, she discovered her vocation for fiction films and in that same year moved over to feature filmmaking as an assistant director, unlike the other analistas who worked in and preferred documentaries. Her short vignette “Laura,” dealing with friendship and exile in the film Mujer Transparente, has been critically commented on.

MAYRA VILASÍS

Mayra worked in the Information Center of ICAIC before becoming an assistant director. When she began at ICAIC the concept of the “new man” was not discussed, not even theoretically. What was discussed was the “eficaz del cine” meaning its artistic value and value as part of the Cuban culture; and human value in terms of illuminating the objective of becoming a human being and the objective of looking for the identity of being Cuban. Remember, she says, “we came from a precolonial and postcolonial
culture. Spain first then the U.S. We had to “despojarnos” free ourselves (decolonize) to search for identity – these were the objectives that we discussed.”

LOURDES PRIETO

Before Lourdes’ generation, the 1975-76 cohort of women who entered ICAIC as analistas, assistant directors had been men. “ICAIC was looking, above all, for people with a high cultural formation and they went to the university to find them.” Lourdes is a long time ICAIC documentary director who freelances and does her own documentaries on the side. Enamoured with the documentary form, she is not interested in directing fiction.

TERESA ORDOQUI

Teresa worked at ICAIC from 1960 to 1963 in film animation (dibujo animado). She moved to the film studios of Cuban television where she began her filmmaking career as an editor and assistant director for documentary films and was the first woman after Sara Gomez to direct a feature film in 16 mm (there’s a millimeter hierarchy in the film world) and not at ICAIC but for Cuban television (IRCT). She became a filmmaker by on-the-job training at the film studios of Cuban TV, where she did many adaptations of Cuban literature. She is one of the first women film directors in Cuba.

LISETTE VILA

Besides being a filmmaker, Lisette is the current president of UNEAC (Unión Nacional de Escritores e Artistas de Cuba) an important vanguard association for artists and intellectuals of all stripes. She began working on musical tracks for Santiago Alvarez, Oscar Valdes, Rebecca Chavez, Mayra Vilasis, Guillermo Centeno, Rigoberto Lopez – all filmmakers who she did sound tracks for and who were working in 35 mm. and this kept her near the world of film. Due to the resource constraints of the Special Period, her documentary work was done in video. She worked in all the various film studios doing sound – ICAIC, FAR, and the studios of Cuban television, ICRT; and trained sound professionals.

NIURKA PEREZ

Niurka studied art in order to integrate the artistic in her filmmaking. With art her principle aesthetic, she began her career at the FAR film studios in 1988. Within the military studios, she felt the artistic freedom to experiment creatively and introduced
video-art to the FAR film studios. Like other women who began their film careers outside of ICAIC, it did not take her 10 years to direct. She began directing in 1991 and now works extensively in Cuban television as well as freelance with productions outside Cuba.

MARISOL TRUJILLO

Marisol was one of the first women to begin her career at ICAIC in 1971 as a writer for the Information Center. She worked as a film critic and scriptwriter before being promoted to the position of film director in 1978. Often referred to by the other filmmakers and cited in articles that appeared in the press and film magazines, she has a smart eye on ‘the social’. When she started working at ICAIC all the people she worked with (except Sara Gomez) were men. When she became a director, the assistants were mainly women.

Working Inside ICAIC

The complete school: on-the-job-training

“For all of us it was a test of fire. There were a lot of women and this group of analistas as we were called, was going to collaborate in the filmmaking process. Analysts were those that researched the scripts. But the research had to function at the behest of the image. The job of an analista was one of assisting the director but it also went a little beyond assisting and included script research, archival work to look for facts and photo documentation – primarily for documentaries. The analysts had the opportunity of being a part of the complete documentary filmmaking process from beginning to end. Fiction films come with the script already made. We had to learn how to do research as a function of the image, learn a new visual language. This is what each one of us learned according to the project. What was interesting to me was that I could do the complete process, in other words, from the theme to post-production: research, script, pre-production, production, and editing (post production). This was a complete school.”

“I think that everyone doesn’t have the same experience in ICAIC. Everybody depended on the first project that touched them and the road they chose afterwards - their interests and talents. In my case, I was timid and didn’t talk much, and I remember the
programming director chose me although they didn’t know what to do with me and I didn’t express myself much. It took them a while to give me a project which turned out to be *Tumba francesa*. The work was about the Franco-Haitian tradition that arrived in Cuba after the revolution in Haiti. It was made here in Havana but we had to go to Santiago de Cuba and Guantanamo. I studied the theme like it was a thesis. Then I began working on the script. That project was my initiation and I liked it. It was a theme that allowed me to find a road I never knew existed. The director chose the theme.

“My process within ICAIC helped me develop other things, to know Cuba as well as other countries; to associate with themes that opened up other roads. For example, in 1979, I worked on the documentary *Carifesta* with the director Bernabé, who gave me the first chance to have my own crew and film because there were a lot of events to shoot during the festival. The Caribbean was an unknown world to me….this process of getting to know film is the process of cultural nurturing. [*Este proceso de ir conociendo de cine es el proceso de alimentacion cultural.*] I always considered the Caribbean a trail of islands without history and from this moment they began to interest me. Through film work I began to reexamine, reevaluate myself and the neighborhood where I lived. At that time we all got our experience (cut our film teeth) working on this project. I stayed with Bernabé until the end of the project, to the editing, and for me it was a school of life.”

“**Directors could elect to shoot** themes of interest to them, or they were assigned to shoot films for political and cultural, events, or at the request of other state organisms. Usually the director of production would assign who or what project I would work on. Sometimes I got to choose. In Cuban film, the director is the most important person, not like in the U.S. where the producer is the most important.”

Another filmmaker notes: “**for us ICAIC was a film school** because until one sees the whole process, especially the editing, you’re not finished with the work. You need to begin to associate all the steps in the process and get everything together in your mind in an organized form. This helped me a lot. In fiction, the crews are larger although the participation of the assistant is also very direct, very tied to the director. Without saying that in fiction there is no collaboration, in the documentary I feel more collaboration. In the documentary production the crew is smaller, fewer people. I’ve
worked in both documentaries and fiction film. There are levels and evaluations and after I passed an evaluation and moved from analyst to assistant director, for me it was the same job without many differences. Within this category of assisting there were also grades like A, B, C, according to experience, job results, years of work, and in this way you climbed up the ladder, and in this way I came to be first assistant director in feature films.”

One analista worked with various directors. “Some I felt good with, others not, depending on the theme and harmony of the film crew. Cuban documentaries are very complex because it’s not just doing interviews and looking for historical facts. In these beginnings, it wasn’t clear where my career was going. I didn’t know if I was going to direct, there wasn’t even a line to develop. I stayed more in the documentary world than that of fiction. The work of fiction film scared me a little, I felt better in documentary film because I liked to arrive at the final product. I wanted to be in film for the intellectual work more than a practical job. First, you have to be an assistant director before being a director; this is very important. I was never an assistant director on any fiction feature. I did one documentary and in the evaluation they said I was never going to direct. Then I knew I wasn’t going to direct. I realized that in ICAIC I had to take a different route, I didn’t know the route to take but I had to take another one. There was a road that everyone took and I wasn’t the exception: first to be assistant director, then to pass to assistant director when they opened the competitions. In my case it wasn’t like that.”

Another filmmaker says: “I started working at ICAIC a few days after Sara Gomez died in 1974. [Sara Gomez is still the only women in ICAIC to have directed a full length feature film.] Sara had a strong personality, a clear attitude and she was intelligent. At the time she was filming Cuban cine was ‘effervescent.’ Everything was happening and the effort was to film everything. Sara was able to insert herself into that moment. When I began, there was more caution, a new generation (analistas) that required requisites, evaluations, procedures. It was frustrating for those of us that it took 10 years to be able to direct. But most of all I think it was a problem of our attitude that we as women had and the complexity of life at that moment.”
“Cinema is a cultural act.” Part of ICAIC’s ‘school’ was the rhythm of the day. Within ICAIC filmmakers met weekly to screen and discuss films made by each other. Cuban people are very talkative. We’re talkers and when given the opportunity we express, talk, discuss. Sometimes it’s hard to critique fellow directors but we learned a lot through these internal discussions of films, made at ICAIC or foreign films. ICAIC leadership (Alfredo Guevara) felt it important to maintain these discussions. The discussions were at 8:30 on Friday night. It was a school within a school and our discussions were without a pencil but with ideas in our heads, and everyone expressed their opinions. After I began directing, I went less to these discussions due to the demands and schedule of work.”

“1975 to 1985 is the generation of the ‘young directors’ but we’re not so young,” one filmmaker notes wryly.

“In 1985, ICAIC had internal convocations, that is calls for scripts, which was the process by which male directors working in the documentary genre passed on to become feature film directors in fiction. This year the “creative groups” were formed based on “affinities and friendship” (affinidades y amistad). These groups had just started up when Titón (Tomás Guitierrez Alea) died, the economy was hard hit, directors had to look for production funds outside of ICAIC, work in other countries, and generally open up their own paths.”

“In 1986 there was an “artistic evaluation” where many people “defined themselves and most chose documentary films. I decided to stay in fiction genre because it interested me more. Throughout the years I began to accumulate experience, worked second units and second camera and filmed some things but never anything of mine.” [She was an assistant director for 10 years from 1975 to 1985.]

Another filmmaker noted that “women became directors within ICAIC only by directing documentary films, but outside ICAIC women were directing complex telenovelas of 27 chapters for Cuban television, doing independent work, and videos. But still no one had broken into fiction feature filmmaking inside ICAIC, even after the filming of Mujer Transparente.”

In 1988, ICAIC decided to test the mettle of the “young directors” who now had experience directing documentaries to see if they were ready to make their first fiction
First you present your idea to ICAIC’s chief of production. After your idea has been approved, you have so much time to present the script. One and a half months, two months, whatever you ask for. You have to do research, the fundamentals: transportation. ICAIC gives you the possibilities – if there’s gas—because that’s the other “cine Cubano.” No, I laugh but really it’s been something tragic. It’s not just cinema that needs gasoline but factories – people have to eat.

Until 1990, ICAIC produced a purely national cinema. But the 1990’s began a big surge of co-productions. Given the country’s dire economic situation after 1990, co-productions provided one of the few ways for filmmakers to make films.

In 1991, Humberto Sola noted director of “men’s films about women” headed up the creative group that made the film Mujer Transparente from five vignettes directed by three women. The creative groups that began were for directors. The money available at the time was for the state’s stable of directors, not for experimenting with that unknown quantity -- a woman director. Even so, one of the creative groups under the tutelage of Humberto Solas produced the vignette film Mujer Transparente, incorporating the first fiction work of three female directors Mayra Vilasis, Mayra Segera, and Ana Rodriguez and one women scriptwriter, Tina León. But the big break through for women did not happen with this breakthrough film.

Another filmmaker noted: “A few years ago, there began to emerge small independent films. From the 1990’s on, people got together here and there to do things. There’s a certain “monopoly of creation” in ICAIC that ignores many women and men with talent who do independent video work. The machismo is in ICAIC, in that women don’t get in nor ever appear as directors of feature films.” I asked here if she felt like she could direct: “I think I could, yes, I could do it. I’ve done this for years. But if one day I did it, I would begin with something small, a fiction short or a documentary. Really, I’ve been a little lazy, I dedicated myself to doing my job but not to trying to direct. I’ve had
projects but I haven’t struggled sufficiently. I’m not going to say it’s easy but I think that it requires a lot of work and struggle. It’s not as though you’re an assistant director and then become a director. I don’t mean to say that perhaps a person interested and with an idea in mind couldn’t direct. The possibility exists but it’s not really structured, it depends on one’s initiative and interest, and willingness to struggle for it.”

The Mechanics of Oblivion I

Although women are never usually mentioned or considered in the ICAIC pantheon of male “founders,” Norma Torrado’s name and editor’s credit may be seen on the most important films from Cuba’s early era of documentary filmmaking. Like other youth of the period interested in film, Norma formed part of a film club called Cine Club Visión. Chanan (1985) provides a note on these clubs:

Nuestro Tiempo was one of the two principal recruiting grounds for future members of ICAIC: Alfredo Guevara, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Julio García Espinosa, Jose Massip and Santiago Álvarez were all members…There was also the Cine Club Vision, situated in a working class district of Havana, which drew its membership not only from radical intellectuals but also the local people….The composer Leo Brouwer made his debut as a young guitarist under its auspices, and other members who were later to join ICAIC include Norma Torrado, Nelson Rodríguez and Gloria Argüelles, and the cameraman, Luis Costales (p. 81).

Norma was working as a domestic and manicurist, when in 1952, she entered and won a contest to critique an Italian film then playing in Havana, Carrusel napolitano, distributed by a North American industrial film company, 20th Century Corp. “You had to do the critique and send it to the University of Havana, where there was a summer film program of various courses given by José Valdés Rodríguez, who directed the film appreciation course, as it was called. Well I won. I did the critique and won the tuition and the opportunity. It was the first time I had the emotion of going up to the University of Havana” (the dramatic entrance to the University is architecturally marked by its striking and famous stairway, the scene of many political encounters). It was there she
met many of the compañeros who would later become the first directors at ICAIC – Gutiérrez Alea, García Espinosa. She met up with them again in 1960 when the courses she took at the university and participation in the Vision film club would serve as her calling card and entrance into ICAIC:

Who were the group that had something to do with film at that time, well, in this group falls Nelson (Rodríguez, another important editor of the period), and…José del Campo, we were people who began working together. This was the beginning of how we fulfilled the dream of beginning to work in film, in ICAIC, which was being formed by this group of young people restless to do everything that had to do with the film industry. On the other side there was another group, of intellectuals, who had this restlessness for film, for theater. There was Alfredo Guevara and also Santiago Alvarez. And look how things go, at that time, around 1953, we had been in contact and had interchanges with this other group. We did activities and encuentros, studied cinematography, they had a higher level of studies. Then we formed our own group, Cine Club Visión in our own barrio (neighborhood) of Santos Suaréz. The ones who had the most theoretical experience, who gave us lectures on film were Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa.

Julianne Burton, early scholar of Cuban cinema, wrote a seminal retrospective piece entitled, “Revolutionary Cuban Cinema” in 1978 in a special section of the film journal Jump Cut, where she discussed the talented Cuban documentarist and founder of Cuba’s classic school of documentary filmmaking, Santiago Alvarez:

Oblied to draw from existing film archives and such ‘second-hand’ sources as news photos and television footage, he developed a methodology which circumvented the need for on-the-spot footage and elevated the film-collage to a high level of political and artistic quality. (p. 18 italics added)

This same article by Burton is reproduced in Michael Martin’s 1997 two volume anthology, New Latin American Cinema (page 127); and the line is quoted again in a 1999 article by cinema scholar, John Hess, entitled, “New” Latin American Cinema” in Latin America: An Interdisciplinary Approach (pp. 272-292). I present the “lineage” of this one sentence to make a point and to illustrate a mechanism through which women and their contributions are overlooked, ignored, elided, and remain in the shadow.
structure of important work that could not have been accomplished, or so well accomplished, without them. In this case, perhaps no one was curious enough to wonder exactly what was Santiago’s “methodology” that circumvented the need and cost for shooting on-the-spot footage and allowed him to turn a lack of resources into an “expressive asset,” thus shaping the aesthetic and dynamic of Cuban documentaries of the classic period and creating a “school.”

Perhaps I would not have wondered either except that I interviewed Norma Torrado, Santiago Alvarez’s editor who, in the process of narrating her experiences, mentioned that at the end of each editing day she would pick off the editing room floor all the pieces of film, categorize them, and file the frames, thus creating an archive of images that not only Santiago, but many filmmakers, drew upon especially when there was a need to work quickly. In the production and editing of a documentary newsreel that changed each week across the theaters of Cuba, the need to work quickly was always upon them. In fact, Norma Torrado’s “methodology” garnered her Vietnam’s top prize for the most distinguished journalist to cover Vietnam, although she had never visited the country. She narrates her experience of these early days below.

NORMA TORRADO

“I was always a strong person….now I’m retired from film and free to do the work of God and my gods (orishas). I’m telling you this because it’s important and you have to touch upon it somehow because Santiago Alvarez is a director that worked with the political criteria, he’s ideological, very. I was respected because I always had a profile, a profile within ICAIC that I couldn’t shake because, anyway, it was useful among other things. I was a very dynamic person, very rebellious at that time, and they preferred that to anything else. When I was being processed for the Party, during an assembly of more than 1,000 persons, I said that I believed in ghosts, and the person who was directing the Party Assembly in that era for that meeting was a black leader, very important in the Popular Socialist Party, and when the meeting was over, I left with Santiago and this man fell in behind me and said, “Listen, do you know that you’re a first rate militant?” And I said, “What do you mean by that?” and he said, “Leave it at that,
these are the kinds of militants the Party needs.” So I always had this profile of being like that. I worked 20 years.

“In 1960, after three interviews, I started working as an assistant editor with Santiago Alavarez. Later I was evaluated and began working as part of Noticiero ICAIC (the newsreel that was shown weekly in the movie theaters), the only woman. Then Santiago started doing both the Noticiero and documentaries and it was noticieros and documentaries, documentaries and noticeros – it got crazy. I would go to work in the morning and never know what time of day or night I would be leaving the editing room.

“Santiago is an interesting case because he came from CMQ radio and knew everything there was to know about radio. He was an administrator and then started working at ICAIC and came to stand out as one of the most important directors of Cuban film. As a documentarist I don’t think there has ever been anyone to match his dynamism, his enthusiasm, originality and novelty. He was a person with tremendous dynamism. I called him the Information Czar. He was a very open person. For example, maybe you had just dropped by for another reason, but he would say, “Listen, look here, what do you think of this, give me your opinion”; and he’d put the material on the moviola and you would give your opinion. And he would respect it, analyze what you had to say, and later might say, “I think you’re right, your criterion could be interesting to use as an alternative structure for the montage…..” His dynamism was somewhat similar to Fidel Castro’s. To such a degree that he later was the reporter that went to film most of Fidel’s visits outside the country. I never enjoyed any of these trips, trips to Africa, important trips. But I did hear anecdotes from the cameramen who went, about him, about Fidel.

“I think that for the News (noticiero) you have to “raise the flag.” In other words, it was an opening to reflect, portray, all the history of the Revolution at that time. I think this (filmic) archive must be worth “22 kilates” (millions) in historic value. In that archive you could say that the entire history and process of the Cuban Revolution is portrayed. We filmed everything. We filmed everything that happened around us. I think it’s a beautiful history, something unique, if I may say, because there were other parallel stories occurring as well. Things happening in other parts of the world that we
also covered internationally, and also in Latin America, and all went together in this focus on information.

