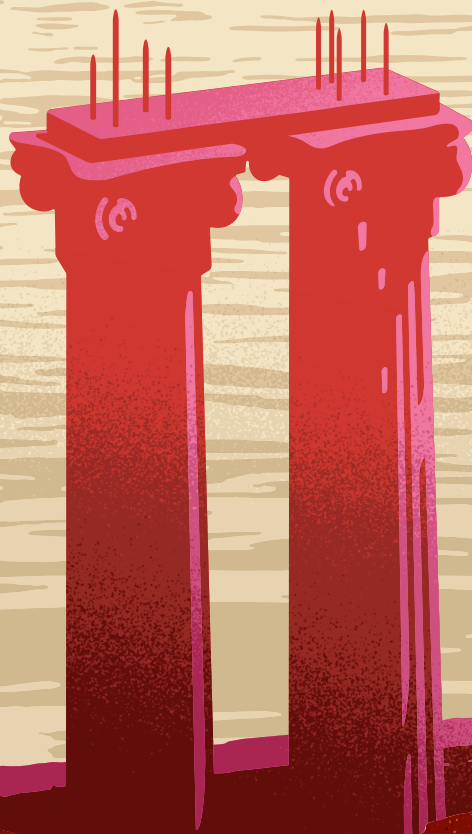


**Laura-Zoë
Humphreys**



FIDEL BETWEEN THE LINES

Paranoia
& Ambivalence
in Late Socialist
Cuban Cinema

BUY

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IN LATE SOCIALIST CUBAN CINEMA

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS *Durham and London* 2019

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Cover designed by Matthew Tauch

Text designed by Aimee C. Harrison

Typeset in Minion Pro, Franklin Gothic, and Serifa Std

by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Humphreys, Laura-Zoe, [date] author.

Title: Fidel between the lines : paranoia and ambivalence in late socialist

Cuban cinema / Laura-Zoe Humphreys.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2019. | Includes

bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019006366 (print)

LCCN 2019012785 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478007142 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478005476 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 9781478006244 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Motion pictures—Cuba—History and criticism. | Motion pictures—Political aspects—Cuba. | Motion pictures—Cuba—History—20th century. | Motion pictures—Cuba—History—21st century.

Classification: LCC PN1993.5.C8 (ebook) | LCC PN1993.5.C8 H867 2019

(print) | DDC 791.43097291—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019006366>

Cover art: View of the Monument to the Victims of the USS *Maine*,

Havana, Cuba. Illustration by Matthew Tauch.

Duke University Press gratefully acknowledges Tulane University's School of Liberal Arts, which provided funds toward the publication of this book.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has taken me from Montreal to Chicago to Baltimore to Winnipeg to New Orleans and back and forth to Havana for more than a decade. Numerous people were essential in its making, both for their work on the book and for helping me keep it together in a sometimes too itinerant lifestyle. First and most importantly, I would like to thank the many Cuban filmmakers and intellectuals who generously gave me their time and their trust. Their stories and their passion for art and for life—their capacity both to dream utopian dreams and to be deeply self-critical—were what motivated me to take on this project. I cannot possibly name them all, but I hope they will see their imprints on these pages. My research in Havana would not have been possible without the support of the Escuela Internacional de Cine y TV (EICTV) and the Cinemateca de Cuba. At the EICTV, special thanks are owed to Maria Julia Grillo and Raúl Capote Rodríguez, who welcomed me into the EICTViano community and facilitated visas for numerous stays. The staff of the Cinemateca, especially Lola Calviño, Luciano Castillo, Mayda Ferrá, Manuel Herrera, Tony Mazón, Mario Naito López, Daymar Valdés, and Sara Vega, have been the best work colleagues I could have asked for. I am grateful for their help with archival research, their company, and for loaning me a desk and the air-conditioning in the summer of 2016, when I decided to finish the first draft of this book in Havana.

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Thanks to the regulars at the Playita de 16 who kept me company during so many early morning swims. I learned much from them about life and politics in Cuba. Heartfelt thanks to Beatrix Berger, Esteban Bruzón, Claudia Calviño, Lisandra Díaz Moreno, Karel Ducase Manzano, David Fernández Borrás, Mayda Ferrá, Mayelin Guevara, Haroldo Jaen, Adriana Lord, Nathaniel Lord Romero (you are missed), Carlos Machado Quintela, Evelio Manfred Gay, Lianed Marcoleta, María Elisa Pérez Leal, Nery Romero Ferrer, Damián Sainz, Ebert Trujillo, Daymar Valdés, Rúben Valdés, Yan Vega, and Othón Yañez Troncoso. Their comments have been essential to this book and to the project I began while finishing this one. Most importantly, their friendship made Havana home and enriched my life through both my own and their moves to new countries.