“During this period I was also studying journalism and graduated in 1979. I studied parallel to the craziness of my job. I entered with a very low level of scholarship. I also am a founder in the sense that I worked in the literacy groups to help workers at ICAIC like myself. We did something called *seguimiento* (“pursuit” or “continuation”). So I began in first grade and studied to sixth grade, then high school, preuniversity and then I did the exam to study journalism. I would have liked to have studied something else, like art history, but it didn’t fit the profile of my job so I only had access to the matriculation for journalism and that’s what I graduated in. I then did post graduate work and worked at ICAIC until 1982 when I retired for medical reasons from the world of film.

“These were interesting times because groups would come…from Africa, Venezuela, Brazil, and I would work with these different people from around the world and teach them editing. For the dynamics needed for this work, I was very strong, always running. Then I did something that had some interesting results. I made myself an archive, a somewhat personal archive, and physically became one myself. We would listen to Fidel’s discourses and when I went to work the next day I had a knack for locating the images that would support his speeches. I saved everything and each day after editing with Santiago I set myself the task of saving and classifying the left over images. Image by image I put it in the archive perfectly classified. This helped me tremendously, so much so that it won me an important award from the government of Vietnam.

“How I did this was to hunt down the person when he was picking up the newsreels (*noticieros*) from the theaters, where they would be held in a type of temporary archive before being burned. When the North Americans were finished with the copies of feature films they would throw them out because it was impossible to keep them in vaults forever. So there was a person, an elderly person in love with the job, who received about ten copies of these newsreels each week after they had finished cycling through the theaters. He would save me a copy and I would work it, taking out the information on Vietnam. I had the complete history and process of the war in Vietnam.
and there was a moment when this tremendous archive was needed quickly to make a documentary film about the North-South war and the Vietnamese Liberation Front. (I asked her if this was her idea.)

“This was my idea because it was a way I created to be able to work quickly. I had a separate room and had my archives there, classified, all this information. I suffered a bit because the archive was dismantled to make the film to send to a film festival, Esocolmo, I think. Some time passed and Santiago called me one day to tell me that a person named Norma Torrado was going to be decorated because the government of Vietnam had given her the award for “Distinguished Journalist” and this award was only given to journalists who actually went to Vietnam. I was given the award by the Central Committee of the Party of Vietnam of the North-South Liberation Front, because remember, there were three fronts: Vietnam North, Vietnam South, and the Liberation Front.

“There were so many anecdotes. There is an anecdote about when Che died. The Central Committee of the Party wanted a photo of Che in his beret with the star and I quickly located it. I had many things in those archives, personalities, photos of Che, Fidel, leading politicians that appeared in the news a lot. So I had the responsibility to locate these pictures. Che was a political leader who didn’t much like to be filmed; it was difficult, very difficult. There is the story of the news cameraman named Oriol Menendez who was filming him and came back to the office upset saying, “I can’t film the news anymore because this just happened: Che said to me, ‘Leave the camera and come work with me, it will be healthier.’ When Che died it was difficult to put together 20 minutes of footage to make the documentary about him because there was so little filmed material.”

They already began to think that this second generation of Cuban filmmaking had university graduates (the analistas) and that we didn’t have the academic formation. But we had experience, tremendous experience. Don’t forget, we were workers. I realized then that I had to study as well. Because it also came up on the evaluation that if you didn’t have a cultural level, a level of study, well then, the evaluation wasn’t going to go anywhere. You know who saved me was Octavio Cortazar, a very informed guy, good friend, and productive director. He told me my evaluation wasn’t going anywhere
because I didn’t have university training. But he had an experience during a slow period at ICAIC when there wasn’t much production and not very many script ideas, so he proposed to the directors that they collect the archival material, look at it, and classify it – because my work served as an example. He had seen my work and was fascinated with the type of classification I had done without studying, because he knew what it entailed. So in my evaluation he said, “Look, I have here a catalog of technicians in the world of North American film and Norma Torrado is a specialist in this branch.” And so he saved me because it meant a raise in salary. He never told me this but someone told me that in the evaluation Octavio defended me saying, “I have reviewed her work and it’s a classification system as exhaustive as any of those that specialists do in the U.S.”

(This last bit of narrative shows the importance given to a high culture, a “cultural level” (nivel cultural) as a prerequisite for working in the field of film. High culture and U.S. professional standards emerge as deeply rooted criterion for appreciating someone as an educated person and skilled professional in film.)

When I asked Norma again (in the process of analysis) about her role in the first years of revolutionary filmmaking, and particularly about her behind-the-scenes contribution to Santiago Alvarez’s “methodology,” she laughed and commented that in those early years, the editing room was like a family and the work very much a team effort.

**Documentary filmmaking**

“**The Cuban public has developed** an educated taste for documentaries, and likes them because it’s a look at their reality, a look within at the soul or spirit and a recognition of themselves. Moreover it was a cultured audience who had seen the best of world cinema including East European film such as Russian film, Polish, Hungarian, Check, Bulgarian, and I could compare them with French cinema for example; as part of the privileged Cuban public that, luckily thank God, did not feel the whip of social realism. But, on the contrary, ours was a socialism that reflected another kind of society and another socialist public. The political culture of socialism made cinema a mass art but a cultured mass art (i.e. it educated the masses). Since the 1980’s unfortunately we don’t have the same opportunity. This public, this generation, the past two generations
have not had this opportunity of cultural and social formation. But these years were very important for me.”

More than one documentary director lamented:

I think we’re losing our historical memory. We’re living in an audio-visual age, not the age of oral tradition and we are not gathering what is happening on film. Very little is being done about Cuba today, and we will lose this memory, so necessary, this audio visual memory. From 1959 to 1990 Cuban national cinema recorded Cuban history. From 1990s forward – there is a lack.

Norma continues to provide the early background of documentary filmmaking:

“The newsreels of Santiago were actually documentaries. Some noticieros were called ‘mono-thematic’ - those that were converted into a documentary. Maybe it was a piece of news that dominated the week, maybe a theme from Fidel’s discourse, the sugar harvest, or some strong theme that was important in the news and that could dominate 10 minutes of a noticiero; that’s why we called them mono-thematic.

“With him there developed a style of work that I believe was unique in the history of Cuban cinema, because I don’t think Santiago ever made scripts. The work was very dynamic as well, had to be turned around in a few hours time, sent to the labs and distributed to the theaters. He was a director with a very profound intuition. Later, after a few years the system changed and then he began to make scripts but the first few years he worked without them. He was a person that, with all that material filmed in disorder by the cameraman, in a few hours dependent on the reality - where it was filmed and in what place they were filming - could unscramble all this material and with it all (strips of film negative) hanging from clothespins [in film bins] begin to improvise the montage. He was an interesting case, Santiago. He was very dynamic and unique. There was a group of us and we worked together as a team and everyone would get into the act editing the material.

“There was really no time to do research. We’d receive the information, the information about where a political event was to happen and we’d send the film crew. Many times Santiago would go when it was important. Other times only the film crew would go. And afterwards we would see the material, process it, and edit it. If Santiago
had gone, he would usually have an idea visualized when he got back to the editing room, and it was easier that way.

“Then there was the era of the record. Later we had an important editor, Idalberto Galvez, who started working with the sound track more intentionally, politically, creatively; so then we would work the image on one side and he would work the sound on the other. We even used the Beatles – Cuba found out about the Beatles on a noticiero sound track! Don’t forget Santiago did documentaries as well. The sound track on the documentary Hanoi 13 (1967) was the first time originally composed music was used. The film was given a prize for its sound track, written and composed by Leo Brower, at the Leipzig Festival. I think this was the golden age of Cuban cinema. There was a golden age and then later it became an industry.”

Another filmmaker picks up the story:

“I had been working with Santiago Alvarez a long time in editing and worked with him on a documentary called “History of the Revolutionary Plaza” (date). I began with the research and stayed until the end. Before this I had worked with him on a project on the external debt and it was very interesting…in that Santiago was a master of editing images, he was incredible and paid a lot of attention to the sound. The documentary, called “Solitude of the Gods” about Latin America’s external debt, was a very difficult theme for a filmmaker. In Cuba there were a lot of events and conferences taking place about the external debt but there was one that even gathered the religious, and the discourses were very good; it was the decade of the 1980’s. And he took the magisterial and religious discourses and converted them into a socio-politico demand. We worked with biblical texts about debt and debtors. It was an interesting process. It mixed piety with dreams, Mexican painting, the figure of Marti and much suggestive language. The event was to listen to these discourses and he went in and formulated this theme. There are projects that have marked me, that have taught me, there are styles of work that have interested me; and ways of interviewing, this is very important.”

Another filmmaker: “in response to an internal contest put on by ICAIC where documentary projects could be presented, I presented a theme that became my first documentary about the photographers who went to Playa Giron (Bay of Pigs), entitled “Images in Memory”. The film had a simple structure, the classical documentary
structure of interviews, reconstructions, and recreation of memories of the event. There were three planes of narrative: interviews with the photographers and their memories of what happened, the photographs they took of these events, and what was happening at the moment.

“One day on the set where I was shooting, I was waiting for the sun to come out and happened to grab an old magazine and read an article about Panchita Rivero and that became my second documentary. Panchita Rivero was a hero of the Revolution. She was a medical doctor in Manzanillo in the southern providence of Oriente. Panchita was a women who had all kinds of difficulties that might be reasons for her not doing anything in her life; she was poor, black, with a physical defect and slowly little by little she converted herself into a woman that overcame all these difficulties. We became great friends and when I interviewed Panchita she was 90. She said the most important thing that occurred to her was her son. I tried to convince her that the son was possible because there had been such a mother. It was a friendship that lasted until her death and I called the documentary “When a woman doesn’t sleep” and it’s the story of Panchita. I’ve never had a plan; the documentaries chose me.”

*Women's cinematic representation*

“The question you asked me was “How do I feel reflected as a woman?” In the first place I want to “be.” I want to identify as a human being. I want to see like a human, not be put in a little castle to say, women behave themselves like this. In the first place, I want to be drawn like a human being…not like a victim. I feel that in Cuba actually, perhaps we might lack, or need to move toward understanding how difficult are the difficulties women as human beings face in live their lives; and that these necessities don’t limit them, or are not the only and exclusive limits to the role that they have to carry out in the home….

“For example, the theme of “the woman” isn’t a theme that appears sufficiently complex on television or in the media of mass diffusion. Here in this very *machista* society (like in all Latin American societies and like in Spanish society), I could tell you there is a great deal of homophobia. Perhaps the theme of “sexual difference” has
successfully begun to break this taboo, for better or worse. But it’s a “disqualifying vision” because when a homosexual appears on television the treatment is a caricature, we never present them as a person that has or has taken responsibility for difference, has made a choice in their life, and even so is respectable. It’s a caricature that we show off. For me it continues being the same outline, disguised.

“I don’t want to say it’s absolutely the eye of men only and exclusively. I have known many women who are very machista. I don’t want to make men entirely responsible for establishing this relationship or schematic vision about women.

“I believe there are many women who, for convenience, for opportunism, do not confront themselves. There is not a homogenous opinion about these things and it is not easy to impose a discourse that breaks the norms. It’s not easy. Never has been easy and will continue being not easy. I’ll give you an example. Fresas y Chocolate (“Strawberries and Chocolate”) was never shown on television. Nor was the documentary I did on the making of Fresas y Chocolate. What I want to say is this, that to have a discourse, or to have a position that in some way attacks, that breaks, that questions the establishment is not easy. It is not easy and at times you pay a price and sometimes not everyone is willing to pay this price and at times it is not convenient to break swords for a battle so basic. I think that one must see the complexity of the moment. I think the Cuban artist is a special artist because with the crisis we had to face and make a major creative effort. In terms of an author’s creativity it’s more work if you’re in a country in crisis than if you’re not.”

“I think that in all ways in Cuba little by little things are advancing and I think that in this more complex view definite spaces have been won. It was unthinkable 10 years ago to see, even with this schematic and simplified view, to see these themes in the audiovisual media, as much on TV as in film and of course much less in the theatre. Impossible, however, now they are there. I think that women’s discourse about her and by her will appear with time, it will appear and hopefully soon. Hopefully I myself will find the way that I feel comfortable and authentic to speak about these conflicts.”

Another woman is most bothered by the “false, physical, commercial ideal of women, the false image of women as objects of consumption, and this! in a non-
consumer society. Currently, the representation of the women is worrisome, as a social object and throwback to the 1950’s.”

**I-MAGIN-ing Gender**

*Magin* in Spanish means “imagination.” In Cuba it meant, the Association of Women Communicators (MAGIN), a group of women who had been successfully diffusing the concept of gender in and through the Cuban mass media. In 1996, they applied for and were refused status as a non-governmental organizational (NGO), a decision that automatically made the group illegal. They disbanded. In my fieldnotes a Cuban filmmaker and a woman from New York talk about MAGIN. The woman from New York tells me bluntly:

MAGIN was officially disbanded because Vilma Espin, President of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) (and wife of Raul), said there was no need for a self organized feminist collective, that MAGIN was duplicating the work of the Federation and that women should work within the Federation. They had to quit publishing the magazine. She also said MAGIN was beginning to develop feminist theory and that they came up against the men. In Cuba there are no independent self-organized collectives, neither of women, teachers, students, etc.

In her interview, the filmmaker had been hesitant to call herself a feminist even though she was a known advocate for women’s rights and had been a member of MAGIN. My fieldnotes reflect:

Before MAGIN, the filmmaker never belonged to any woman’s organization, and emphatically not to the Federation, (Federation of Cuban Women) which she identified with representing the needs of housewives and rural women, but not professionals. Nor was she interested in affiliating herself with any woman’s group. But another woman had convinced her otherwise and she joined because of her. She called her the soul of the group. MAGIN gave her a new perspective on the importance of a gender focus in the audio-visual. Her professional career began in the film studios
of the Cuban military, an obviously male environment, where she not only worked but also directed men, and didn’t encounter any difficulties in terms of being a woman. Therefore, she never felt a pressing need to ally herself with women. After her work in MAGIN she began to develop a new awareness concerning gender, which has influenced her subsequent work: such as focusing a documentary on a woman in the military in one instance and in another, freely using three women interviewees without feeling the need for male “balance.” Also, she was never interested in being interviewed as a woman war correspondent, although she had been asked various times. But recently she has decided to talk about her experiences because she feels a woman’s experience in the face of war is different than a man’s. She said, “war is anti-filmic.”

A leader or “protagonist” of MAGIN describes the formation of this women’s group and their experience in the effort to diffuse the concept of gender. She tells the story below.³

The Story of MAGIN

“Engels’ scheme was that revolution came first and that feminism was unnecessary within the revolutionary struggle. In Cuba, prevailing concepts had it that feminism was equated with lesbianism and women that began the women’s movement were bourgeois. The first order of the day was national independence and the consolidation of the Revolution. Popularization of “locas lesbianas” (crazy lesbians) was a misconception of feminism believed by many Cuban women, so feminism became a bad word.

“But the encounter with feminists from other parts of the world who found the Cuban women’s position on feminism to be reactionary, just as the Cuban women found feminism to be anti-revolutionary, were ideas hotly contested by women from around the world with Cuban women. It was a comfortable strategy not to bring up the power of men, the patriarchal power, not one demand, not one demand to look toward women as women, well none of these things were worried about. Meanwhile we have been growing up, we’ve been thinking.

“A group of women began to ask why it was so difficult, why there was no recognition, etc. and moreover, why was equality proclaimed in the official documents and it wasn’t true in the concrete. Then there occurred a very interesting and dangerous
process in political terms, women left behind their mass organizations and began to say of what use were they? This was at the end of the 1980’s, when the conditions for the preparation of the Communist Party Congress in 1990 produced a collective discussion on a Base document and what happened was instead of the organization doing it, it was those who had left the organization. They included a questionnaire of women at the base, in the neighborhoods. Instead of being benefited by the equality project with politburo resolutions, they simply had not benefited because no one had stopped women’s double duty, men still ruled in the house, women were not in the tribunals, were not in the position of decision-making and this was in 1993. From a long time back, women have been asking, what use were they? There was a group of women in the communication media that said, independent of whatever existed in the Party, there existed a desire in favor of equality. These ideas did not penetrate to the profound reaches of people’s consciousness and much less with men.

“There were a few actions by young people as in other countries, as a result of a worldwide wave of understanding. Then we felt that from the communication media we could do much more to advance the thought that guided equality, for example: why weren’t we seeing blacks on television? Why, when women came out in the press it was either for commercial reasons or as artists, while men came out in the context of work, in the scientific world? Why in the tribunal was there only one woman and the cameras never focused on her? etc.

“We began to ask ourselves things and we were already a group that knew of the new concept of “gender” and we thought, given that in Cuba the feminist concept of feminism had been so devalued and this had happened in other countries as well, the best we could do was to try to pass some of the feminist ideas by taking another road, by talking about the category of “gender”. This analytical category allowed us to do many things.

“One day a group of us met and wanted to do a seminar to interchange ideas. Every one of the women had very pretty revolutionary files. There was a television director who the year before last put on television the first telenovela that inserted concepts of gender. It was so popular that people from Brazil came to check out how it was possible that this telenovela was beating theirs. Then a forum “Women and
“Communication” was organized where women from Chile, Mexico and various other countries came and spoke in a language that for us was strange. The ideas we had, but the language was new. We didn’t have the words but we had the phenomena and we had the ideas regarding the phenomena. From that point on, we began to analyze what we had in common until one day about 32 women came together and we felt we understood each other and together we could do something. Then another conference supported by UNICEF was held in Ecuador entitled “Gender and Journalism”. At this conference, an anthropologist working in public health opened our eyes to the fact that children and most of all women needed more iron, more calcium, that we have to ask women specific things and how the extreme needs of her sex gave women a situation that wasn’t illness but wasn’t health either, because when we go to the doctor we feel very well but we’re not happy and from that moment nothing could stop the thing (gender awareness).

“Then we did individual growth workshops, that’s what we called them. I’m speaking to you as if we’ve known each other all our lives. In Cuba, for example, everything “mass” is very important, so important that the individual dissolved very quickly. So we did individual growth workshops on everything: all kinds of language, the image of the women, knowing our rights. The first stage of this group grew until it reached about 300 or 400 men and women; and in regards to the men they were not afraid they would be pegged with being feminists or feminine.