This project found its first shape in the Departments of Anthropology and Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Chicago. There I owe a debt to William Mazzarella, Tom Gunning, Lauren Berlant, Michael Silverstein, and Stephan Palmié. Their faith in this interdisciplinary venture, the insightful questions they posed, and, most of all, their friendship and care over the years have been crucial in bringing this book to its final form. Anne Chien steered me through graduate studies and beyond, as she has for countless other students. Everything I know about Brecht I learned from Loren Kruger. Jim Lastra helped me think about international new cinemas. Miriam Hansen and Yuri Tsivian inspired me to take up film studies. I hope this book would have lived up to Miriam's high standards.

The current job market has been brutal to many of the most brilliant researchers and teachers I know. I am lucky to have found employment and am endlessly grateful to those who helped me in my own job searches and relocations. An Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Department of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University provided me with two valuable years in which I began writing this book and started research on a second project. Special thanks go to Kristin Boyce, Anne Eakin Moss, Rachel Galvin, Yi-Ping Ong, Rani Neutill, Gabrielle Spiegel, and the members of the 2012–14 Andrew W. Mellon Seminar for their rich intellectual engagement and their incisive comments on early versions of two chapters of this manuscript. In Hopkins's anthropology department, I am particularly thankful to Andrew Brandel, Veena Das, Aaron Goodfellow, Jane Guyer, Clara Han, Niloofar Haeri, Richard Helman, Naveeda Khan, Neena Mahadev, Anand Pandian, Anaid Citalli Reyes-Kipp, Vaibhav Saria, and, most especially, my officemate and dear friend, Andrew Bush, for their support with this project and as I sought my first tenure-track position.

I am grateful to my colleagues in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba, where I held that first tenure-track position. Special thanks are owed to Kathy Buddle, Anna Fournier, Derek Johnson, Ellen Judd, Fabiani Li, and Greg Monks. They helped me strengthen my understanding of anthropology as a discipline and encouraged me to carve out an interdisciplinary path for myself. Also at the University of Manitoba, thanks to the members of the Humanities Institute's Latin American Power and Resistance Research Cluster for reading and to Jorge Nállim for crucial guidance on the logistics of bringing the book to press. The book took on its final form in my first years as an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at Tulane University. I could not ask for a more exciting and generative place from which to think the future of media and cultural studies. My colleagues are, to my mind, a model of the best sort of intellectual engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration. At Johns Hopkins, the University of Manitoba, and Tulane, finally, I owe a debt to all the students in my Cuban Cinema and my Media and the Public Sphere courses. Their curiosity and insightful questions did much to push the thinking that went into this project.

Over the years, many people have taken the time to talk me through my ideas or to provide comments on the conference papers, job talks, articles, and chapter drafts that have gone into the making of this book. Laurie Frederik, Susan Lord, and Paul Ryer helped orient me on my first trips to Havana and long afterward. Joao Felipe Gonçalves, Ariana Hernández-Reguant, Ana López, and Masha Salazkina pushed me to think in more sophisticated ways about Cuba, its cinema, and its politics. Conversations with Alex Boudreault-Fournier, Erin Debenport, and Cassie Fennell provided important provocations. Rachel Galvin, Eric Herhuth, Michelle Lelièvre, Sarah Luna, William Mazarella, Hannah Rogers, Eli Thorkelson, and Jeremy Walton gave detailed and astute readings of individual chapters. Their care and labor were essential to helping me formulate and refine my ideas. I am forever indebted to Kenneth Brummel, Faizal Deen, Anna Fournier, Julie Gibbins, Ruth Goldberg, François Proulx, and Shayna Silverstein. I would not have made it to the finish line without their generous intellectual engagement, their friendship, and, in the case of Shayna, her presence throughout the years pushing me to write from the other side of social media or the library to the café table. Dan Morgan read so much and with such great care. Thanks also to him for always reminding me to finish.

Gisela Fosado at Duke University Press is an exemplary editor. Her enthusiasm, quick responses, and patience helped me write the book I wanted

to write and, hopefully, one that others will enjoy reading. Emily Chilton, Lydia Rose Rappoport-Hankins, and Jenny Tan provided essential support at critical stages in my work on the manuscript. Liz Smith shepherded the manuscript through the editorial, design, and production process, and Sheila McMahon provided careful and detailed copyediting. I am grateful to the two anonymous readers for their painstaking attention to every level of the argument and writing and for their willingness to keep pushing for improvement over two rounds of reviews. I could not have asked for a more insightful reading. My gratitude also goes to David Sartorius and to two anonymous reviewers at *Social Text*. Their comments on an early version of chapter 2 pushed me to better articulate the broader stakes of this project.

The research for this project was made possible by generous grants from the University of Chicago, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Fonds de recherche du Québec—Société et culture, and the Social Science Research Council. Earlier versions of chapters 1 and 2 first appeared as “Symptomologies of the State: Cuba’s ‘Email War’ and the Paranoid Public Sphere,” in *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion: Feelings, Affect and Technological Change*, ed. Athina Karatzogianni and Adi Kunstman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and “Paranoid Readings and Ambivalent Allegories in Cuban Cinema,” *Social Text* 35, no. 3 (2017): 17–40. An analysis of Susana Barriga’s *The Illusion* (2008), discussed in chapter 5, appeared as a film review in *E-misférica* 7, no. 1 (2010), <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-71/laura-zoehumphreys->.

I am also grateful to the staff, faculty, and students of the master’s program of the humanities at the University of Chicago for their support and company. Karin Cope and Miranda Hickman fostered my love for writing and creative thinking. Sam McGavin may well be right that it was her idea that I do research in Cuba in the first place. Her friendship has been invaluable during so many difficult moments. Thanks also to Mario Aranda, Diego Arispe-Bazán, Gláucio Augusto, Eleanor Bailey Little, Brian Brazeal, Justin Bur, Carolina Caballero, Nusrat Chowdhury, Brenda Cockfield, Will Eizlini, Paul Fagen, Dianna Frid, Julia Gibbs, Alayne Gobeille, Danny Gough, Elyn Humphreys, Paul Jenkins, Allan Lesage, Hillary Neeb, Stefan Reinecke, Phil Stalcup, Bill Toles, Dan Torop, Michael, Clare, and Evie Treberg, Nikola Tamindzic, Grete Viddal, Lonnell Williams, and Artemis Willis for helping me keep it all in perspective.

This project made an itinerant not just out of me. My thanks to Dziga, who has kept me company through two international moves and several annual migrations; to my mother, Suzanne Humphreys, who is an excel-

lent copyeditor as well as the best long-distance driving, swimming, and canoeing partner I could ask for; and to my father, Glenn Humphreys, who helped take charge of the endlessly complicated logistical issues involved in jet-setting on a shoestring. My parents always believed in me even when I did not, and they never once hesitated to deliver indeterminate packages across international borders to unknown people. Their unwavering support has allowed me to live my life more richly, if, perhaps, not always all that sensibly. This book is dedicated to them.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS — xi

INTRODUCTION

CRITICISM FROM WITHIN

“For once I’d like to do an interview about cinema instead of talking about the same nonsense,” a then thirtysomething Cuban filmmaker told me in February 2008 as he graciously showed me out of his apartment in Havana’s middle-class Vedado neighborhood.¹ The “nonsense” to which he referred included questions about social criticism and censorship that I had introduced toward the end of our conversation, and which he had largely evaded. In the days that followed, this comment haunted me. From my first visit to Cuba in 2003, to full-time fieldwork from 2007 to 2009, and subsequent visits through 2017, my goal was to track how filmmakers were negotiating aspirations to produce films that depicted the nation’s social and political realities with their dependence on broader structures for support: the socialist state as of the beginning of the Cuban Revolution and, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the global market.² To the novice fieldworker that I was at the time, my interlocutor’s resistance to my attempts to guide the conversation to these topics seemed to throw my entire project into doubt.

With time, however, I realized that it was precisely such resistances that needed to be explored. A year after our initial conversation, I returned to this same filmmaker’s apartment to look over the transcript of our first interview together. A discussion of Susana Barriga’s *The Illusion* (2008), a short first-person documentary about Barriga’s painful and paranoia-imbued encounter with her exiled Cuban father in London, England (see chapter 5), soon led to

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a broader conversation about Cuban filmmaking and the lingering effects of Cold War divides on public debate in and about the island.³ After detailing with some bitterness his encounters with censorship in Cuba, the film director recounted with equal rancor his experiences of being silenced by audiences abroad, who, he explained, often dismissed his statements about Cuban politics by saying that he would not be able to articulate such views on the island. “What freedom of expression are they talking about,” he asked, “when they won’t let me voice my opinions? I’ve found that the best way to survive in Cuba is to refuse to be part of either group.”