“At first the FMC looked upon us kindly. But when they realized that our language was a fascinating language, captivating and a language that “sticks” – when they realized we surpassed them even though we were a group and did not want to be an organization, but we were professionals and everyone did something. There was Irene Ruiz who like to talk about why there weren’t blacks on television and that blacks were part of Cuban reality and she presented images that made one think about his contradiction. We did things that in this moment were a challenge because other people didn’t really believe that much. So our friends (FMC) felt threatened, but well, here also there is another reason at the bottom of it. Your countrymen and the U.S. government had just passed the Toricelli law and Track 2 and as you know Track 2 says to subvert Cuba from within and through intellectuals and organizations. This was true, so the Party decided to cut the legs going down this road and they decided not to create any more
organizations. In this moment we were asking for legal status because legal status would permit the search for funds to do more activities. We made a development program for two years with many actions. I went back to the Dominican Republic. The government had decided not to create more feminist organizations. The group already had a presence. We were presenting the concept of gender to society. Articles were written about us because, like the women in Nicaragua, it was a moment when the patriarchy feared women’s independence.

“To sum up, in 1996 we were called to a Party meeting and told very nicely, with a lot of recognition that not everything “just” is opportune, and that although our propositions were laudable and very correct, it had been determined that no more non-government organizations were being created and so our group would not be legalized. This meant that we were illegal and everything we did from that point on would be illegal. As long as nothing happened, we did things, and everyone recognized us. The patriarchy and machismo was there without a doubt. The FMC was present at this meeting. In order to create another organization, it had to be through an official vehicle (i.e. the FMC) that would do it and we would have to wait to be approved and be given a locale to have meetings. Nothing that is not within these canons is looked well upon, and I’m not saying it can’t be done but that’s how it is.”

Women and the Revolution: Filmmakers speak

“Look. This Revolution has been very big for everyone. But for the woman it’s been doubly or triply big; because so many things have changed for the woman. For the man the changes have been important, significant, but for the woman, the changes have been violently big. Because the woman began to feel she could work shoulder to shoulder with her husband. She could aspire to a career without it costing a cent, whatever she had to study. And so that’s how it was, little by little, realizing that she had in the world a horizon much larger than she had imagined. And from there, of course, all the possibilities for the woman…women began. Those that were illiterate became literate. Those that wanted to study had the possibility to study. All these possibilities. Until that moment they had none but they had none because of tradition: women were made for the home, the husband, the children, the fathers, the grandfathers, to attend to all
these relations. This was something that the woman did not imagine. Traditionally, they had no possibility and then to have all the possibilities. The Revolution was important for everyone but it was three times more important for women.

“Revolutionary social change brought more liberty for the woman and therefore was more important for the woman. You had to have lived it, to have seen it in your own family, your own friends and neighbors. The film “Portrait of Teresa” deals with the theme of machismo in the relationship of a couple. “Portrait of Teresa” not only deals with the issue of women working but with the whole thing about machismo. The husband is macho and she breaks with all that.”

Actually Living Machismo

“Machismo forms part of the Latin culture. I can tell you this machismo now is not the same as in the 1960’s. The machismo of the 1960’s doesn’t want the woman to work. Today I would say that the machismo that exists is more…evasive, disguised….It’s a machismo that goes trying to get the woman to do what he wants her to do, but she of course when she tries to be a free being, isn’t allowed to put a foot. It’s not, like in the 60’s. “I don’t want you to work” - this has ended. …Women don’t accept it anymore, much less a young woman. A woman in her 30’s in the 1960’s came dragging this machismo from her father, from her grandfather, at home. Then when she married, she bowed before the machismo of her husband. But now the young Cuban woman in this moment is a woman who has all the possibilities to exist, to work, to create. How is a man going to come and say: “No, don’t go outside because I don’t want you to. Don’t go out in the street, neither to work nor to study. The woman today would not stand for this. Because the concept about the woman has changed.”

“I don’t think that the Family Code was so implicada in the making of “Portrait of Teresa,” nothing like that. But it does seem to me that the social conditions at that time brought both things as a consequence. On one part, the Family Code and for the other part, the reflection in art – in this case the world of cinematography – a series of questions that were boiling up in society, such as the equality of man and woman, which was a big thing, how can I tell you, very forward, very interesting for all of us, and that it even included the family problem, that wasn’t only a family problem, not a problem only
of labor rights in the family. It was a question whether the law would support the role of
the women in the family. It seems to me that the social moment produced both things in
their own way: one treated in art, the other by legal conscience.”

“The Portrait of Teresa” shows the consciousness raising function of film. The
popular discussions about the film helped people to express, dialogue, listen, and people
began to develop a consciousness about the reality of the themes. [When asked if the
film “Portrait of Teresa” was controversial, she responds by saying it was more than
controversial, it was like “looking into a mirror and not liking what you saw.”] Now
women have gained the right to work doubly hard, at work and in the home. Now the
married woman has double duty. For the woman with kids, triple duty because she not
only has her job, but her husband and kids. Although the Cuban state has now tried to
ease things, I’m not going to say it’s been resolved totally. That a woman would want to
marry in these times, in Cuba and in the world, that she would want to marry, have a
husband, attend to him, and have kids – this woman is heroic, her duty never ends.”

“The state helped by establishing infant circles (circulos infantiles) everywhere
so women with children could “resolve” and work. Then after this preschool, there is first
grade which is semi boarding, where the students receive lunch. Then the woman goes to
work, her child to school and lunches at school. Later the child goes home, someone
picks him up somehow, or she picks him up when she’s finished with her shift, looks for
her son and goes home. And at home, no matter what, despite the school, the lunch, the
lunch in school, and the infant circle, there begins yet another work shift.”

“Not only films but also documentaries have helped the woman develop her
understanding of machismo. As well as the press and television. Actually living
machismo has to act more disguised because the Cuban woman will not now accept it
directly. Even though machismo exists, the revolution included the struggle for the
demands of the woman. Whatever the political, social, context, the woman ought to
continue struggling against machismo, even though this struggle is always inside a
system “X” and cannot be isolated. In Cuba generally, this has changed a lot and the
woman knows her own worth as a teacher, professor, mother, etc. She knows that she is
important in what she has decided to be.”
A filmmaker says, “I have never looked at machismo through sexuality because in my opinion, I think in Cuba in the sexual sphere, it’s the women who command. The man always thinks he’s the one who seduces. But historically it has been the woman who seduces. I see these postures of the rooster like caricatures of themselves. I haven’t had the experience of feminism but in our society we have interceded on behalf of the rights of women. I defend talent in both genders. I look for our place, not as women but showing the talent we possess as human beings and luckily, we’re women. I think that this gives it a different point of view.”

“Women were always the lietmotif of the first lyrical years of Cuban cinema. In many areas, there has been a brake put on patriarchy. Women have power in many important social sectors, except filmmaking. How is it possible that in other sectors women have flourished and in film, in the place where ideas occur, where feelings and thoughts are expressed, the formation of tastes, ideals and ethics, women do not have the same opportunity as in other sectors? I think patriarchal reproduction has been in the hands of the directorship of ICAIC and is not a policy of the Revolution. This has been a mistake because years have passed and these women are now in their fifties for the most part. Now they have the maturity to face a film project but they’ve also lost their youth and vitality and strength and are a little depressed for not having had the opportunity. I think this is important.”

“The past is irreversible. I hope that silent years have served a purpose. At the present time, there are no obstacles for women to begin directing. With the introduction of women in the production of Cuban films we will begin to hear the plurality of voices and diverse themes. There is the need of thematic diversity. We are now at a different moment in Cuban cinema. The present director is not a machista. He’s reached out to women. Individuals were responsible not the system.”

“Women, in order not to discriminate, do not recognize that we are discriminated against.”

Obstacles Women Face: Sacrifices and conflicts

“Men and women both were impacted by the Special Period. After the arrival of the Special Period, women stopped working in film due to the lack of resources and
also because they weren’t given a chance, and the few chances there were, were given to the men.”

“The need for someone to put up the money.”

“The film crews are men. In the beginning, a woman directing was a bit strange but then it became normal. Economics has impeded more than anything else. I didn’t experience discrimination.” [But she later describes how men would deliberately run down the battery to the camera so they would have to stop work for that day. She notes that if she had denounced them, it would have become a difficult situation. She retired instead.]

“Working as a woman, as the director you have to convince the crew what you want to do and how you want to do it. You have to make them see it through your eyes. Convince them that that’s where the camera goes. You needed good social relations.”

In order to get at the obstacles women faced as filmmakers, I tried another questioning strategy with one women. I asked her, “If you wanted to make a documentary about women working in film in Cuba, what would be the dramatic line of the conflict…how would you feel being the protagonist of this drama and what would be the conflict?”

The filmmaker responds: **There are three problems** I believe. First, the real difficulty women have getting into position of direction (executive management). That’s the real difficulty. If it hadn’t been for that, there would be millions of women directors by now, not only in Cuba but everywhere. This difficulty combines a lot of factors…. One important factor is that you must have iron health. Iron. The industry requires big investment. Until now, male directors have been able to make a mediocre movie and go on to make another film.”

The filmmakers most often voiced their belief that the primary obstacles women faced were fundamentally economic. As the years went by, themes like machismo and those that appeared in “Portrait of Teresa,” were abandoned as other problems became paramount. As one filmmaker says, “**Women supported the brunt** of the Revolution and this economic situation, taking care of husbands, children, parents. The domestic life versus the state level -- domestic politics, not the state. This [focus] was a spontaneous phenomenon, not planned.”
Individual and Collectivity. “I worked for the magazine *Bohemia* until I retired. You know how we live and that part of my salary is in dollars and my children are not competitive. I have two children a man and a woman, the female studies biochemistry and the male just finished his studies. I’m now divorced and a widow although I have parents. Women here are for protecting the Revolution and their children. The “everyday” is what develops individuality because for example you have complexity in our economy and people are beginning to think about themselves and their homes. Now we can’t think about the solutions for everyone. The economic situation doesn’t permit thinking about collective solutions. Individuality is always talked about as a function of the individual that surrenders, the mystique of sacrifice that developed in my generation, in which I personally still believe. But in the concrete, people need to think of themselves. These collective solutions and social pretensions are coexistent with socialism and Cuba has had to make concessions.”

“I don’t want to be treated like a victim or victimizer but like a human being. I think that in Cuba today, from the Special Period until now, there are many conflicts that have to do with ethics, with morality that Cuban women are suffering. It’s the conflict of identity. When the phenomenon of prostitution appeared again there was a conjunction of a moral crisis and economic crisis in that a woman was sleeping with a man or twenty men to resolve a material necessity. But this isn’t what so worried me. What concerned me was in the framework of the family and the phenomena that happened in the family when the daughter returned home and the family knew she was prostituting. In other words, how have these ethical “dikes” been broken? I’m not talking about 19th century morality. Nothing like that. I’m talking about moral degradation and how this conflict is resolved within the social fabric. Because on the other side, I want to live life. I only have so long to live and there are things I want to have in life. How can I reconcile my surrender to a social project with my personal fulfillment? In other words, there are things that I don’t want to wait to be old to have. I don’t want to live my whole life in a bad place, I want a home. Finally, how can I reconcile my personal fulfillment with the fulfillment of the country.

So this is a very conflictive reality in this country, a reality of a country with an explosion of intellect and an underdevelopment of material means; and there is conflict,
and this conflict is suffered very much by women. In other words, day by day at home, with the children, how can material well being not supplant spiritual well-being? But, why not, I want to live well. The conflict between the material and spiritual is always present in a human being and I think that it’s present in Cuban women that each time more and more women are breaking the dikes and living in a better way. These ruptures are a conflict. And one doesn’t pass unharmed or unhurt in thinking a different way.

These conflicts and themes are beginning to appear in literature although less so in the mass media. It’s true that the theme of the woman does not appear with sufficient complexity in television or in the media of diffusion.”

Relationships and Health. “[Filmmaking] is a work so interesting it put my health in danger. I retired early from film because I lost perspectives on my physical and mental health. It’s very absorbing work and I lost the margin of balance regarding health. I also lost the best couple relationships for this work and there are things in life that happen only once, they don’t happen a second time. It’s not that I regret the time lived, my job, but my family hated everything that had to do with my job because I spent years without having a family life. But those were great times, how we worked together as a team. Sometimes we get together to reminisce and talk for hours about those times (the golden era of film) and the work experiences, the human experiences - because a lot of things were mixed together there.”

National Identity

“Don’t lose sight of film’s role in the recuperation of the national image, our own identity and image. Film’s recovery project at the beginning of the Revolution (images and identity) -- Cuban film rescued the national identity, it formed a public, and a public that thinks. This has not happened in Latin America. What has happened to Brazilian cinema? What has happened since the 1970’s? What has always happened to Latin American cinema is happening now: the big screens are filled. Who dominates the transnationals on the big screens? North American film. Who is the owner of the large chains? That is to say, what is the destiny of our national television screens? To be clones.”
“**A country that has its cinema**, has been able to record its images, its sounds, its life and environment is a country that has grown and matured because I also think, and express this often -- the idea that culture is the soul of any nation. I also speak in terms of identity when I say that the creation of film and liberation and the introduction of the Cuban woman as a participant in society go together.”

“**Even though now video** is the more economical, the film camera remains a real temptation. As a filmmaker, I appreciate the charm, strength of film and power of a film camera. But perhaps it might be better to contemplate the collective act of people who don’t even know each other going into a theater to collectively watch a film together. People that don’t even know each other are collectively united in “cultural participation,” an act of sharing as they leave the theater, talk about the film, discuss points and issues and what they saw, agree and disagree with. It’s a social and cultural relationship that is provoked by entering a movie theater. So I think the mystery and mysterious attraction of films is in the theater and not so much in the camera. The value of film is that it can seen by everyone like a grand cultural act.”

“**The most important thing** that Cuban cinema has done in the last 10 years has been to look for ways to renovate film language and a way to represent an actual modern sensibility of this century and the next. To educate the public through a new cinema in which the people are given new cultural elements that they have to learn and understand.”

“**Finally, socialism has to mean** that one lives better, has to mean a much more attractive system, has to mean one eats better, healthier, that it’s beautiful and one enjoys more of culture, has to mean all these things; and I think that this moment in Cuba -- how to do this with a richness without it becoming a formula. I think that we are really in a moment of reflection and we are also older.”

“**Time to go inside as a country.**”

**Impact of Globalization**

“**Each time it’s more difficult** for a Latin American filmmaker to reach the large chains of exhibition. Why are filmmakers in these countries continually asking for quotas on the screens? What happened to Brazilian cinema when the state entity ended? What has happened with all the national cinematography that also had the support of the
What has a filmmaker been obliged to do in order to survive? To do advertising or mortgage his house to make the next two or three films. What is the production of all of Latin America in the face of the great North American production? This isn’t a solely Latin American phenomenon. France, Spain, Germany, also do not have a national cinema. Globalization has globalized tastes and then, what happens? They are the owners of the theaters, owners of the advertising houses, owners of the channels. What space is left for Latin American cinema?”

“I think it’s a mistake to think that to enter the market one has to copy a particular schema that doubtless has produced commercial results. But also has produced these results because the market is not in the hands of the poor. Big markets don’t support the great variety of “small markets.” They lose the special particularity of each country and each culture. American film has the reins because they have the power and the money, but I think it’s an error to compete. We can compete. But we can find parallel roads that respect the great cultural diversity. I think that if Cuban cinema is going to be successful on the big screens in important markets, we have to arrive with our identity and very special Cuban way in tact, and the special personality of the author of the work has to be respected.”

II. Filmmakers’ Focus Group

A psychologist, who worked in advertising and continued to educate people on the job about the realities of gender, facilitated the focus group. Along with one or two of the directors present, she had participated with other professional women in communication in activities that MAGIN had organized to educate the media and society about the concept of gender. The three directors present worked either in Cuban television (ICRT) or ICAIC and also freelanced. The discussion was guided but also was quite freewheeling as I imagine focus groups in Cuba must usually be, even the formal ones.

In her introduction at the beginning of the focus group, the publicist/psychologist (these wonderful professional combinations are found in Cuba!) told the group that she wanted to know what the creative team thought of how women’s image was used to sell a
product, and as a strong example, she used women’s image in the sale of Cuba as a

Image of Women

“There’s the sea, tranquil, with all the passion that the sea implies; because

anyway, we have the benefit of the sea around us and all of this can be exploited. But

then to put a women in front of the scene (sea) almost nude with a subtitle that says,

‘Cuba: the pleasure of its company.’ I used this poster to interview women at work,

designers, etc., and most of them saw it as something normal; in other words, the woman

is part of nature. Men say that as well, that woman is part of nature. But most do not see

what the ad is selling. And you see that this patriarchal focus doesn’t bother anyone but

is “normal” and part of nature, which doesn’t permit me to have a consciousness about

how my image as a woman is being manipulated. On top of all this, you have women
designers who consider that women have always been a myth and rather than express a
creative thought, rely on old hooks and elements to do the selling.”

A filmmaker pipes up: “The first woman protagonist after the Revolution is

“Manuela,” who is a woman combatant. Look at the type of women they select: it’s a
total rupture with this dependent woman, with the subordinated woman. Perhaps it’s a
woman already the total opposite. Humberto (the director of “Manuela” and other men’s
films about women) has thought about women as figures in order to present particular
epochs of our history, not to deepen the understanding of the feminine personage. The
fact of selecting a feminine protagonist instead of a masculine protagonist, the woman is
carrying an important role. Because this hadn’t happened before. I agree that not only
was the problem that the woman the works, it’s also a problem of how she’s treated as a
subject and object of the work; not the woman as subject of the work but also the woman
as object of the work. And you have this vision of, say, the colonization of the woman,
terribly colonized…..”

Lack Women Directors

The ICAIC filmmaker comes to the point straight away: why are there no women
directors in feature films? The non-ICAIC filmmaker responds: “I’m going to say what
I think about this. I think that this has been the consequence of ICAIC policy. Totally. I am totally convinced of it. Because if ICAIC would have had a policy to promote, really get behind women directing or had an interest in this, it would have been facilitated. And it absolutely has not been facilitated. It has not been facilitated. First, I think for those within ICAIC it’s very hard for them to realize the way this has been the case with those of us not inside ICAIC. To what level the hostility; it’s very difficult to realize why.”

The ICAIC filmmaker says, “I myself never realized this. I saw it as a generic problem of women but never saw its relevance.”

“You can ask any artist that has worked outside ICAIC. Here’s an interesting anecdote: One day they (ICAIC) invited me to a meeting between Cuban filmmakers and North Americans at the Film Festival. They invited me because the North Americans asked that the director of “Spain in my Heart” (Espana en el Corazon) be invited. If these filmmakers hadn’t wanted to talk to me I would have never been invited. That’s the degree of marginalization.

The third filmmaker interjects: “Not only that, but there is no FILM outside of ICAIC.”