This filmmaker was not alone in his wariness of a reduction of his work and beliefs to a binary view of Cuban politics framed, on one side, by staunch support for the Cuban government and, on the other, by the conviction that Cuba is a totalitarian regime that stifles all meaningful debate. Over the course of my fieldwork, I learned that politics and social criticism had become sources of both desire and anxiety for artists and audiences. In the post-Soviet era, a series of economic, political, and technological changes created new openings for public debate and representation. Artists and intellectuals celebrated the expansion of what could be articulated through cinema and other arts, while audiences crowded into theaters to see the latest controversial film or, in cases where state officials blocked these works from the big screen, circulated them informally over newly available digital technologies. But these openings also exacerbated the political paranoia that has long dominated the Cuban public sphere. While spectators argued about whether films harbored secret messages against the socialist state, veiled complicity with political leaders, or served as publicity stunts, filmmakers complained that these readings ignored the nuances of their depictions of Cuba and reduced their art to propaganda.

In the chapters that follow, I tease out the history and dynamics of this paranoid public sphere. Reading films against what artists and spectators say about them, as well as for how they rehearse and transform genres pervasive in art and in Cuban intellectual and political discourse, I show how Cuban filmmakers have historically turned to allegory to articulate an ambivalent relationship to the Revolution and how such attempts have repeatedly come up against paranoid readings of their work.⁴ One of this book’s central goals, then, is to explain the history by which nuanced political positions in Cuba have so often been reduced to Cold War binaries and to show how these divisions are increasingly out of step with the hopes and sentiments of many Cubans. This book thus also necessarily delves into themes with resonance beyond the island, exploring what happens to politics

and public debate when freedom of expression can no longer be distinguished from complicity, how allegory and conflicts over textual interpretation shape the public sphere, and how textual analysis and ethnographic fieldwork can be brought together to better understand the broader social and political import of cinema.

Telling this story requires me to move back and forth in time across and within the chapters, in order to establish the precedents that set up the aesthetic and political positions and genres that play out in later debates. To make it easier for readers to follow these shifts, in the remainder of this introduction I provide a brief history of the major institutions, individuals, and events that have shaped Cuban cinema from the beginning of the revolutionary period in 1959 until 2017, then outline the book's major theoretical and methodological interventions. This introduction, then, provides an initial picture of how filmmakers working in a state socialist context have attempted to use their films to open up new meanings, the complexities and contradictions that have plagued these efforts, and what this can teach us about cinema, censorship, and the paradoxes of the public sphere.

Social Criticism, Censorship, and Cuban Cinema, 1959–2017

I take cinema as my focus because it has long been one of the sites where struggles over freedom of expression have been the most acute in Cuba.⁵ Demonstrating both the importance granted cinema by the new revolutionary government and the political capital enjoyed by the Revolution's first generation of filmmakers, the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC, Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry) was one of the first cultural institutions to be established after the triumph against General Fulgencio Batista in January 1959. Following the nationalization of movie theaters and distributors in the early 1960s, the ICAIC dominated film production and distribution well into the 1990s. Artists and intellectuals on the island often praise the ICAIC for having safeguarded a broader margin for both aesthetic experimentation and public debate than other institutions, including, notably, state-operated journalism and television. As one of the ICAIC's most recognized directors, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, once famously argued, Cuban filmmakers took on difficult issues in their films because "journalism . . . does not perform its mission of social criticism" (qtd. in Chanan 2002, 51; see also chapter 2). Much of the credit for the ICAIC's relative freedom is given to its longtime director, Alfredo Guevara,

who headed the institute from 1959 to 1982, and again from 1991 to 2000, before taking over the leadership of the Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (New Latin American Film Festival) until his death in May 2013. As is well known in Cuba, Guevara formed a close personal friendship with Fidel Castro during the 1940s, when the two were student activists at the University of Havana. It is also an open secret on the island that he was gay. Over the course of his career, Guevara drew on his personal ties to Castro to protect controversial films and filmmakers, including during the 1970s, the period of worst censorship in Cuba and an era when gay artists in particular came under attack.