“So at this meeting, I was there, seated and someone asked what we’ve just asked, Why, in Cuba, are there no women directors? And the person who was facilitating the meeting - of course, from ICAIC, said, “Well, yes, the truth is there are many women editors and women in other places, but in direction, we have only Marisol (Trujillo). Now we have Rebecca (Chavez), Miriam (Talavera), and Mayra (Vilasis) beginning, but well, of directors, that’s it.” So Teresa and I don’t exist; we’re two more directors. We have works. We’ve been recognized. You can see in Mayuya’s book the absence of women. As far as ICAIC is concerned, no other cine exists.”

The third filmmaker notes: “Before the Revolution there was Cuba SA Films that was a production house that had the Popular Socialist Party that did things. Carpentier worked there, Onelio Jorge Cardoso worked there, Nicolas Guillen, important people worked there and this film was never recognized. Furthermore, the films were collected and no one knows where they ended up. Someone said it disappeared deliberately, and that some of it was found in a trash can outside ICAIC.”
“But I’ll tell you something: I have worked inside ICAIC and they haven’t been so benevolent with me either. I’ve worked in ICAIC all my life. I reached first assistant director; I did it al pulmón (with all her might) demonstrating that I could. Usually the assistant directors were men. I made my first film as assistant director with “Portrait of Teresa” in 1978. Apart from everything else, you were an assistant director if someone trusted you with their film, which wasn’t easy. Because the job of assistant director was thought to entail such physical strength, that it had to be for someone notoriously strong, which, of course, had to be a man. To ride a horse, trudge through the mud. I trudged through the mud, rode a horse, all of it because I wanted to direct. And to direct I knew I had to go through all of this. I became an assistant director in 1985. Like life itself, so in “Portrait of Teresa,” many male companions became an assistant director sooner than me. In other words, it’s not just a problem of women outside of ICAIC. I think that the concept of machismo towards women, how shall I say -- to throw women aside -- is inside these same people of ICAIC.”

The Mechanics of Oblivion II

The filmmaker outside ICAIC asks: “Have you seen the Cine Cubano (magazine) from the 20th Anniversary of the New Latin American Film Festival (1999)? Have you seen it? Look. First of all, there isn’t one article written by a woman. There isn’t one article about a woman. Twenty years of Latin American cinema and they don’t talk about Maria Luisa Bemburg? Not even Bemberg! (from Argentina) Forget about Cuban women. No one. There is a nice section in the issue called “Declarations of Love” (for the love of film), and it begins with one declaration by Buñuel, who ends by saying, “isn’t Latin American a marvelous being.” I have nothing against ‘marvelous beings’ but there are no women to be found anywhere in the section declaring their love. In this anniversary issue there are only photographs of actresses.”

The facilitator chimes in, “Without an analysis of the situation one would continue thinking this is normal.”

“Also, I was awarded “The Coral” (Cuba’s most prestigious prize in film) in 1988 and in the list of Corals for that year I don’t appear.”

The others ask, What did ICAIC say?
“They said it wasn’t in the archive. Such simple answer: we don’t have it; who knows what happened. I don’t think that in the face of things like this we can cross our arms.”

Invisible Violence

The psychologist/publicist agrees: “We have no other alternative but to make the effort ourselves, look for our different mechanisms to sensitize people because there is also this: when I’ve talked with men in various lines of work about these themes (i.e. in what a woman can or cannot do in X profession, they are aware of the role the woman plays but it’s as though it were a rhyme. They say it’s always been like. Then we see these attitudes in film and you begin to realize or to see it as something habitual. It’s the same as when you’re evaluated, like I said, this way of not realizing or seeing something doesn’t mean it’s not invisible violence. It is aggression.”

Women’s Point of View

“I want also to say that there is something I have historically opposed: that is, I believe that a woman does not have to only treat women’s themes. The woman artist has a distinct way of seeing things, a different sensibility that functions in treating our themes and functions to treat whatever theme of life. I had to defend myself a lot when I made War Correspondents, which has a masculine theme, but I was sure that a man would not have had the same focus. I don’t say better or worse or equal. What I say is that at least it would not have been the same. So I think that women have gone missing, not just for the men but we have been missing for ourselves, in our education, in our formation, in our daily life, we’ve been missing this feminine point-of-view. In everything. We miss it in the culture, in literature, we’ve always read many things, seen many things, many works of art, more of them made by men. Culture - not that culture is everything - is education, although the professor is often a woman in the examples used by men. So this woman is being a vehicle to transmit things that are determined by a masculine focus.”

Filmmaker: “This is what we have to unravel.”

“This is how it is with all the themes in daily life, this sensitivity before a mountain of things.”
“Something like this happened when I made the documentary of Pablo. He was always seen as a hero not as a human being, not a human being in flesh and bones, whose greatness was to transpose this humanity into determined questions; more than this I wanted to bring him down to earth. I don’t know if I succeeded but at least I saw him as a person that was here, like a Pablo that was close to us now, not a hero that died in 1936. It seems to me that a man would have extended the heroic figure and not the human image.”

“Something similar happened to me with Cespedes (a documentary she made) and I thought, he’s always so talked about and the same things are always said. So I started looking for the other Cespedes, the close Cespedes, Cespedes, the human being. And I soon found that Cespedes had written poetry and I never knew that and I began to read his poetry and I was amazed. Then another interesting thing happened with this documentary. I had 15 minutes and it couldn’t be longer and I had five interviews, 3 women and 2 men. It was too many so I cut it down to 3 interviews. I thought maybe for “balance” I should have 2 women and 1 man even though the film was in what the women had to say. Then I said, Come on, *chica*, if you’ve done other documentaries with only the male point of view, why do I have to balance men with women and finally, I decided that it was a feminine vision of Cespedes and it was the documentary I really wanted to make. And this other Cespedes is a Cespedes totally different from what the people know. Totally distinct. For me, truthfully, I discovered a different Cespedes. A figure that I felt to be distant now is close and that’s another marvelous thing about documentary that, like you felt with Pablo, when you begin to investigate something, you fall in love with it. That’s why I say that I’ll never stop making documentaries. I think our sensibility motivates us.”

III. Panel - “Women at the Audio-Visual Crossroads”

This purpose of this section is to convey the findings from the panel, particularly the critique and analysis that was presented by Cuban women in communications during the “Women at the Audio Visual Crossroads” conference held in Havana, March 25, 1999. The panelists were women media workers and members of the vanguard
speaking to an informed audience of peers, who also participated in a critical discussion (debate). In this old battle, it seemed to many present that the news at the “crossroads” was old, summarized by this panelist who said:

In spite of the institutions that represent us as workers, or as artists, or in our case as women, Cuban women filmmakers are each time more alone in our struggle to obtain access to the resources that permit us to exercise our function as film directors, and the right of our work to promotion, distribution and exhibition.6

Women and the Revolution

A journalist speaks: “In general terms, how do I see the phenomena of women not having power? You say it’s because men are in charge. I was remembering how, when we were analyzing all the big press stories about, for example, a tour of Fidel’s through the provinces, or something like that, you never saw a single woman in the group that accompanied the chief of the Revolution. And why? Why don’t women accompany the chief of the revolution? As women we are on the periphery, supporting. We have been in the offices, not the ones making decisions but in the offices, doing, constructing, and propping things up. Supporting everything. But we are not even in the tribunals. And look, if we don’t point out the patriarchy, it’s because we haven’t yet even popularized the word. But thinking women in this country know very well there is a tremendous patriarchy.

“What happened in the beginning? In the beginning it’s a beautiful liberating project, as we all know, and loved; and we continue loving it in that it involves all the dispossessed, all the unjustly treated, and among them ourselves as women. While the emancipatory project did this, we were happy; because in good measure through the FMC (Federation of Cuban Women) we conquered unimaginable things that no other feminine movement in Latin America ever had…such as saving the woman from prostitution. We became literate and were happy doing so many things that coincided with our interests. Now, when we’ve arrived at a determined point in time, and begin to have particular interests of our own, we are told with these words, that we can’t be seen as something
“distinct” because we’re equal. As time passed we’ve seen this to be a great untruth; we’re not equal nor do we wish to be. Because I don’t want to be like any man. What I want is to be like I am, but have equal opportunities, not be discriminated against.

“But we don’t have conciencia, because these things are not spoken about in forums, not spoken in associations of any type and not even in the organizations of women. It’s to say, we’re not spoken about in terms of being a woman but in terms of being a revolutionary. And for us being revolutionary was very important, it was nothing more or less than to maintain this country where it now stands, here, doing this meeting. Well, there has always been another priority concern and that’s the political, that of the Revolution, that of unity. So how am I going to raise feminist or feminine demands, or of gender, if the first priority of the Revolution is other? It’s all very complex. There’s also another element, and that is that when we begin to speak of these things, well, we’re strange people. I think of other groups and of other people who have wanted to say and do something. And then, also there’s been a historical reference that repeats the same history…that is, as women of the time we repeated the same history of those women who preceded us because in this country we did have a feminist movement that contributed to the Latin American feminist movement.

“But what happened was the Batistazo arrived. Those women back in 1939 (before World War had yet begun) demanded the rights of Jews and opposed anti-Semitism; had obtained language in the 1940 constitution that would include illegitimate children and the children of married couples as equal before the law; these women decided to struggle against Batista and for political and national interests they forgot about themselves as women. That was then and maybe it was necessary. What did the 1952 civic front of women Martianas do? It was a front of women that struggled for women and with a tremendous broadmindedness because they were in all the political parties and of all sexual preferences…This was a time of advancements…They did the same thing in 1952. When Batista made the coup d’état, they dedicated themselves to the revolution, to make the revolution, and to support the revolution. They forgot themselves. And still they committed the supreme error, that is, in 1959, the 28th of January, which is the date in which they founded the civic movement of women
Martianas, on the date of José Martí. Well, they said everything had been gained, so there was no further reason for the group to exist and they disbanded. “When we started to think as women and speak as women, then no, this was seen as divisive. The meaning was lost for a simultaneous -- not parallel -- but simultaneous struggle, the need and necessity for women to liberate themselves. All these things have been lost along the way. Speaking today was necessary because studies, there are, and also people that think and know. But what is missing is theoretical development. When a group of women here, among them myself, wave the concept of gender, without speaking of feminism – what a bad word! The concept of gender, this too is a strange word that doesn’t have anything to do with anything. And still many of our colleagues don’t use it. For this reason you’re not going to find what you want, yet. Yet.”

Film to Video Devolution

“I have brought with me Mayuya Douglas’s book, The Black Tent, a very detailed chronology of cinema in Cuba from 1897 to 1990, in order to have an idea about the absence of women in this medium. Before 1959 there were only 6 women mentioned, who either had bought a production company, began editing a newsreel, etc. but no directors. The first notice of a woman director is that of her death in 1974; Cuba’s first woman director, Sara Gomez, goes unmentioned before that.

“After many years without incorporating new creators, at the end of 1975 ICAIC moves the young people who had come to ICAIC as assistants in direction, screenwriters, directors of newsreels, critics and analysts into documentary production. From this group it was anticipated that women directors would be incorporated. In 1985 it says that a group of documentary directors were promoted to directors of fiction feature films, and it says these promotions will continue in subsequent years and will include women directors. That was in 1985. We’re now in 1999, and this has not happened.

“In spite of the early arrival of film to Cuba in 1897, during the age of the neo-Republic cinema was never a secure industry nor an art with esthetic accomplishments. Throughout all this history the woman filmmaker does not appear. 1959 arrives and shortly thereafter, the creation of ICAIC; and the Cuban woman, who after the Revolution is present in the most unlikely places, still does not appear in the film medium
in even the most classic professions women working in film usually occupy – editors, costume designers, script continuity and make-up artists, until 1974 and the death of Sara Gómez, the only woman director of feature films, whose first fiction feature was finished after her death by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa.7

“The second feature film directed by a woman was Teresa Ordoqui 13 years later in 1987. Te Llamarás Innocencia (“I Will Call You Innocence”) was produced by the television film studios and has been in our opinion consciously forgotten and almost not exhibited. Between 1970 and 1975 besides ICAIC there were the film studios of the television, the studios of the Armed Forces (closed since 1975) and in the production for the military sphere there are no women working in production. Only ICAIC has make-up artists, scripts, costumes, etcetera, and only one woman editor. Later there began to appear women as analistas, who did research, some became assistant directors. This job began to encourage women: some gained admittance to jobs in sound, three women began to direct: Marisol Trujillo at ICAIC, Teresa Ordoqui in television, and me in the military studios of FAR.

“We began the decade of the 1980’s with three women directors, 83 years after the arrival of film in our country, and 21 years after the triumph of the Revolution. To continue: three more directors are integrated in television: Lisette Vila, Gloria Pedroso and Norma Eras; three more at ICAIC: Veronica Chavez, Mayra Villasis and Miriam Talavera; and – I’m still talking only about film -- four more in FAR: Maritza Sánchez, Regina Domínguez, Mabel Ascuy and Mercedes Ascaño. These last two women work in the news, not documentary. These studios of FAR transformed from studios of film to studios of film and television and, as contradictory as it seems, was the place where most women gained access to directing. And with video, the total list of women broadens. Between those women that shoot film in 35 mm and those that shoot video like film by 1989 there were 22 women. This is the situation before the arrival of the Special Period and the drastic reduction of cinematographic production and the closure or transformation of the production houses [film studios] since 1989 outside of ICAIC.

“Since the beginning of the 1990’s, film in Cuba is made inside of ICAIC. This has resulted in the diminishing and closure of the doors to women filmmakers. In the 1990’s ICAIC produced Mujer Transparente, five stories of women, two directed by men
and three by women: Ana Rodriguez, Mayra Seguera, and Mayra Vilasis, those who demonstrated great quality and dominion of the profession. But we have, as women, few possibilities of directing fiction. For the rest, beginning from the 1990’s the possibility of directing film has finished. Video was our last hope and with that we had the possibility of beginning a new relationship without losing our prior love, that of film. For some, video was a way of producing for television that dramatically reduced resources and production time. What is undeniable is that many filmmakers having been obliged to direct video, have raised the standards of this kind of production. Video has also given many women the possibility of beginning to direct, on the one hand because of the reduced production costs and on the other, the institutions of video production have multiplied.

“But also what has happened is that our work in video, in comparison with quality films, is almost not exhibited nor commercialized. Our presence in international film festival, in person and our works, has almost disappeared. Video continues being the poor brother and we can’t count on institutional support for participating in the festivals where video has access. Almost no organism has money to send a single video cassette.

“To conclude, we consider that in these moments there are a number of important women capable of directing film or video as film. The access of women to direction has contributed in important ways. Contributing also to the promotion of women are the School of Film, Radio and Television at the Institute of Superior Art, the International School of Film and both have since the 1990’s a number of women graduating a total of 30. Where are these women now? Very few of them have access to the possibilities of directing their work in this medium, without taking into consideration that in the 1990’s there were possibilities for women to work in creative groups of the Association of Brothers Saíz, where many women gained access.

“At any rate, fiction continues being a “taboo,” contrasted with women working in TV, who on occasion direct telenovelas of up to 100 chapters, in film only two women have directed a feature film. Shorts and medium length fiction has been made by a number of women, many as graduate theses. Our statement for this panel as two women filmmakers by profession and heart -- we have to confess, we would have preferred that
the transition from film to video have come in our lives as an option, not as the last alternative.”

*Women in Film “Evolution”*

This panelist began with the question: **What is the context of filmmaking for men and women?** What is the reality? Because there are many problems that we share in common. So my approach to the problem of the woman in film will be in terms of what I consider the fundamentals and some preoccupations for which I do not pretend to have the answers. Moreover, I obviously don’t have the truth in hand; rather, the purpose is to debate the issues.

“Much has been discussed and will continue to be discussed concerning the Cuban response in the face of neo-liberal globalization. The response, as some believe, cannot be based on a homogenization or standardization of our culture. The diversity within unity is the proposition that I identify with. But the concept of diversity is subject to debate worldwide and seems associated with anatomical differences: black, Indian, woman, as well as sexual and religious affiliations, etc. Diversity is not well understood. That is, that which isn’t contained within the concept of unity can take us to criterion that like those segregated identities can be converted and have been converted in some countries, into a way of being political – identity politics, or the politics of the minority. This is the more sophisticated version. Less evident and more crafty is that which neo-liberal globalization proposes that nobody, or few, talk about: we divide our own struggle to preserve identity, proposing fragmenting models that lead to a devaluation of our collective identities as a people. This situates the debate in terms of “identities” against “identity.” For this reason, I propose that there be extreme caution when we approach the theme of the woman filmmaker in relation to professional opportunities in the actual moment – we run the risk of being permeated with this kind of thinking.

“Therefore I choose to separate the problems that have been confronted by filmmakers of both sexes in order to adequately undertake a description of the environment where our problems are located. Many are going to protest. Other will feel attacked. It isn’t a matter of negating what has been done in this sense. It’s a matter of
affirming that what has been done has been insufficient and hardly scratched the surface of the problem, apart from its complexity. What does it matter for the right of the documentary to exist if we don’t struggle with still more force for the right of the documentarist to the resources to maintain it alive? To give an example. Supposedly, to provide services to foreign productions had as the dramatic consequence, intentions aside, of getting rid of national film with the resulting displacement and frustration of the individual artist, especially directors of both sexes, who quickly found themselves without a space. This is difficult to understand; even more so in that television worldwide is one of the major consumers of documentary film and fiction made especially for this medium. I think television should revisit the problem regarding the possibilities of making low budget films, which doesn’t imply low quality, and could contribute to making our big screens attractive, reducing the presence of North American cinema of low quality. On the other side, it favors projects about the universal aspects of our specific reality. I am sure that we are in the presence of product that could be sold to foreign television. Talent abounds as do professionals with high skills.”

**Access to Space**

She continues: “With the closing of the other film studios (FAR, ICRT), only ICAIC is left with the will (and resources) to maintain a national production, but this is without special merit since the purpose of its existence as a cultural project of the Revolution, is precisely to make Cuban cinema. To reach its objectives, it was the first to offer services to foreign productions, to make co-productions and to look for external financing to make cinema totally for Cubans. For this, not only were specific personnel utilized but, creators (creadores) without distinction of sex were invited to participate in the search for the financing of their projects. In other words, for the filmmaker at ICAIC there was a space created, a space to develop the fight for resources, which was different from those other filmmakers who lost their original space (the film studios of other state organisms that had closed completely); and the young, who, despite some exceptions, will graduate and not find space either. The problems of the creators at ICAIC is found fundamentally in 1) the approval (aprobación) of projects, independently if they have
national or external financing; 2) relationship with the production apparatus; and 3) the major or minor capacity of the those looking for financing to find it.

Promotion of Films

“Another angle of the problem is that once the film is completed only feature fiction films can count on promotion, exhibition, attention of the specialized critic, and the press. Although I have reservations about the quality of work that is developed in favor of fiction films, what’s certain is that something is done. It’s different in the case of documentary film. Documentary film is invisible to the promotional apparatus, for the specialized critic, for the functionaries in charge of supporting your exhibition in the country’s only possible spaces: television, film theaters and the video circuits of ICAIC. In the critics’ event in Camagüey, it was concretely planned that the places where North American films are exhibited, in video rooms, etc., why not program a documentary in either video or film? Then at least there’s the presence of film, almost always North American, and a national documentary - that provides some balance. This was very well planned but up to now nothing has been done. No results anywhere.

“It is my estimation that television has closed its doors to Cuban film. Closed. For me personally they remain closed. Cuban cinema does not exist for [Cuban] television. In terms of a possible discriminatory attitude with respect to women in their access to filmmaking, we cannot forget that in the first place, it carries a man’s name: el cine (film). Also, its second name is masculine: el septimo arte (the seventh art). Moreover, it only has fathers, not one woman even served to give it birth. When did the first woman filmmaker appear? I don’t know. I only know that in the world panorama they remain scarce and with few works, although they stand apart by their quality. In Cuba, before the Revolution, I only saw the debut of one woman director in 1952 or 1958. It was Evelia Joffre. They turned over a production that had already been filmed and which had resulted in a chaos, for her to carry, not the credits but the discredits. In productions, they prefer men, even in those professions “suited” for women such as make-up artists, costumers.
“In honor of the strictest truth, it’s the Revolution that opened the doors of film to women in Cuba. They are a little ajar, no? Not with open arms. Directors, producers, screenwriters, script continuity, make-up artists, editors, functionaries. However, in the majority of cases the feminine presence does not correspond with its potential in the sector. There are areas where their presence is zero or almost zero. Camera. Sound. However, in feature films, that presence appeared in the death of the first woman filmmaker of the Revolution, Sara Gómez, who without completely finishing her film, De cierta manera seems to have hung a curse on us. Such luck that in 40 years of Cuban cinema, we can not count one 35 feature film directed entirely by a woman, which in my opinion, constitutes a shame. Teresa Ordoqui, with Te llamarán inocencia, was shot in 16mm, which I don’t understand, and is practically a clandestine film.

Future Research Questions

“How has the woman constituted the revolution within the Revolution that begins from the principle that no political discrimination consciously exists with regard to us, This absence can only be explained by unconscious discrimination, dictated by the sexist component of our idiosyncrasies that effects both men and women. I urge a rigorous and exhaustive study of these phenomena which, in accordance with the characteristics of our social project, can qualify as a dysfunction or anomaly.

“The future does not look any better. To demonstrate that, we only have to answer the question previously asked: How many young Cuban girls have entered and graduated in the film schools of San Antonio de los Baños and ISA (Instituto Superior de Arte)? There’s another: “What has happened with those who have obtained access and graduated? There does not exist an exhaustive study of this problem that identifies the least apparent causes of the problem. I only recommend that this action not be fragmented and that it does not lead us to involuntarily create our own ghetto.”

Women and Television

The third panelist and television director: “The woman in society, her participation in society, in politics, in the different areas of society, even when
constituting a type of take over of power, never subverts or even questions the concept and construction of patriarchy. Women’s own official institutions, even when activating serious programs in favor of the woman do not go beyond these limitations. In principle a fundamental indicator is the leading political role (protagonismo) of the woman in the many and varied spheres of the Cuban state, but one that diffuses a very different picture from the real nature of woman; one that stimulates woman’s subordination as mother, woman as spouse, and the feminine woman. The woman as a human being is denatured in order to reproduce the cultural codes of her millennial mission.

“I have reflected upon these aspects for years trying to encounter an answer so illuminating that it would be capable of clarifying the correct road before the urgent call to begin the march. When on occasion there is still the need to break old ways of acting we are afraid of the social implications, when obsolete moral prejudices and old customs are rejected by some part of society but are present in the everyday constituting vectors of development, in the dynamic of the spiritual and physical evolution of society. Television, the media par excellence for provoking familiarity with this, offers answers about identity. I ask, Why, if we are not a television that lives off advertising, do we feel fear in involving ourselves in this need to let it function positively for these models of “rupture”? I also ask myself, for television that depends in a certain way on advertising subsidy, if logic is justified with respect to the subordination of general taste that obliges an opportunistic posture in the reproduction of models that please the apathy of the consuming tele-audience. But in the case of television subsidized by the state, the only explanation is the ideological disequilibria in relation to significant participation (participacion protagonica), not numerical but of gender. Because I don’t things are resolved with ten men and then there are 100 women as happened with Blacks with this idea of “balance.” This is not the problem. The problem is that there be a leading role in the place there can be, that the truth be felt, and that it go toward a vanguard. It isn’t a question of numbers but of those in the vanguard being in the vanguard. That they be people truly ready for this evolution that society needs. Now is the time for televised work to deepen human feeling. For its stories to lay the foundation for a serious and detailed study of social reality, its social organization in regards to individuals.
“Where is the strategic key? Along with Martí (*el maestro*), I believe in equilibrium of social forces. But the first forces that ought to be balanced are those of gender because that is the union and creation of life. And life should not begin badly. By experience, we know that what begins badly ends badly. Can this issue be resolved by television? Not really. Television is certainly a power but an imaginary power. It’s indispensable then that the effort begin in real power. That’s the proposal.”

**Women and Video**

A woman active in the National Video Movement of Cuba, a sponsor of the conference begins: “I have put together a few lines in the manner of a chronicle about women’s participation in the video movement in Cuba. The first reference I want to make is to Mercedes Perez, who was the director of educational television, and although no longer with us was an intense force in the movement.

“The first meetings of the National Video Movement of Cuba (around 1988) counted on the participation of the work realized by women inside the national institutional organizations. This was fundamental in that period. The majority of audiovisual production equipment was acquired by the management of these organisms for use in purely official functions to works of documentary importance. These first informational promotions were motivated by the institutions desire to communicate. So we can point to, for example, women working and involved with the activity of the Ministries of Construction, the State Committee of Collaboration, the Ministry of Industrial Fisheries, and the Merchant Marine among others. They registered for courses designed to better the technological quality of the audiovisual media and received certificates from IRCT (Cuban television) and the National Video Movement of Cuba.

“With regard to bettering the quality of the message I have to mention Gloria Pedrosa, a woman recognized for working tirelessly to contribute to this important objective through the organization of seminars and workshops within our organization. The National Video Movement, even from the beginning when it was a small group carried out a national event that permitted the interchange of experiences, discussions in regards to the ways and means to convince the management of our respective institutions to acquire equipment, and how to find a better way to support the needs of video makers
(videastas). The first year the group was headed up by José Antonio Jiménez, who was a strong supporter of women in production. Nor can we fail to mention the continuing support for women provided by the National Movement of Video in Cuba.”

**Distribution of Video Programs**

“Videos were shown in the video screening rooms of theaters across the country. Back then Alina Reybourn, who worked at ICAIC, conducted an extensive search of video materials throughout the island for ICAIC’s screening rooms. And in the past, they existed, even in the far corners of our country.

The feminine presence in video was also supported at this time in television with material directed by us. The television program *Prismas* was the primary medium to disseminate our work. More than five years ago a group of women directors from the military film studios (FARC) enlarged the ranks of those making video. We have been enriched by the professional support of this mass medium of diffusion. In teaching, as much as in institutional promotion, and the recent incursions into publicity, the feminine gender has been present fortifying the audio-visual communication activity of our country.”

**IV. The Transparent Women of Cuban Cinema**

The following section examines the concept of transparency in relation to women represented in Cuban cinema and working in film production.

**Interrogating Transparent Women**

While the allegorical condition of women as embodiments of a concept of nation has been sustained, the female figure has emerged in Cuban films as the agency through which a new range of critical discourses about Cuban culture in general and the revolution in particular are enunciated. Evolving as a series of responses to the development of contemporary Cuban society, the cinematic representation of women retains the one cardinal feature that Humberto Solás had designated as the essential feature of the female characters of *Lucia*: transparency.
For the three female protagonists in Lucia, transparency meant at once the social condition in which male characters did not so much see women as see through them. Solás’s repertory of heroines were all socially marginalised beings, ‘unseen’ within the patriarchal power structure before and after the revolution. But beyond that diegetic notion of transparency, the film was configured discursively in such a way as to motivate the audience to read into the narrative destiny of the three heroines the larger panorama of a century of the struggle for national liberation and self-realisation. This ‘propensity’ to read the nation through the transparency of the female allegory of Lucia was no mere accident but derived from the cluster of textual practices Solás employed that defined the cinematic text not merely as a reflection of social reality, but also as the occasion of a particular type of audience engagement. In Lucia the female figure, rather than functioning simply as the mimetic representation of gender or class struggle, thus became the ‘site’ in which the audience participated metaphorically in the process of national self-realisation. (D’Lugo, 1993, p. 280)

Solás was not the only Cuban filmmaker to use women as a code of representation. The practice was so widespread among directors that the film-going public became habituated to reading the representation of the Cuban nation through the images of women. Arrendondo (1997) argues that by appropriating the female body to signify the nation (i.e. the transparent women), the representation of women became “empty signs because they were acted upon by history and society; with the re-appropriation of their bodies, women gain agency to become subjects” (pp. 26). “Translucid” characters in which the female body is not co-opted “represents the experience of individualized women….and women’s agency within their society” (p. 26).

The Film: Mujer Transparente (Transparent Woman)

In the film, Mujer Transparente, “Isabel,” is the first vignette, a screenplay by Tina Leon from which the film gets its title. “Isabel” exemplifies the transparent woman: unseen in the private sphere at home, unseen by her husband and children, but becoming visible to herself. The notion of “transparent” women bothered me and I reached for other translations (e.g. “translucid”) that might reveal a more liberating meaning. I went back to the interview text and to Hector Veitia, the film’s director, to uncover the filmmakers’ meaning. He replied:
the title *Mujer Transparente* came out of a story written by my wife by the same name which later became one of the stories of the film which I directed. In the beginning the story had that title, but the rest of the directors of the other stories liked it so much that it was decided the film should have that name. *Mujer Transparente* means a woman that nobody notices although without her nothing would be done because she is always doing the things that nobody values, nor her husband, nor her children, because everybody assumes that she is just doing the usual things she should.

Another Cuban friend and filmmaker said it meant this to her:

Transparent means something that can be seen in its totality,  
Like glass when it’s clean that can be seen through the other side,  
Or like in water that you can see the bottom of when it’s not deep.  
I extend the meaning to a person who knows, understands, perceives,  
or could get to know, understand, and perceive. Its utilization here is poetic, there are 5 stories of women that look in the mirror, did you notice?

Ana Rodriguez, who directed another of the film’s vignettes, “Laura,” was interviewed for this study and discussed her use of the word “transparent”:

My intention with the work, well, my idea arose because of friends of mine from infancy who left Cuba at the time of Mariel. We had studied together since elementary school and always had studied together including at the University, although different careers. They decided to leave Cuba and I decided to stay and I always felt that the separation was not clean, was not transparent -- translucent, diaphanous, in that moment. Without discussion or political confrontations, etcetera, but it was a rupture without words. I knew they were leaving but I didn’t know the day they left. With these friends I shared many treasures and mysteries, the beauty of youth and something was left, something that I didn’t get to say to these two friends who I never saw again.

Martin D’Lugo (1997) had this to say about “Laura”:

Laura’s reminiscences of the two decades she has known her friend, Ana, thus sketch a more generic history with which a whole generation of Cubans can easily identify. The most powerful moment of the story occurs when Laura comes to the
tourist hotel where she will meet Ana and is ignored by the desk clerk, thus making her feel that she is an alien in her own country and bringing an audience of both men and women to identify with Laura’s sense of marginalization (p. 164).

Paulo Antonio Paranaguá elaborated:

The meeting between two old girlfriends, one an exile and the other having stayed in Cuba, provides an appropriate setting for doing the rounds of a fair number of topics for reflection and sources of vexation for someone taking stock from the perspective of the Revolution’s heroic years, the sixties. Issues are no longer tackled within a narrow frame of reference but in terms of the individual’s links to the collective and to politics. The tensions created by tourism, the bureaucratization of the elites, lost illusions, wasted energies, the refusal to admonish those who left the country and, therefore, the need to re-start the interrupted dialogue with them, all that Laura delivers in the space of a short wait, some walking about and an internal monologue.

Ana notes that the editor of the film worked to unify the five distinct stories. It was an exercise for the “young directors,” a film that reflected the experience of Cuban women from young to old. “The film went well, a little daring, bold, but my intention was personal. It was part of the social reality that the country lived. At that time we saw the beginning of prostitution, the tourist problem, there didn’t exist the convertible money exchange, in other words the dollar was penalized. Amidst all this, I was very connected to the theme of “the community” and whatever new treatment of it. I think the Cubans in exile and those in Cuba have different points of view, but they also have points of view that unite them; and I think that this occurs with people all over the world. The Boliviano that meets with a Boliviano in Turkey are going to have a dialog together they couldn’t have with a Turk because there have common roots. And yes, I believe in identity and I think a lot of people left this country as an economic exile more than a political exile, and this is faced in the film. People have a right to decide how they are going to live their life and decide what to support and I think that people that don’t bet on something, don’t win, because they vegetate and don’t live. That’s how I think and I very much respect the decisions of any human being to decide to change their status in life and not to live in
Cuba anymore and to live in another country; and for this they don’t stop being a Cuban. These were the things that inspired my theme for the film, which at that time were quite controversial.

“Films are like that, the liberty of each one to interpret. I think a lot of people thought or understood the film in many ways, they thought that the girl that lived in Cuba had problems, and I thought to the contrary. In other words, my vision at the moment of developing the character was that she was a realized woman in the best sense, a woman who had had two marriages and her second marriage was strong, she was a professional that had had her children, had the primary necessities of life covered, and was very clear and peaceful carrying on in her life. The other character who live in the U.S. – and this only by intuition – that in a way she can’t think and can’t return to being what she was and I think that yes, life is a little like that, that in the people who left Cuba there remained an empty space that couldn’t be filled and maybe tried to be filled with children, family, having the material needs covered, but they have a sadness. I don’t think exile resolves all problems. You have to be very strong. Exile is difficult and you have to know how to grow in exile.”

**Brief Summary of Major Findings**

The major findings, briefly summarized below, will be discussed in the following chapter:

The major findings from the data sources are that:

1. Women filmmakers’ access to and participation in the cinematic production of cultural meaning in Cuba are primarily through 1) the documentary film genre, and 2) the filmic representation of women on-screen, where their ubiquitous image was identified with processes of revolutionary social change and the historical recuperation of national identity. In effect, Cuban cinema created the “new man” through the image of women.

2. The presence and visibility of women on the Cuban screen goes in tandem with their absence and invisibility off screen: a lack of systematic support for women’s professional development in terms of opportunities and creative spaces to direct feature films, to access resources for the promotion and distribution of their films, and to influence their own representation in the production of national Cuban cinema.
Nos quedamos... Como se dice en el argot cubano, estábamos pintando y nos quitaron la escalera. Nos quedamos colgados de la brocha, y fue un precipicio. Caímos, Caímos, Caímos... Todo faltó, el combustible, el dinero, la comida... El país tenía deudas. Entonces faltó de todo: no había luz, los apagones fueron históricos... Aquellas vidrieras vacías, llenas de papeles y revistas, sin un blúmer, sin una blusa, sin un jabón para lavarse... Yo creo que la historia algún día tendrá que recoger el poder resistencia de este pueblo. Este pueblo ha resistido lo que tú no te puedes imaginar, porque faltó: la carner, el pollo, los huevos, el jabón para lavarse... Una crisis desesperante (p. 17).

In her interview Norma mentions both Gloria Arguelles and Julia Yip. “In my interview with Santiago Gloria Arguelles was there, she started with the Noticiero but then went over to documentaries and later to editing feature films (fiction). Gloria is a founder also. We were neighbors in the barrio.” Regarding Julia Yip, she says, “I recommend you see an editor in Cuba who came in right after I did named Julia Yip.” I note this in order to document the historical chronology and presence of women working in Cuban film.

Translations throughout this study are mine except where otherwise noted.

“El socialismo finalmente tiene que querer decir que uno viva mejor, tiene que querer decir un sistema mucho mas atractivo, tiene que querer decir que uno coma mejor, y mas sanamente, que sea hermoso, que uno disfrute mas de la cultura; tiene que decir todas esas cosas, y yo creo que este es un momento en que en Cuba esta y como hacer eso, hacerlo con la riqueza sin que eso se convierta en un esquemita, en un formula. Yo creo que nosotros estamos realmente en un momento de reflexion y tambien estamos mas viejos.”

Cespedes, a Cuban patriot and slave-owner, was the first to free his slaves in an act known as “El Grito de Yaro.”

“A pesar de la existencia de instituciones que nos representan como trabajadores, o como artistas, o en nuestro caso como mujeres, los cineastas cubanos estamos cada vez mas solos en nuestra lucha para lograr el acceso a los recursos que nos permitan ejercer nuestra funcion como realizadores cinematograficos, y el derecho de nuestra obra a la promocion, distribución y exhibición.”

In Norma Torrado’s interview she mentions Sara’s Gómez’s editor, Iván Arocha, as the person who had the responsibility of finishing her film.

“Transparente significa que una cosa puede verse en su totalidad, como el vidrio cuando es blanco que se ve hasta el otro lado, o como el agua que se ve su fondo cuando no es profunda. Extendido el significado a una persona es alguien que conoces, comprendes, percibes, o que puedes llegar a conocer, comprender y percibir. Su utilización aquí es poética, son 5 historias de mujeres que se ven en el espejo, te fijaste?

“Mi intención con la obra, bueno, mi idea surge porque mis amigos de la infancia salieron de Cuba en la época de Mariel. En esa época estudiábamos juntos desde la primaria. Siempre estudiábamos juntos inclusive en la Universidad, pero carreras diferentes. Ellas decidieron irse de Cuba y yo decidí quedarme y siempre sentí como que la separación no fué muy limpia, no fué muy diáfana: sin discusiones, ni enfrentamientos políticos, etcétera, pero fue una ruptura sin palabras. Yo sabía que se iban pero no supe nunca el día que se fueron. Con esas amigas compartí riquezas y misterias, y bellezas de la juventud, como que me faltó algo por decirles, yo a estas dos amigas que no nos vimos más”.
CHAPTER SIX – SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION
THE SOCIAL PRACTICE OF CUBAN CINEMA

Cinema, for us, is inevitably partial, determined by a ‘toma de conciencia’,
the result of a definite attitude in the face of the problems which confront us,
of the necessity of decolonizing ourselves politically and ideologically…. 
Sara Gomez

Introduction

This study examined the use of film in the social transformation of Cuba after the
1959 revolution. Since Cuban cinema frequently used women’s filmic representation in
the portrayal of nation and national development, this research focused on the
participation and experience of women filmmakers in the creation, control, and
production of cinematic representation and cultural meaning. This concluding chapter
contains a summary presentation of the data with my interpretive response to the major
findings interwoven throughout. I also discuss the implications of these finding in terms
of the broader themes and issues of concern in the field of education and development.