Two of the institute's most important figures—Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa—studied cinema at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (Experimental Film Center) in Rome in the 1950s, along with Néstor Almendros, who would soon leave the ICAIC and, eventually, Cuba, earning international recognition abroad as a cinematographer for the French New Wave and an Oscar for his work on Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978). Other members came to the institute through their previous participation in local cinema clubs. They brought with them strong ties to and interests in Italian neorealism, international new cinemas, and the work of German playwright Bertolt Brecht and Soviet montage filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein. Leading leftist filmmakers from Dutch documentarist Joris Ivens to French Left Bank filmmakers Chris Marker and Agnès Varda visited the island, exchanging with the Cuban artists at the ICAIC and producing their own films inspired by the new revolution. And finally, in these first decades, the ICAIC also supported the production of films that challenged traditional gender roles and explored slavery and contemporary racial dynamics. Nonetheless, and in spite of the Cuban state's official objectives to combat gender and racial discrimination, the first generation of Cuban filmmakers typically consisted of white men from the middle or upper classes, with the notable exceptions of Afro-Cuban filmmakers Sergio Giral, Sara Gómez, and Nicolás Guillén Landrián.

Guevara was also by no means a straightforward champion of freedom of expression. Indeed, it was in response to his censorship of Saba Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal's short documentary about Cuban nightlife, *P.M.* (1961), that Fidel Castro famously delimited the boundaries of the cultural field in a speech that same year as follows: "within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing" ([1961] 1980, 14). As I elaborate in chapter 1, this pronouncement gave rise to radically different interpretations. Some Cuban artists and intellectuals, including those associated

with the weekly cultural supplement *Lunes de Revolución*, viewed Castro's declaration as the inauguration of a totalitarian control over the cultural field and eventually went into exile. For others, however, his statement was a guarantee of a freedom of expression within limits that they were willing to accept, and which they also fought to expand. In a performative play on Castro's phrase, the filmmakers associated with the ICAIC and other artists defended the right to "criticism from within." Over the course of the decades that followed, they worked to extend what could be articulated in public while remaining, on the whole, loyal to the values and ideals they associated with the Revolution, such as solidarity, social justice, national sovereignty, and commitment to public health care and education.

Allegory, understood here as an aesthetic mode in which the surface of a work suggests the existence of another meaning that needs to be decoded, played a crucial role in these attempts to articulate a critical but committed relationship to the Revolution.⁶ Beginning in the 1960s, Cuban filmmakers adopted what I call modernist allegories. Drawing on modernist aesthetic techniques and open endings, filmmakers worked to create films they hoped would incite spectators to engage in critical reflection of social problems and take action to address them. Many of these works articulated an ambivalent take on socialism, smuggling in criticism of the state between the lines while nonetheless remaining true to revolutionary values and ambitions. For their part, spectators accustomed to such practices frequently responded to films with what, following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), I term paranoid readings. By paranoid readings, Sedgwick means an allegorical mode of interpretation in which analysts strive to reveal the secret meanings and workings of power hidden beneath the surface of texts, often by mobilizing tautological arguments that unearth threats anticipated in advance by the critic.

In Cuba, the adoption of such paranoid interpretive tactics frequently led to the reduction of films to arguments for or against state socialism, leaving filmmakers struggling to shape perceptions of their work and their own politics. The efforts by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea to counter readings by some foreign critics of his film *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*, 1968) illustrate these dynamics (see chapter 2), as does the 1991 censorship of Daniel Díaz Torres's bureaucrat comedy, *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas* (*Alice in Wondertown*), which was pulled from theaters after only four days amid accusations on the island that it was "hyper critical," "defeatist," and even "counterrevolutionary" (see chapter 3).

While this book returns to the 1960s and the 1970s, the buildup from the mid-1980s to the censorship of *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas* in 1991

marks the beginning of the late socialist era on which I focus, which itself can be roughly divided into three historical periods: the immediate post-Soviet era of the 1990s to approximately 2005, otherwise known as the “Special Period”; roughly 2006 to 2009, when the Cuban economy began to recover and Raúl Castro stepped in to take over from an ailing Fidel; and 2010 to 2017, when the economic reforms launched under Raúl Castro began to take on more distinctive shape.⁷ The censorship of *Alicia* marked the rise to dominance of the second generation of filmmakers, those artists who were in their teens or early twenties in the 1960s, got their start as film critics and documentarists in that decade or in the 1970s, and were finally given an opportunity to make feature-length films when Julio García Espinosa took over as director of the ICAIC from 1982 to 1991. It also heralded the beginning of a new era in Cuban filmmaking and in Cuba more broadly. The collapse of the Soviet Union plunged the island into a severe economic crisis, which Fidel Castro denominated “the Special Period in Times of Peace,” a moniker that referred to the government’s adoption of wartime survival measures to survive the disappearance of the nation’s primary trading partner. This economic crisis reached its peak in 1994, when thousands of Cubans took to boats and makeshift rafts in an attempt to make it to Florida.⁸

For all the desperation produced by a constant state of material shortages, however, the Special Period was also a time of hope and anticipation, as market reforms opened up new opportunities for individual entrepreneurship and suggested the possibility of political change. The state welcomed foreign investment, and a new influx of foreign visitors poured dollars not only into state coffers but also into the hands of individuals newly granted the right to operate as *cuentapropistas* (small business owners) in a limited range of activities, including running *paladares* (restaurants) and *casas particulares* (private homes that rent to tourists). In the realm of cinema, the loss of state funding slowed filmmaking to a trickle and led to a new dependence on international coproductions. These changes subjected filmmakers to market forces, but they also provided them with increased independence from the ICAIC, at least for those able to secure ongoing relationships with foreign producers. Finally, this era saw a new relationship to the diaspora. Whereas in previous decades leaving Cuba was a decisive juncture, in the 1990s state officials and artists alike began depicting the diaspora in a more conciliatory light. By the end of that decade, emigrants had begun traveling back and forth to the island with greater frequency, forming a new and more flexible diaspora than what had existed in previous years.

Citizens' growing dissatisfaction with an economy that, as many artists put it to me, was neither socialism nor capitalism but the worst of both combined, meanwhile, forced the state to grant new room for public expression. As the stories recounted in this book make clear, the state continued to censor works and to jail artists deemed political dissidents. But the 1990s also saw increasing attempts to contain dissent by giving it a limited outlet in the arts, including in cinema.⁹ As I explore in this book's later chapters, economic crisis, emigration, the new relationship to the diaspora, a renewed emphasis on the personal, and the crisis in historicity provoked by the collapse of the Soviet Union all became dominant themes in films of the Special Period and the early twenty-first century, as filmmakers took advantage of their increased independence from the state to give voice to a growing disillusionment with the socialist state and its policies.

Yet at the same time, films fell prey to new forms of paranoid readings, as spectators debated whether the release of critical films represented wins in a battle for greater freedom of expression or were merely signs of more subtle tactics of power. The writings of German theorist Herbert Marcuse and Hungarian dissident Miklós Haraszti provide us with tools for understanding such mixed responses. In a 1965 article, Marcuse argued that, by the twentieth century, liberal ideals of tolerance were being used to stifle rather than to promote freedom. By burying news reports among advertisements or giving equal weight to progressive and regressive political views, he maintained, capitalist media conformed outwardly to demands for objectivity and plurality of debate while in reality ensuring that a population indoctrinated in the dominant ideology ignored real alternatives. Haraszti argued that a similarly paradoxical permissiveness was at work in late socialist Eastern European nations. By the 1980s, contended Haraszti (1988, 77–81), traditional practices of censorship in the Soviet Union had given way to a more permissive model in which an ever-greater range of artwork was allowed, provided that it did not challenge the system.

In the early decades of the Revolution, Cuban intellectuals criticized liberal notions of freedom of expression in terms that resonated with Marcuse's arguments (see chapter 1). But by the 1990s, Cuba seemed to many to be suffering from its own variant of what Marcuse described as repressive tolerance and Haraszti termed progressive censorship. The state's strategic relaxation of censorship and the increasing orientation of artists to the global market exacerbated paranoid readings of films, as artists and audiences worried that social criticism sacrificed aesthetic quality for political

impact, bolstered the power of the socialist state by working as a safety valve or improving Cuba's reputation abroad, or served as a marketing stunt designed to appeal to spectators eager for images of socialism on the decline. As I elaborate in chapter 1 and throughout this book, these suspicions were often both reasonable and productive, drawing attention to changing strategies of power and pushing for greater freedom. But the constant return to the revelation of the other's political complicity also reinforced well-worn divides, thwarting the recognition of ambivalence and the emergence of alternative political positions.¹⁰