In the course of this research and before that, living and working in Miami, or
Chicago, New York or Havana, I was often struck by the passion that Cubans have for
being Cuban. Lo cubano. While this may sound naïve after decades of identity politics
(and living in Miami), I have wondered about this deep ethno-enthusiasm whenever in
evidence. I suspect this intense self-identification has a “primordial” or existential
component along with a political genesis, so I read with interest Kapcia’s explanation of
this “one dominant, and overwhelming, feature of Cuban political culture – the obsession
with identity (2000, p. 24). He says that “when one examines the nature of Cuban society,
such an obsession becomes less obsessive and more logical, because history (as ever,
written by the victors) tended until the twentieth century to define Cuba as a culturally
dependent, satellite entity, denying it a history of its own.” Kapcia notes:

The search for independence, and later, ‘sovereignty’, became
naturally a search for a lost ‘history’ and an attempt to rescue an
identity. Cubania, therefore as will be argued henceforth,
became less a ‘nationalism’ than a political expression of a
growing collective desire to rescue and define an ‘imagined
community’, with all the contradictions that such a search
must necessarily entail. (p. 24)
In the early years of revolutionary Cuban cinema (later known as the golden or classical era of Cuban film), developing a national cinema or national film industry was basically the same endeavor. The important emphasis was *lo cubano*, and the feeling of *lo nuestro* (“ours”). Of course, it was a cinema born of the times with revolutionary aspirations and pretensions. In the sense that Walter Benjamin would understand, the early sensorium of the Cuban revolution was euphoric, effervescent, dynamic, in flux, spontaneous, and inspired by utopian visions and possibilities of individual fulfillment and national development. In the spirit of the times, individuals grappled with one question faced most intensely in moments of profound social change, quintessentially exemplified by the character of Sergio, in the classic Cuban film, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, who throughout the film observes the radical social changes about him and in one celluloid moment finally utters, “What meaning has this for me?”

This dissertation methodologically evokes answers to this question from Cuban women working in film. What, in effect, constitutes the social practice of Cuban filmmaking? How has film as “the art form of late capitalism” (Aronowitz 1966) engaged with the social/ist practice of Cuban cinema? The two central assumptions that undergird this study are: 1) the power of mass media to “mediate” personal and national identity and 2) the particular importance of women in processes of social change. Through interviews, panels, participant observation, films, and other texts, the study documented women’s perspectives and participation in film and cultural production. These two questions oriented the research and guided the fieldwork:

1. How was cinema used in Cuba’s national development?

2. What do Cuban women filmmakers say about filmmaking in the context of their social and political development, about their participation in film production and in the production of cultural meaning?
I. Cuban Cinema in National Development

*Now is the time for televised work to deepen human feeling.*
*Cuban filmmaker, female*

After the 1959 Revolution, immediate strategies for national development focused on the social sectors of education and culture, primarily evidenced by the 1961 Literacy Campaign and the creation of the film institute of ICAIC. Based on their lived experience, leaders of the Revolution knew that revolutionary consciousness could only truly arise from experience, the personal experience or praxis of the revolutionary process, such as mass mobilizations and collective action. Knowledge of this sort was a “toma de consciencia,” a consciousness-raising act of transformative learning.

Education and culture were the social arenas in which the first task of the revolutionary government, the creation of a revolutionary social consciousness, was directed and the context in which the ideological practice of Cuban cinema was conceived and practiced. The revolutionary Cuban state fully supported the development of a national cinematic culture as a strategy in decolonization and nation building.

Throughout ICAIC’s forty year history, cinema and the arts it incorporated including the fine arts, music, graphic and poster art, and literature, were used to aid in the development of social and national consciousness as the foundation for the development of a new society -- in the early days metaphorically referred to as the “new man.” The legal mandate of ICAIC begins by stating, “Film is an art” and ends by noting that “film is the most powerful and suggestive medium of artistic expression and dissemination and the most direct and extensive vehicle of education and popularization of ideas” (*Cine Cubano*, 1998, No. 148, pp.1-2). Along with the dissemination of ideas and the diffusion of social innovation, the principal project of Cuban filmmakers was to reveal the hidden, ideological dimension of cinema, to show the ideological mechanisms of the art and its history as a tool of capitalist colonization. As Alfredo Guevara put it, Cuban filmmakers wanted “to demystify cinema for the entire population; to work, in a way, against our own power; to reveal all the tricks, all the recourses of language; to dismantle all the mechanisms of cinematic hypnosis” (Martin, Vol. 2, p. 129). Their priority was the decolonization of consciousness -- to break the mental habit of
underdevelopment that manifests itself not only in the realm of economics but in individual and collective psychology, and in the multifaceted domain of culture.

ICAIC thus mediated a social revolution by reflecting and projecting a new “sensorium” through its production and exhibition of documentaries, feature films, weekly newsreels; it used such “educational delivery systems” as weekly television shows featuring film history, film language and technique, foreign film exhibitions and events with visiting filmmakers, film clubs seeded by a network of film aficionados, university support for a film curriculum, and mobile film units that traveled throughout the rural interior bringing cinema technology and the living history of the moment, prolifically exemplified by the Cuban school of film documentary. ICAIC built upon a cinematic culture that had been growing in Cuba prior to the Revolution and that creatively exploded into activity with the formation of ICAIC.

II. Experience of Women: Participation and Representation

Generational Thinking

The women filmmakers I studied for this research came primarily from the second generation of filmmakers working at ICAIC, women who began as “analysts” during the 1975-1976 recruitment, almost 20 years after the Revolution. On the basis of my research, I made a tentative list of generations (subject to the imprecision of any periodization) that serves just enough to be provocative and well enough to be illustrative of the historical lineage and filmmakers’ place in time. There is a strong sense of “generation” and “next generational thinking” as part of the Cuban ethos and very much part of the women’s sense of their creative life and life span. As one filmmaker said, “We’re the generation of young filmmakers, only we’re not so young.”

The 1960’s was the first decade of revolutionary cinema. According to historical reckoning, the founders of ICAIC were men: Alfredo Guevara, Tomas Gutierrez Alea, Julio Garcia Espinosa, Santiago Alvarez, and Manuel Octavio Gomez. Working with these first generation “Founders” (all film directors except Guevara) were the mostly female “Editors,” (i.e. Gloria Arguelles, Norma Torrado, Miriam Talavera, Mirita Lores, Julia Yip) and Nelson Rodriguez, an important editor of this (“classical”) period who has
yet been given his due in a recounting of Cuban cinema’s foundational figures. During these first years, Cuban filmmakers focused (cut their teeth) on documentary film production, an editor’s medium. As one editor described, during these early years of intense revolutionary activity, the creative and production pace of ICAIC was spontaneous and fast and the working ethos was “collective,” a team-oriented spirit befitting a revolution setting out to change the material and social conditions of production. While mostly unheralded, these women editors were an integral part of the first generation of Cuban filmmaking and the creative, foundational processes of those early years.

Not until the next decade did “Second Generation” Sara Gomez crack the male director’s club within ICAIC with her 1974 film, *De Cierta Manera*, in 35 mm. Another filmmaker, Teresa Ordoqui, working outside the institution of ICAIC and until recently often outside ICAIC’s official reckoning of women directors, also directed her first feature film, *Te Llamaras Innocencia*, at the film studios of Cuban television in 16 mm. During the 1970’s, the “institutionalization of the Revolution” was underway. In 1975, the Communist Party had its First National Congress and with the consequent reorganization of ICAIC, institutionalization finally penetrated into the autonomy of the cultural sector. The internal restructuring was in accord with ICAIC’s own directorship which wanted to develop more efficiencies in the film production process. In 1975, the “Analysts” (the Second Generation “analistas”) were recruited into ICAIC primarily from the universities to function as researchers and assist directors in a variety of production tasks. The analysts were mostly women (one man) and included the women I interviewed for this study: Marisol Trujillo, Mayra Vilasis, Rebeca Chavez, Lourdes Prieto, Gloria Rolando, Ana Rodriguez, and Tessa Hernandez. Besides ICAIC’s male directors and female analysts, the second generation of Cuban filmmakers included women working outside ICAIC at the film studios of other state institutions.

By 1980 three women in Cuba had begun to direct documentaries: Marisol Trujillo in ICAIC, Teresa Ordoqui in the film studios of Cuban television, and Belkis Vega in the FAR. One filmmaker noted, “We began the decade of the 1980’s with three women directors, 83 years after the arrival of film in our country and 21 years after the Revolution.” The filmmakers I call the “Independents” emerged in the 1990’s as a cross-
cutting group of women working both inside and out of ICAIC, but who began to develop their own creative projects and/or work with foreign producers or with other national organizations. Of the women I interviewed, I include in this group Gloria Rolando, Lizette Vila, Nuirka Perez, Lourdes Prieto, and Belkis Vega. Because of the drastic economic situation of the Special Period that began in 1989, the decade of the 1990’s saw the emergence of the “Video Generation.” This development was a mixed blessing as more women were able to get access to the medium but were confined to working solely in video, while resources to work in film were given to men. As one woman notes, “We would have preferred that the transition from film to video had arrived in our lives as an option, and not as the last alternative.”

**Becoming a Filmmaker**

As previously mentioned, most of the analysts recruited into ICAIC came from the University or were assigned to ICAIC to fulfill their “social service” requirement in return for receiving a free university education. Most had never previously thought about a career in film. Why would women in Cuba think about film as a career? There were no film schools at the time, and only the University of Havana had developed any kind of cinema curriculum. For a woman to think about the possibility of making films was as “remote as thinking about the possibility of becoming an astronaut.” Prior to their work at ICAIC, many of the women working inside ICAIC had little experience with film beyond that of a “simple spectator.” Even so, being a simple spectator in Cuba fifteen years after the Revolution meant being one of the most sophisticated viewers of world cinema in Latin America. Most ICAIC analysts had studied art history or music or had some other cultural background such as working at the National Library or had revolutionary credentials such as participation in one of the new national plans for social transformation (e.g. Plan Escambray for collective agriculture). Some were writers, scriptwriters, journalists, or critics prior to becoming assistant directors and finally documentary film directors. Mostly, says one women director, “ICAIC was looking, above all, for people with a cultural formation and they went to the University to find them” (“estaban buscando sobre todo personas con una formacion cultural alta y fueron a la Universidad a buscarlas”). The women who began at ICAIC as analysts and
eventually became directors are Rebecca Chavez, Lourdes Prieto, Gloria Rolando, Marisol Trujillo, and Mayra Vilasis (deceased). Tessa Hernandez did not pursue directing even though she is one of ICAIC’s most sought after assistant directors. Ana Rodriguez has worked primarily in feature (vs. documentary) film production as an assistant director; and although her first directorial debut in Mujer Transparente was lauded, she has not made another film.

Of the filmmakers who work outside of ICAIC, one woman did dream of becoming an “astronaut.” Belkis Vega, without the benefit of a formal curriculum of film study and unable to get into ICAIC to receive on-the-job-training, studied instructional design and then art history because it gave her a cultural level (“me daba un nivel cultural general para poder realizar cine”) to prepare herself for filmmaking. Throughout the present study, the women displayed a keen sense of the importance of culture and cultural preparation for a career in filmmaking. She finally got her break at the film studios of FAR, where she began as a scriptwriter and moved quickly on to directing. In 1975, the FAR film studios had become more flexible in opening its doors to civilians and women filmmakers because of the increased demand for the military to produce films. Other women also began at FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, or Armed Forces). Lisette Vila had studied music and became a sound editor, responsible for the sound track of 35 mm films that were made specifically for the patriotic education of the military. From there she branched out and did sound for the various film studios in Cuba at the time training sound editors, and finally directing her own videos. Niurka Perez, whose educational background is grounded in the fine arts, found the military to be an open environment for experimentation and incorporation of the fine arts in her work, either as a topic or as part of production design. Teresita Ordoqui, although she began her career at ICAIC (1960-1963) became a director at the film studios of Cuban television, where she filmed many adaptations of Cuban literature.

Editor, Norma Torrado’s access to filmmaking during the first years of the Revolution was through participation in the film club Cine Vision and by winning a contest that gave her access to the only University film course offered in Cuba at the time. Participation in this film club put her in contact with other cinephiles who would later become Cuba’s most talented film directors (the male founders noted above).
Genre, Gender and the Obstacles Women Face

There has been a loss of historical memory. Little is being filmed about Cuba today, and we will lose this audio visual memory. From 1959 to 1990 Cuban national cinema recorded Cuban history. From 1990s onward there is a lack. Cuban filmmaker, female

The effort to develop a Cuban film industry and national cinema began with the documentary film genre: documentary production required fewer resources (actors, equipment, sets) and entailed less financial risk as the new directors learned their art and craft. While documentary filmmaking was the professional route for men to move into feature film directing, it was not so with women. It took 10 years for the analysts to become documentary directors. And none was promoted to the position of feature film director. Throughout the 1980’s ICAIC sponsored “convocatorias” or competitions as a mechanism of advancement through the directorial ranks, and a way for new scripts and new talent to be discovered and developed. Women were regularly overlooked. And perhaps other women, seeing the writing on the wall, were less motivated to set themselves up for rejection. After many unsuccessful attempts one “independent” filmmaker said, “I didn’t feel mad; I just decided to do things for myself.”

In the status hierarchy of filmmaking genres and formats, 35 mm film is better than 16mm and the feature film is more prestigious than the documentary. These professional preferences are not unique to Cuba. In the development of Cuban national cinema, documentary filmmaking was used as training ground to groom the first generation of male feature filmmakers. But when women finally moved into the ranks of documentary film directing, they experienced a glass ceiling and the beginning of feminization of the genre. Documentary films were not given access to promotional resources, or as one woman said, “our films are invisible to the promotional apparatus.” When film became scarce as it did in the Special Period only men worked in film. Women worked in video tape or not at all. Some women felt that eliminating film’s traditional genre hierarchy might help increase women’s access to film resources, especially in a country that had historically valued this genre in its development.
During the 1990’s, documentary filmmaking was almost at a standstill as the ICAIC budget during the Special Period was focused on the development of feature films that could bring in co-production dollars or be sold on the international market, and on servicing foreign productions -- policies that left women with even fewer production resources. A contradiction noted at the “Women…at the Crossroads” panel is that television could help support documentary filmmaking because as the Cuban state owns the media, it is not subject to market determinations. Women continue to find it difficult to understand why so little documentary filmmaking is currently produced by Cuban television; instead, production funds go to telenovelas, another genre more viable on the international market.

The incorporation of women into the ranks of film directing and other positions of leadership and decision-making in the Cuban film industry was slow and contradictory. One woman noted, “We’re the only country in Latin America that could unite all the conditions to promote the woman in all the specialized fields of film and until now we have not done it.” This endemic stagnation of women was addressed at a 1988 seminar convened by the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) to evaluate progress made toward the participation of women in the media in terms of objectives that had been formulated at the 1985 Nairobi World Conference of Women. Women filmmakers and women in media attending this seminar identified what then had been long-standing and persistent problems of women’s advancement. Approximately twenty years later, these problems are again identified in this study. Despite the Revolution, and the gains of Cuban women in other professional areas, women filmmakers have been reporting for three decades the same obstacles to their advancement and the same lack of redress.

The criteria of real change are not a matter of increased access to occupations that are traditionally female such as editors, make-up artists, or costumers, says one filmmaker, but “those that imply a change of language, a change of theme, a change of image exercised by women as creators.” Women filmmakers have not been and are not in creatively decisive roles. One filmmaker found cold comfort in the explanation given by Julio Garcia Espinosa (then president of ICAIC) back in 1988 that “[“Simply”], the situation of women filmmakers within ICAIC was not a priority.”
Besides the mechanics of oblivion described in the previous chapter (the problems of invisibility and erasure from the historical record), and the “economics that have impeded more than anything,” women discussed the obstacles they faced in terms of its “ideological” character; that is, Cuba’s patriarchal and machista culture largely inherited from Spanish colonialism and some Afro-Cuban religious practices. The “new society” continued to produce old ideas in the sphere of relations between men and women. Most of the women in the study thought that Cuba’s economic situation and the “unconscious” policy of machismo at ICAIC were the major causes of the poor advancement of women in filmmaking, and to a lesser degree the lack of information and procedures for integrating women, especially the new generation now graduating in the field of film and media.

**The Policy of ‘Unconscious’ Machismo**

Whatever the socio-political context, women have had to struggle against the patriarchy in their political system. The lack of women in filmmaking, whether in the genre of documentaries or feature films, contrasts with the progress women have made in other labor sectors in Cuba (including television). Therefore, most women identified the problem, not with the equality rhetoric of the Revolution, but more closely with the particular institution and directorship and policy of ICAIC that throughout its history preferred to advance (younger) men than (middle-age) women. There were no mechanisms for younger women to come up through the ranks. Some women began to refer to the young male directors at ICAIC as “pretty boys”, implying yet another level of discrimination and sexual politics that became glaringly apparent with the arrival of the Special Period, when experienced women directors were denied production resources in favor of “the younger generation” -- of men. A woman filmmaker said, “ICAIC has had, in my opinion, an unconscious policy of showing more Cuban cinema through the work of men… I defend the talent of genders, looking for our place, but not just because we’re women, but showing the talent we possess as human beings and luckily, we’re women. I think we have a different point of view.” She also notes that:

Cuba is machista, but in society the man and woman have equal salaries. I think the Cuban male is machista inspite of the laws of our society that legislate equality.
between the sexes. In Cuban films, this machismo is marked and evident in the quantity of fiction works by men and the quantity of works by women. The concept of machismo is very embedded in Latin culture but depends on the woman’s acceptance or rejection. Women have to know to educate their sons to not be machistas and not to accept machista behavior in men. In other words, women have a great responsibility to change things.

Since the retirement of Alfredo Guevara (the person most responsible for the artistic freedom and cultural autonomy of Cuban filmmakers and director at the helm during most of the three decades that women experienced a lack of advancement) and the new directorship of Omar Gonzalez, many women filmmakers feel new spaces will now open up for their work and voice, thus making realizable their cinematic contribution to the cultural plurality of the Cuban culture and to what “lo cubano” could mean.

**Women’s Representation in Cuban National Cinema**

Social theorist, Carlos Monsiváis, indicates that cinema’s authority in shaping national identity is not that it reflects society. Instead, the cinematic remaking of a culture in the image of the “nation” is possible because cinema dramatizes social problems and social relations in a “language” that the audience finds intelligible, and I might add, pleasurable.

Before turning to the representation within the cinematic production of ICAIC and development of a national cinema after 1959, I want to make some comparative points with the history of Mexican cinema. According to Hershfield, “By 1948, Mexico was producing more films than any other Latin American nation, despite Hollywood’s historical dominance. This accomplishment was due to both internal and external factors: the international crisis of World War II, the development of an unprecedented economic independence, the institution of supportive state protectionist polices, the success of Mexican films in other Latin American countries, and what Carlos Monsiváis describes as “an alliance between the film industry and the audiences of the faithful, between the films and the communities that saw themselves represented there” (1996, p. 4).

This alliance between the Mexican film industry and the “audiences of the faithful,” supported new discourses of national identity not just because the screen
represented the dreams and fantasies of the recently urbanized and largely illiterate Mexican audiences, but because these audiences saw the films as reflections and explanations of their own reality. In Mexico, we see some of the same factors and dynamics come to play in the case of the national project of Cuban cinema and the use of women’s filmic representation.

Women’s major participation in the development of a national Cuban cinema was primarily through their visual representation in fiction films beginning with the previously noted “men’s films about women” such as Humberto Solás’s *Lucía* (1968), and Pastor Vega’s *Retrato de Teresa* (1979). Cuban national cinema developed using the figure of woman to mediate a new revolutionary consciousness for a new society, which during the first decade of the 1960’s was metaphorically identified as “the new man.” One women filmmaker’s characterization was that the “new man” exists in Cuba and will exist in the measure that the Cuban Revolution exists. You can’t talk about the “new man” without talking about a Revolution in Cuba, a true Revolution that contributes to education, public health, infant care, with so many things that contribute to a human being’s fulfillment…and I think this is the road on which the new man travels.” In the film of the decade, *Lucía* (1968) showed three female protagonists in three historical periods whose destiny was identified with the liberation and development of the Cuban nation and self-realization.

When asked about the “new man,” another filmmaker said that when she entered ICAIC, this was not a phrase that was discussed, “not even theoretically.” Instead, the focus was on the “eficaz de cine” (effectiveness of film). This meant its “artistic value and value as part of the Cuban culture, its human value in terms of illuminating the objective of becoming human. The objective of this search was for Cuban identity. Remember we came from a precolonial and postcolonial culture. Spain first, then the U.S. We had to free ourselves.” The director clarifies: “effectiveness or *eficacia* in the sense that you want a message to reach the audience, you want to reflect on a problem, and you reach the goal and find solutions, then the artistic work is effective.” By these standards, the signature film at the end of the second decade of Cuban filmmaking, *Retrato de Teresa* (1979), was effective.
*Portrait of Teresa* was one of the biggest hits in Cuban cinema. It was a hit on two counts --- cinematic as a film and extra-cinematic as a social document that served as a touchstone for a national discussion on women’s rights. *Teresa* connected with the Cuban public and became “educational” as a result of its social impact and its analysis and representation of women’s equal rights -- at work in the public sphere and at home in the private sphere, where the “equality” of marital fidelity and the “male prerogative” was challenged and where the “equal” rights of women were clearly un/revealed in the bedroom. The popular attention and discussion about the film helped “the people” to focus on the issue, to express opinions, dialogue, listen, and engage in a collective act of analysis and consciousness-raising, exemplifying what one woman observed: “Films make evident social consciousness.”

But most of the 1970’s women issues had been forgotten according to one filmmaker. Prior to *Portrait of Teresa*, the only female feature film director at ICAIC, Sara Gomez, produced her film *De cierta manera* (1974), a film that used both documentary footage and fictional narrative to challenge the machismo of the time. One female director admired Sara Gomez for maintaining a critical attitude in her focus on marginal populations and their revolutionary gains. She presents the complexity and contradictions of historical processes of the people living them and the struggles of the marginalized and poorer social classes, or “sectors” -- since Cuba (as United States) is a “classless” society.

In the following decade, the film *Hasta cierto punto* provides a generational sequel and homage to Gomez’s feminist film by Gutierrez Alea, Cuba’s master filmmaker. At one part in the documentary footage of his film, a man provides a personal, but also social, commentary on the state of affairs between himself and the state’s official revolutionary stance against machismo. He responds to an off-camera inquiry:

> Oh, they’ve managed to change my attitudes on that score. I’ve certainly changed up to a certain point (*hasta cierto punto*). I’m probably at 80 per cent now. Maybe they can work on me and get me up to, say, 87 per cent. But they will never get me up to 100 per cent, no way. That thing about equality is OK but only up to a certain point. (in Martin, 1997, p. 157)
Marvin D’Lugo notes that these real life interviews placed within the fictional narrative of Cuban films served a fundamental social function “in depicting the larger cultural community as the source and arbiter of the social meanings presented and contested within the filmic narrative” (pp. 157-158.) He notes that this radical narrational element resonates with Stanley Fish’s notion of “interpretive communities” and the presence of this interpretive community within the film reinforces a sense of the audience as nation within the viewer. “The narrational dynamics of Hasta cierto punto thus suggests a self-conscious effort to align cinematic spectatorship with the interpretive community of the nation and thereby to engage that audience in the full appreciation of the revolutionary meanings attributed to the female within Cuban society” (p. 158).

On the one hand the figure of women on the Cuban screen was overdetermined and on the other, underdetermined. For example, Michael Chanan notes that, "A number of films produced by the Cuban film institute [ICAIC] during in the 70s - among them Sergio Giral's trilogy, El otro Francisco ('The Other Francisco'), Rancheador ('Slave-Hunter'), and Manuela, and Tomas Gutierrez Alea's La Ultima Cena ('The Last Supper') - investigate the nineteenth-century Cuban social formation and the role of sugar in shaping its character, and that of the different social classes by which it was constituted." But Chanan elided, as did the ICAIC filmmakers, any discussion of the cinematic treatment of the impact of the sugar/slave economy on women which, if it had been treated cinematically, could not have failed to confront the historical roots of machismo a lo cubano, and briefly made visible in the discussion below.

An important glimpse at the effects of the slave system on women may be garnered from a brief look at the social demographics presented by Smith and Padula (1996). Cuba was the last colony to become independent from Spain (1898), prompting an anthropologist to call it "the whitest of the Antilles" (Mosquera, 1999). Since the Spanish crown prohibited unaccompanied women from traveling to the New World, by the end of the sixteenth century, "white women constituted less than 10 percent of the Cuban population" (Smith and Padula, 1996, p. 9). By the seventeenth century, the aboriginal population had been eliminated and slave labor, primarily male, was imported from Africa. Black women who did arrive as slaves faced pregnancy and childbirth under the dangerous conditions of rural life, often being forced to cut cane during the
sugar harvest to the day of their delivery (p. 9). Spain finally allowed single women to emigrate along with entire families and by the end of the eighteenth century white women constituted 43 percent of the white population. Black men still outnumbered black women. Smith and Padula indicate that the long-term deficit of women had a profound impact on the family as well as on racial and sexual relations in Cuba" (p. 9). Besides the intense sexual rivalry between white and black men, "wide-scale miscegenation between whites and blacks produced a large mulatto population." Children of these unions carried the social stigma of illegitimate since "Spain restricted interracial marriage out of fear it would give blacks a prestige which might undermine the slave system" (p.9). Often illegitimate children were conceived during sugar harvests, unknown or unacknowledged by their fathers and left when the cane cutters moved on to the next plantation. For elites, marriage was a means to protect the family property from the claims of illegitimate children who had no rights to inheritance. As Smith and Padula say, "the resentments and tensions borne of illegitimacy would taint Cuban history for centuries and lead to various legal reforms in the twentieth century" (p. 9).

Douglas, an inside chronicler, notes that Solás's film Cecelia "produced a violent public polemic around the question of cultural politics and production of ICAIC" (p.194). Not only was the film ICAIC's most costly production to date, but Solás had exercised creative license with one of the most popular novels in Cuban history in transforming Cuba's literary patrimony into a cinematic one. A fuller understanding of the polemic with Cecelia has eluded me. But I can imagine the debate that ensued among the artists, filmmakers, the public, and the partido. Provoked by Cuban filmmaking, these polemic and public discussions are indications of a broad and deep cinematic culture operating within the Cuban social fabric. We see in Cuba how film is the site of thoughtful public discussion. We see in action the potential of a film to provoke cultural and political public debate, first in its viewing and then in public discussion. We see a country defining itself through a transformative educational and social learning process using the "entertainment" art form of modernity. As a handsome old Cuban cab driver (taxista) told me one day on the way to ICAIC -- for him, “Cinema was a school.”

While film in the 1980’s began to show women in different social sectors, the figure of the Cuban woman was still tied to the national, historical project. It seemed as
though the decade never recovered from Solás’s film, *Cecelia* (1981). By the end of the 1980’s there had been four films about women by various male directors including *Cecelia* (1981), *Amada* (1983), *Hasta Cierta Punta* (1983), and *Habanera* (1984). But none of these films provoked or sustained the social discussion that *Portrait of Teresa* had, and no woman had been at the creative helm of any of them. At the 1988 seminar that evaluated women’s progress in the media, one woman was moved to ask, “Has our cinema fallen behind the transformations and development of the Cuban woman in these years?”

In 1990, the creative group of Humberto Solás seemed to respond to this question with *Mujer Transparente*, a film of five vignettes directed by women that reflected women’s changing circumstances during the past 40 years. Through participation in the new creative groups at ICAIC, there seemed to be an effort to open a space for women both thematically and through women exercising creative control of their image. But the decade passed, and no women moved into the ranks of feature film directing. One woman says, “Currently the representation of women is worrisome, as a social object and throwback to the 1950s.” One woman felt that both women and gay men are treated as caricatures, not as complex human beings and individuals that deserve to be respected for having taken responsibility for their “difference” and their choices. In Cuba the concept of “sexual difference” is beginning to break the taboo around the representation of homosexuality. One woman calls this lack of depth in character development and portrayal a “disqualifying vision.” Another says, “The false, physical, commercial ideal of women bothers me the most. The false image of women as objects of consumption.”

**Themes and Social Vision in Women’s Films**

There is no surprise to find big modernist themes in Cuban films. Humanism is the macro-thematic thread that runs through films made by the women filmmakers. Films focus on “the human being” and the dreams, motivations, frustrations of daily life. “Man” writ large, as in the stated theme of one woman: “Man as a human being and center of the Universe.” And of course in Spanish, the word “man” is still used and understood as the linguistic stand-in for the human being, male or female.
The consensus of the filmmakers is that women’s voice and point of view is different and that women’s perspective is lacking on the Cuban screen, whether in documentary or fiction. What that means exactly is not a matter of consensus. One woman said, “I am a woman. I think like a woman, react like a woman, and as such, face creative labor; I am interested in the way I reflect these problematics in my work. To arrive at reason but through feelings. My work is not very theoretical nor conceptual. There are concepts, there are theories, there is a thesis, but these always arrive through the lived experience and that has to be through human feeling.” According to some of the filmmakers, feminine style is identified by communication through the sensations, impressions and emotions.

One filmmaker says, “I did a documentary about war correspondents that was a very masculine theme and I proposed it for two fundamental reasons: one, because I began in this institution and all my life heard stories about war correspondents; and since I began to see them I realized that what people live in war is never possible to transmit it in a film, because war is anti-filmic….Another reason was because of personal experiences as a human being in relation to the war……war is something terrible, it is not a spectacle.”

Another filmmaker likes to “rescue the forgotten” (such as the Cuban musician who worked with George Gershwin). In her definition, culture is “home, family food, everything that surrounds us…an investigation of everyday things, their origin and history. Being a woman doesn’t mean you can only talk about women. I’m interested in everything. Each artist is an individual. Each one a universe, speaking their own language.” She would like to develop themes about “individuals and the problems of an individual at a certain time, in a certain society. What is their existence? How do they live? Women and men. What are their concerns? And the problems that children face concern me a lot.”

One filmmaker indicates how the hard economic times have impacted the choice of themes: “The basic social problems make it so that your own thematic preferences must pass to a second, not so important, level. Some of the themes of my work include art in Cuban society, the family facing crisis, old age.” Women directors often sacrificed their personal life for a career interrupted. Particularly during the Special Period,
women’s responsibility and sacrifice for family and country was at the cost of their own creative and professional ambitions. On the other hand, women also spoke of having a career at the cost of not having a family, “It’s not that I regret the time lived, my job, but my family hated everything that had to do with my job because I spent years without having a family life.” Many of the women deliberately moved away from a “masculinist” treatment of subject matter. In other words, if given the topic of a national hero (most often men) for the topic of a documentary, they would often bring him “closer” by various techniques: focusing on his home life, or capacities typically associated with women, such as writing poetry; or by any means that would remove him from the previous context of a “slogan” or legend. If treating a women in a typically male job, they would strive to show her not losing her femininity while performing a traditionally male function. Most of these filmmakers believe that women are equal but different. Women filmmakers believe in women’s special voice and “talent” before special treatment. But they also noticed how women have hurt themselves by not demanding more special treatment. A filmmaker summed it up: “To not discriminate, we have chosen not to notice how we have been discriminated against.”

Themes that have appeared in the documentary work of women filmmakers include such topics as moral identity, family relations, prostitution, moral and economic crisis of aspirations, representation of homosexuals, themes of painting and fine art framed by social context, ecological themes, women protagonists working now, and a woman’s personal aspirations vs. commitment to a social project. This last theme is certainly reflected in society at large: “I’m only going to live 20 or 30 years and there are things I want in life that I can’t wait for. How am I going to reconcile my surrender to a social project with my personal realization? In other words there are things I don’t want to wait until I’m old to have. I don’t want to live all my life in a bad place; I want to have my house.” She attributes this conflict in her country as the reality of a country with “an explosion of intellect and underdevelopment of resources.”

*Women and the Revolution: Feminism and Gender*

The Cuban Revolution brought sweeping social change to everyone, but for women, says one filmmaker, it was more important because it brought women more
liberty and more equality. The horizons and aspirations of work, career, an education, opened up. Imagining possibilities beyond tradition, beyond the stereotypes of women made for children, home, and the (viewing) pleasure of a pantheon of familial men: fathers, grandfathers, husbands and sons (the male gaze). The Cuban Revolution was a very personal affair.

Initially, the notion of women’s equality was framed in the context of the labor and the workforce. Through his sister-in-law, Vilma Espin, Castro created the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) to capture women’s labor in a mass, broad-based organization that could function as both a labor pool (for mobilizations, community actions, civil defense) and a site for informal adult education and development of political consciousness. Mass organizations such as the FMC were the Revolution’s hot-houses of political consciousness-raising and how “the people” learned new ways of being. The key concept “equality” was most often equated with women’s right to work and an equal place besides the man. This hotly debated national polemic reverberated in the domain of culture with the 1979 release of the film, Portrait of Teresa. But after the social buzz and cinematic “flare” that this movie instigated, the “woman question” seemed to chill in a wait-and-see attitude toward the Family Code legislation and what results it might bring.

By the late eighties, women were becoming disenfranchised with their own organization; membership in the FMC had dropped, particularly with professionals who did not feel the organization represented or served their needs. Instead of being benefited by the “equality project” women had not benefited; and some reasons given by one of the filmmakers interviewed were that “no one had stopped women’s double duty, men still ruled in the house, women were not in the tribunals, nor were they in positions of decision-making, and this was 1993.” By 1993 women were enduring the brunt of the Special Period. They had traditionally borne the burden of their country’s social changes and now the challenge of Cuba’s survival was on their shoulders -- in the lines they waited in for food, in the time they spent cooking something from nothing, in the support and time they gave their neighbors also in need. One woman said, “That a woman would want to marry in these times, in Cuba and in the world, that she would want to marry, have a husband, attend to him, and have kids – this woman is heroic, her duty never ends.”
Women in Cuba’s understanding of feminism has traditionally been conflicted primarily because of two perceived factors: their identification of the international women’s movement with lesbianism and the need to protect the Revolution from socially divisive factions. Engels (like Newton) still rattled in the bones of these revolutionary women: the Revolution came first and feminism was unnecessary within the revolutionary struggle. But as one journalist said, “it was a comfortable strategy not to bring up the power of men, the patriarchal power, not one demand, not one demand to look toward women as women.” Women forgot about themselves.

Up to now, the material has been based on my individual interviews with the filmmakers. The following section represents group and public discussions that these professionals had among themselves and with other groups, nationally and internationally.

_Evaluation of Woman’s Image in Cuba: The Work of MAGIN\(^1\)_

A group of women in the field of communication began to meet to talk, debate, exchange readings, to study and “to articulate our purpose to permeate a consciousness of gender in the products of social communication.”

Then we felt that from the communication media we could do much more to advance the thought that guided equality, for example: why weren’t we seeing blacks on television? Why, when women came out in the press it was either for commercial reasons or as artists, while men came out in the context of work, in the scientific world? Why in the tribunal was there only one woman and the cameras never focused on her? etc. “We began to ask ourselves things and we were already a group that knew of the new concept of “gender” and we thought, given that in Cuba the feminist concept of feminism had been so devalued and this had happened in other countries as well, the best we could do was to try to pass some of the feminist ideas by taking another road, by talking about the category of “gender”. This analytical category allowed us to do many things.

So began MAGIN, deriving the name from their professional organization, the Association of Women in Communication, and a play on the words “imagination” and
“image,” qualities close to their work as journalists, filmmakers, directors, publicists, writers, academics, and researchers, who as women in the media had all come together to talk gender. “This is a project that is nourished from the imagination. It will never be finished.” Perhaps the best way to provide an overview of the important work they accomplished in the short time before disbanding and the conceptual territory they covered, is to list the themes that emerged from the workshops they held, including the “individual growth workshops” showing the multitude of topics MAGIN addressed, their analytical categories, and perspectives.

MAGIN built upon the discussions women participated in at the 1994 Festival of the New Latin American Cinema, where the image of women projected in the media was roundly discussed in a series of workshops. The participants determined that the image of woman in Cuba was used unfavorably: stereotypical, as objects of decoration and sexual desire, commercialized at the behest of tourism, and with frequency was found in contexts of extreme vulgarity in certain video clips and songs.

Topics put forward as possible themes for future discussion included: the presence of the black woman on screen, the unfortunate reinsertion of the woman-as-object in publicity, sexism in language, and stereotypes in fiction. As a result of the dynamic work done at that event and others, women were able to put together a gender strategy for women in the media. Their working vocabulary included and defined the familiar feminist categories of analysis and focus: the concepts of sex, sexismo, gender, machismo, self-esteem, stereotype, socialization, gender consciousness, and reproduction. The strategies and themes, briefly stated below in list form, represent the past decade of women’s thinking on gender in Cuba. The information comes from a slim, manifesto-style booklet entitled MAGIN, Compendio de temas de actualidad imbricados con la dimension y el concepto de género (MAGIN, Compendium of actual themes with the concept of gender). (Publication date appears to be 1995.) The following section is a good overview of the scope of MAGIN’S work, representing an array of styles and contexts in transformative learning.