The work of a third generation of filmmakers was crucial both to the production of increasingly critical depictions of life under late socialism and to suspicions that such criticism reproduced state power and reinforced foreign stereotypes about the island. Born from the 1960s through the 1980s, these filmmakers got their start in filmmaking in the midst of the Special Period or in the first decade of the twenty-first century and are generally thought to be both more market savvy and more cynical, although they too often harbor lingering attachments to the Revolution, its ideals, and its materialities. In spite of the economic crisis, this is also a generation that enjoyed more—or at least different—professional opportunities than their predecessors. Many of the most successful of these artists, including several whose work is examined here, trained at Cuba's international film school, the Escuela Internacional de Cine y TV (EICTV, International School of Cinema and Television). Established in 1986 as a subsidiary of the Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (FNCL, New Latin American Cinema Foundation), the EICTV is located approximately one hour outside Havana and fifteen minutes outside the small town of San Antonio de los Baños, at the end of a narrow road that winds its way through citrus orchards. The self-contained complex includes classrooms, production studios, a movie theater, a café, a cafeteria, dormitories, apartments, an outdoor swimming pool, and a store renowned for its low prices and its ability to stock ready supplies of items from toilet paper to dish soap, even when these have been unavailable for weeks in Havana.

Reflecting the Third Worldist politics of its founders, the EICTV was originally dedicated to training young filmmakers from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Though the majority of the school's students continue to come from Latin America, over the years the EICTV also developed strong relationships with Western Europe and Canada. By 2007, the school was also drawing students from Spain, Germany, and other countries for shorter seminars as well as for the school's core three-year intensive pro-

gram, which is organized around one- to two-week workshops delivered by specialists from around the world. In addition to providing students with training and equipment to make short films during their studies, the EICTV promotes student works to international film festivals and sponsors alumni for exchange programs in cities including Paris and Montreal. Many of its alumni turn to the EICTV after graduation for employment, and the networks and friendships that they establish during their time at the school are often crucial to their careers and personal lives long after they have left the school, including, for several Cuban students, by serving as springboards to emigration.

Of course, not every aspiring young Cuban filmmaker has the privilege of studying at this elite institution. While the island's national arts university, the Universidad de las Artes (ISA, National Arts University), suffers from a relative paucity of funds and equipment compared to the EICTV, it also plays an important role in training and providing an alternate production center for young Cuban filmmakers.¹¹ In 1988 the ISA founded a part-time academic program for media workers. And in 2002 it began offering a full-time program with both theoretical and practical training components leading to a bachelor's degree through the Facultad de Arte de los Medios de Comunicación Audiovisual (FAMCA, Faculty of Art of Audiovisual Communication Media). A number of Cuban filmmakers earned a degree from the FAMCA either before or while studying at the EICTV. Other institutions on the island founded from the late 1980s into the twenty-first century—including, for instance, the German-Cuban nongovernmental organization Fundación Ludwig de Cuba (Cuban Ludwig Foundation) and, in more recent years, the Norwegian Embassy in Cuba—provide both economic resources and exhibition space to young Cuban filmmakers, further accelerating the decentralization of cinema.¹²

Perhaps the most significant threat to the ICAIC's dominance over cinema, however, is the increasing availability of digital technologies. As has been well documented, Cuba has one of the lowest rates of internet access in the world (see chapter 1). By the time I first visited the island, Cubans were already circumventing these limitations by circulating a wide array of international and local media, including Cuban films, hand to hand over flash drives and hard drives. These informal forms of exchange grew more elaborate over the years. Since about 2010, state control over media distribution has been displaced by the *paquete semanal* (weekly package): one terabyte of pirated digital media that is downloaded and distributed across the island over flash drive and hard drive on a weekly basis. The package's most sought-after

contents are foreign or popular genres from South Korean television dramas and K-Pop music videos to national and international reggaetón. But its organizers do make explicit efforts to include Cuban cinema, from classic to more recent films, if only in an attempt to placate concerns on the island about the threat this new form of independent media distribution might constitute to the taste and values of Cubans.¹³

In addition to shifting control over distribution out of the hands of the state, the advent of digital technologies radically transformed production. From the early twenty-first century on, younger generations in particular purchased or borrowed increasingly inexpensive digital cameras and software editing programs, drawing on these tools to shoot and edit films with more independence from the ICAIC and other state institutions than ever before. Combined with changing social mores as well as the establishment of the film schools, digital technologies also helped diversify filmmaking, as some few more women and Afro-Cubans were able to obtain work, not just as editors or in other more traditionally accessible roles but also as directors, directors of photography, and sound engineers in what nonetheless remains an elite and male-dominated industry.