Strategies and themes:
- Develop self-esteem, recognize and project in women intelligence, capability,
effectiveness, resistance.
- As the work of communicators, ask questions such as:
  
  What image of women are we projecting?
  What effects are we provoking?
  Who benefits from this image of a woman?
- Assume responsibility not only for what is produced, but for what is disseminated.
- Pay special attention to the image of women in the spaces where humor is used and caricature.
- Take note that the black woman should not continue to be presented as a slave or sexual object.
- Open spaces in the media for the dimension of gender.
- Use available statistical information about the participation of women in society.
- Do trainings for communicators in the concept of gender.
- Pay attention to not always interview a man nor that the protagonist is always male.
- Proportion equally the presence of women and men in thematic content as well as in roles protagónicos.
- Pay special attention to avoid using women’s body, sexual attributes as “hooks” for tourism or to sell products.

In a workshop entitled, “Gender in Social Communication: A New Focus,” representatives from UNICEF and UNESCO participated along with national organisms such as Cuban television (ICRT), the Federation of Cuban Women (FCM), the Writers and Artists Union (UNEAC). This effort resulted in an analysis and identification of the special problems women face, such as their heavy workload, few women in higher levels of management and economic administration, disempowering educational and socialization processes, the differential treatment of men as a result of (male) bureaucratic resistance, the absence of a gender consciousness even in women.

The workshop identified a group of socio-cultural factors that affect the above outcomes including the transmission of hierarchical values in women’s daily life, sexist education of society reinforced by the family, sexual roles or historical archetypes, myths, cultural influences, traditions and folkways of Cuban society, the role of the media in mass diffusion and the lack of historical knowledge of Cuban history in terms of
Cuban feminism, and the participation of women in the large historical process and social struggle. Other socio-political factors included the contradictions between the social project and economic and administrative means; contradictions between commitments between work, family and society; a mistaken institutional understanding of the gender concept; and socio-economic factors of the Special Period that aggravated the situation of the country and impeded the development of women.

**Civil Society and MAGIN**

The importance of film in civil society, film as a pedagogical and development strategy, and its mode of address, in the formation of new social values is clearly understood by Marvin D’Lugo in his analysis of the film “Up to a Certain Point” (*Hasta cierto punto*), which incorporates the commentary of real people within the structure of the fictional narrative:

> The staging of the interpretive community within the film helps reinforce in the viewer a sense of audience as nation. The narrational dynamics of *Hasta cierto punto* thus suggests a self-conscious effort to align cinematic spectatorship with the interpretive community of the nation and thereby to engage that audience in the full appreciation of the revolutionary meaning attributed to the female within Cuban society. (p. 282)

Again we see the appropriation of the female sex for statist purposes. Haroldo Dilla’s (1999) analysis of civil society in Cuba is insightful in considering the fate of MAGIN and their project of diffusing, through the media, a new awareness of gender and sex roles. From the point in 1992, “when Castro made a positive allusion to the role of civil society in Latin America in a speech at the Rio Summit, thus signaling an opening of creative space in Cuban civil society” (p. 31), to 1996 when MAGIN applied for non-governmental status, was a road fraught with political complexities alluded to in the findings. According to Dilla:

> the new debate about civil society was constrained by hostility from two fronts. On one side, there was the hostile meddling of the U.S. government, which was interested in using
Cuban civil society for subversive and counterrevolutionary ends. On the other, there was the Cuban political class, which was not inclined to allow competition in the control of resources and values. (p. 31)

And MAGIN was certainly promoting new thinking surrounding the valuation of “woman” and the role of gender in society. By 1996 the Central Committee of the Communist Party had adopted a hard-line position in the face of the Helms Burton law and the Torecelli Act, declaring the official definition of civil society “socialist.” Dilla asks an important question: “What caused this clash between the Cuban political authorities and a segment of emerging civil society that was completely aligned with socialist goals and national independence?” (p. 31). By definition he says civil society is neither the state nor the market but is not necessarily opposed to these (nor can it be declared socialist). “It is always a cultural and historical construct and is thus shaped by the national or local community in which it emerges.” He goes on to say that this phenomenon has special significance for Cuba since:

civil society in Cuba has emerged from the bosom of a socialist project that generated strong upward mobility and numerous participatory spaces characterized by solidarity and collective action on behalf of the common good. As a result, it created a social subject with high levels of education and training in civic activism. From this perspective, the revolutionary state has been an important builder of civil society. And the emergence of civil society is a sign that speaks well of the revolutionary project. (p. 32)

While Cuba’s mass organizations (such as the Federation of Cuban Women, Committees in Defense of the Revolution, and the Union of Cuban Workers) are the traditionally recognized heart of “socialist civil society,” other important actors include the non-government organizations, “especially those engaged in development work” (p. 33).

The developmental NGOs, which benefit from financial aid obtained from their Canadian and European counterparts as well as from their contacts and exchanges with other Latin
American NGOs, have had a very significant qualitative impact on Cuban society. By 1996, NGOs were involved in over 50 projects in six areas: alternative energy, community development, the environment, popular education, the promotion of women and institutional development. (p. 33)

In questioning the future of civil society in Cuba, Dilla says that “nobody disputes the right of the state to protect national sovereignty from the attempts of the U.S. government to use civil society as a destabilizing space in order to achieve its old ambition of becoming an internal actor in Cuban politics.” Nor can it be argued there is some need for restrictive political policies. But what is objected to is that “such policies fall heavily on organizations that have supported national independence and socialism” (p. 36).

In analyzing the strong reaction of the Cuban political class, we find exposed a terrible balancing act and contradiction whose logic surely undergirded the government’s refusal of MAGIN’s request for status as a non-governmental organization, and speaks to the focus of this study and the relationship between national development and women’s representation and participation as indicators of genuine social change. Dilla’s analysis continues:

The insertion of Cuba in the capitalist world economy and the embrace of a new model of accumulation based on the overexploitation of the work force can only be achieved in a controlled political environment. The expansion of free-trade zones, for example, is incompatible with militant unionism, since such a development model requires low-cost labor and other cost-saving devices which normally result in horrendous working conditions. Similarly, the expansion of mass tourism is incompatible with feminist and environmental commitments, since the way this industry has developed in the Caribbean tends to be based on the mercantilization of sexual power -- and the consequent commercial use of the image of women -- as well as the destruction of the environment. This has led to a tacit understanding between the technocratic-business sectors and the traditional bureaucracy—economic surpluses in exchange for social tranquility. (p. 36) (italics mine)

In answer to his own question, Dilla states, “Not only is there a future for Cuban civil society, but there can be no future without it. Only in that space can effective
barriers be constructed to withstand the market’s colonization of daily life and to ensure that utopia is not reduced to eating a hamburger” (p. 36).

### III. Summary Discussion

**Representation: Terrain of Culture**

The filmmakers in this study showed the dynamics of women’s participation in the cultural transformation of Cuban society through their participation in documentary filmmaking and through their efforts to study and apply the concept of gender in their filmmaking work and in the communication media. If Latin American social theorists’ understanding of cultural renewal is that it is a pathway to alternative modernity/ies, they need look no closer than to the heart of the work women do, and the work of these women in the media in Cuba.

The major findings from the data sources indicate that women filmmakers’ access to and participation in the cinematic production of cultural meaning in Cuba has been primarily through their work in the documentary film genre. Women’s “difference” of perspective is evidenced in their thematic content, style, point-of-view, and their treatment of the documentary subject matter. Because there have been no women in feature film directing for four decades, women filmmakers have not had access to the creative control of their own image, nor have they been able to influence how women have been represented in the fiction films of Cuban cinema (still the prerogative of male directors). Women’s on-screen image has been continually identified with processes of revolutionary social change and the historical recuperation of national identity. In effect, Cuban cinema created the “new man” through the image of women. ICAIC institutionalized the already naturalized “male gaze”. The promised “diversity” of the new ICAIC directorship cannot become a reality without promoting women to positions of both bureaucratic and creative power -- allocating production resources to women directors, and providing spaces for them to create another kind of cinema, and concomitantly, another kind of development.
The presence and visibility of women on the Cuban screen goes in tandem with their absence and invisibility off screen. This lack of systematic support for women’s professional development may be understood practically in the following terms: the lack of opportunities and creative spaces they were given to direct feature films, and to access resources for the promotion and distribution of their (documentary) films, the lack of structural mechanisms in place for advancement, and bureaucratic resistance to the problem. Bureaucratic resistance is tied tightly to the paternal state and a social and cultural climate of well-entrenched machismo. MAGIN defined machismo as the “social prejudice that functions by prioritizing the values and characteristics of men that results in impositions on women and their subordination.” Patriarchy predates capitalism and socialism, and will not necessarily disappear with the disappearance of capitalism, nor disappear with the appearance of socialism.

From the beginning of the Revolution, the government had always claimed to be behind the advancement of women’s equal rights. Given this official policy, it would have been difficult to foresee that women working in film would be so “unconsciously” discriminated against during the past 40 years. And it is understandable why they might fault the particular institution of ICAIC rather than government policy. But the paternal state, in this case, the Cuban paternal state, has not historically been willing to give up the male prerogative. Women’s rights have not come automatically with the change to socialism, despite other gains the Revolution has brought. Even in occupational fields where women have advanced, the objective of the Cuban government was “macro” economic policy -- primarily to capture their labor for the new social project. Much more important to women is how these macro policies can ease the burden of their daily lives, a burden women willingly carried for precisely those same reasons – to advance a social cause they imagined to be in their own best interests.

While the economic situation of the past decade and external political relations with the United States have been implicit or complicit in inhibiting women filmmakers from advancing in their field, it is not a credible enough rationale for understanding these women’s experience during the past forty years of socialist change. As one woman noted, the struggle for women’s rights is the “revolution within the Revolution.” While an understanding of the concept of gender is an analytically important way to address the
issue of machismo, it cannot substitute for the larger analysis of male patriarchy, power, and patrimony. Dilla, in his analysis above, refers to the “political class,” but a feminist analysis would have identified the “class” politics to be those of the male patriarchy. Machismo is not a remnant of Spanish colonialism forever implanted in the social fabric, but an image planted in the consciousness of people on a daily, cultural basis through the imagistic power of visual media such as film and instantiated in family and social relations. As Coleridge knew so well, the power of the symbol is a material power.

Women filmmakers are in a prime position to energize the social project they love and have valiantly struggled for at great personal, and also great social, cost. Development must begin to be measured in terms of the span of one life and one lifetime. One can only speculate how different the Cuban reality would be if women filmmakers had been given the space to develop and project their point of view and creative vision; if they had been given the power to diffuse their analyses of gender. Both the filmmakers and MAGIN engaged culture in public, popular, and informal education through their filmmaking and the diffusion of the idea of gender. The power of film to generate social discussion has been demonstrated. What is lacking has been the paternal will to structurally re-adjust the male gaze, and to address the creation of a new cinema with the “effective” gaze of female spectatorship.

Implications of Research

I return to my thesis that cultural renewal is primarily an epistemological task, a task of consciousness. This is the creative act before the creative acts of representation and reproduction. What we know in a public form or collectively is our civic life, gendered and visible. What does it serve to better understand the social practice of Cuban cinema, or cinema in any country’s process of national development? Or cinema as an educational strategy in social transformation? These questions evoke again the idea of paideia, a culture that nourishes and supports the value of individual human life. I hoped this research would further an understanding of culture in social transformation, and the relationship between the arts (cinematic art) and development. How do these macro social/cultural dynamics connect with micro, individual processes of knowledge and self-knowledge inherent in personal, lived experience? Transformative social change
is also transformative learning, at its radical “epistemological” root. How is education transformational? How is imagination “critical”? How is cultural renewal an epistemological task? These questions were the seeds sown in the field of consciousness, thrown into the field of action and practice in considering my research topic and design. They will continue to animate my future research agenda.

In many ways, this study is an effort to understand the utopian desire in human nature, the nature of social change in relation to individual consciousness, and the role of culture in our time. Even after the militancy of the early years of the Cuban Revolution, and the current need to respond to the emergence of market imperatives in a mixed economy, Cuban cinema continues to reflect a deep sense of utopian aspiration and social consciousness. Cinema is both “mass” and “high” culture. This ambiguous relationship between cinematic art and culture is reflected throughout the study. These orientations suggest a basis for new conceptions of education and education in the processes of national development.

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1 Information in this section on MAGIN comes from the booklet, MAGIN, Compendio de temas de actualidad imbricados con la dimension y el concepto de género. (“MAGIN, Compendium of themes with the dimension and concept of gender.”)

2 Prejuicio social en función del cual se priorizan los valores y características de los varones, lo cual reducta en imposiciones sobre las mujeres y en la subordinación de éstas. MAGIN Comendium, 1995, p. 28).
APPENDIX  A – Screening Event

February 28 – March 3, 2000

Film in Cuba

A week-long screening and discussion of Cuban cinema

Belkis Vega, director, screenwriter, former war correspondent and current Professor of Documentary Filmmaking at Havana’s Instituto Superior de Arte, will be on campus to speak about various aspects of Cuban cinema – including the history of documentary filmmaking in Cuba’s national development and the representation of women in Cuban cinema. The development of a national cinema in Cuba came on the heels of a radical change in government. For the past 40 years the state-owned film industry has extensively used cinematic representation for the political and cultural transformation of Cuban society. The visit of filmmaker, Belkis Vega, offers the FSU academic community a unique opportunity to see films that touch on contemporary Cuban reality, and to engage in discussion and dialog.

Everyone welcome to reception hosted by the International Student Center (ISC)
Monday February, 28th from 5:00-6:30 pm at the IS Center - 107 S. Wildwood Dr

Monday - February 28  7:00 pm
Memories of Underdevelopment (99 min) 1968. Dir. Tomas Guitierrez Alea
Memories Saved from the Past (12 min) 1999. Dir. Marcos Castillo
The Ones Left Behind (15 min) 1995. Dir. Benito Zambrano

Tuesday - February 29  7:00 pm
Secondary Roles (113 min) 1989) Dir. Orlando Rojas
War Correspondents (27 min) 1986. Dir. Belkis Vega
And Still the Dream (11 min) 1997. Dir. Humberto Padron

Wednesday - March 1   8:15 pm
Classic Cuban Documentary Shorts
NOW (6min) 1965 Dir. Santiago Alvarez
LBJ (18 min) 1968. Dir. Santiago Alvarez
Hanoi, Tuesday 13 (38 min) 1967. Dir. Santiago Alvarez
Until the Victory Forever (19min) 1967. Dir. Manuel Octavio Gomez
Story of a Battle (33 min) 1962 (dir. Manuel Octavio Gomez
For the First Time (10 min) 1967 Dir. Octavio Cortazar

Thursday - March 2   7:00 pm
Transparent Woman (78 min) 1989. Dirs. Hector Veitia, Mayra Segura, Mayra Vilasis, Mario Crespo, and Ana Rodriguez
Keep the Faith (15 min.) 1991. Dir. Belkis Vega

Friday – March 3          7:00 pm
Life..is to Whistle (100 min.) 1998. Dir. Fernando Perez
Remembering Ernesto Lecuona   Dir. Belkis Vega
From the Dream to Poetry       Dir. Belkis Vega

All screenings held in room 126 Bellamy Building, FSU

Sponsored by: International/Intercultural Development Education  College of Communication  College of Social Sciences
Department of Women’s Studies  College of Education  Congress of Graduate Students  International Student Center
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Describe your educational background and how it prepared you to become a filmmaker?

How has watching movies or a movie affected your personal development or identity?

Would you relate or reconstruct your first experience working in film?

Do you think you’ve had experiences as a woman filmmaker that are different than men?

How is filmmaking different in Cuba than in other countries?

How would you characterize the social function of film in Cuba?

How are film scripts or ideas selected for development and production?

Have films or filmmaking changes in the past 10 years? (Special Period)

How would you character the “new man” of revolutionary Cuba?

Has Cuban cinema contributed to the formation of the new man? Or new woman?

How are Cuban women represented in Cuban film?

Is there anything you’d like to change about how women are portrayed on the screen?
REAPPROVAL MEMORANDUM
from the Human Subjects Committee

Date: July 9, 2001
From: David Quadagno, Chairperson
To: Michelle Spinella
800 N. Bronough Street, Apt. D
Tallahassee, FL 32303
Dept: Educational Foundations & Policy Studies
Re: Reapproval of Use of Human subjects in Research
Project entitled: Cinema in Cuba's National Development: Women and Film Making Culture

Your request to continue the research project listed above involving human subjects has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee. If your project has not been completed by June 15, 2002, please request renewed approval.

You are reminded that a change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must report to the Chair promptly, and in writing, any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chairman of your department and/or your major professor are reminded of their responsibility for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in their department. They are advised to review the protocols of such investigations as often as necessary to ensure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

cc: Vandra Masemann
humanresearch
APPLICATION NO. 01.328-M
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I was born in Miami Beach, Florida. I received an undergraduate degree in English Literature at Florida State University. I attended college during the 1970’s but found life and the cultural dynamics of this iconoclastic historical moment so much more interesting than the classroom that, inevitably and often, I would become distracted by the call to adventure and travel (including extensive foreign travel). While I left and returned to college many times, I was not “deferring my dream”, but living it. These experiences of other cultures informed my perspective and served me well upon applying for graduate study 20 + years later in the field of Comparative and International Education and the FSU program of International/Intercultural Development Education.

Before returning to graduate school in the 1993, I had worked for 10 years in the “culture industries” of film, television, and advertising, primarily with Cuban filmmakers. During the 1980’s I worked in the Spanish-language media markets of Miami, Chicago, and New York. In 1987, I produced a film retrospective, “Cuban Cinema in Exile” and freelanced as a production coordinator on production crews for feature films and television commercials. From 1988 to 1992, I helped produce the City of Miami’s International Co-Production Film Market and Conference.

While in graduate school I was an assistant editor for the Comparative Education Review, a professional journal in the field of Comparative and International Education. I held a variety of research assistant positions including project manager for USAID study tours that brought educators from Guinea to Florida State University, and for which I produced two project videos. I also developed various film programs and film screenings based on my dissertation research. My next project is to produce a short documentary on the women filmmakers in Cuba incorporating the interview footage I shot for this research, with the hope of exhibiting it at the Havana Film Festival. Besides employing visual methods in the collection and representation of qualitative research data, this documentary would be a way to thank the filmmakers for their participation in this study.