At the same time, the ICAIC worked to keep up with these developments. Under the leadership of Omar González, who took over from Alfredo Guevara in 2000, the state film institute established the *Muestra Nacional de Nuevos Realizadores* (National Exhibit of New Filmmakers), later renamed the *Muestra Joven* (Youth Exhibit), a yearly festival in which Cubans up to the age of thirty-five can show their films, compete for prizes, and take part in debates and workshops. Illustrating once again the ways in which new openings have gone hand in hand with new suspicions, the *Muestra* itself has provoked mixed reactions. While many artists praise the *Muestra* for providing young filmmakers with crucial exhibition opportunities, others criticize it as a strategy devised by the ICAIC to regain control over youth film production.¹⁴

These transformations in Cuban filmmaking went hand in hand with further economic and political developments on the island. As the state found more secure economic footing by the end of the 1990s thanks, in part, to new trade arrangements with Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, market reforms in Cuba slowed to a halt. Stricter regulations as well as restrictions on the number of licenses given out to operate small businesses slowed *cuentapropismo*, while also driving many seeking to make a living off self-employment as taxi drivers or in other professions back into the informal economy. In 2004 the American dollar, whose use was legalized

in 1993 and subsequently became identified with the economic crisis, was replaced with Cuban convertible pesos (CUCs), while Fidel Castro himself suggested in 2005 that the Special Period might have come to an end.

As it turned out, even more radical changes were just on the horizon. In 2006 Fidel Castro withdrew from public office due to an illness that the government deliberately attempted to keep under wraps, and Raúl Castro stepped in to take his place. On February 24, 2008, Raúl officially acceded to the presidency amid promises to reform the economy and eliminate the dual currency. Two years later, the government announced plans to shift several thousand workers from the state sector to the private, reopening and expanding the categories in which individuals could apply for small business licenses in order to achieve this goal.¹⁵ And on December 17, 2014, Presidents Raúl Castro and Barack Obama appeared on their respective nations' televisions to announce the renewal of diplomatic relations between the two countries after more than fifty years of Cold War enmity.

Filmmakers, for their part, scrambled to take advantage of these changes. While the ICAIC provided services to big Hollywood productions, artists fought for legal recognition of the independent production groups that had become increasingly integral to domestic film production on the island and to the provision of services to foreign filmmakers (see the coda). In the midst of struggles over the shape that filmmaking and the nation's economy would take, Fidel Castro passed away on November 25, 2016. When it finally took place, many felt that his passing arrived long after the transition that it might once have promised had already taken on whatever limited shape it was going to adopt. But his death also coincided with an unexpected historical twist. Only a couple of weeks earlier, to the surprise of mainstream media outlets and much of the American electorate, Donald Trump won the US elections against Hillary Clinton on a campaign platform that promised to roll back many of Barack Obama's policies, including the latter's efforts to normalize diplomatic and commercial relations with Cuba.

These promises would soon take effect. In the summer of 2017, the Cuban government put a temporary freeze on several categories of *cuentapropista* licenses in order to reorganize the system.¹⁶ In the fall of that year, meanwhile, Donald Trump imposed new restrictions that limited American travel to Cuba and economic dealings with the numerous Cuban businesses owned or affiliated with the military and, amid accusations that the Cuban government had employed an unknown weapon to engage in sonic attacks on American diplomats, withdrew the majority of the staff from the only recently reopened American embassy on the island. In theory, at least, it

will be up to the new Cuban president to navigate this political situation. On April 19, 2018, Raúl Castro stepped down as president while retaining his position as leader of the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC, Communist Party of Cuba), thereby passing the official leadership of the country to a non-Castro and to someone born after 1959—Miguel Díaz-Canel, born in 1960—for the first time since Fidel Castro officially took over the presidency in 1976.¹⁷

By the end of 2017 and the period that this book examines, then, Cuban filmmaking and Cuba were at a crossroads. The state's strategic relaxation of censorship, the growing influx of foreign funding for film production, and, as of the early twenty-first century, the increasing availability of digital technologies enabled filmmakers to produce films that were more openly critical of the nation's social and political problems and even, at times, of its highest political leaders than ever before. Yet these changes also rendered criticism itself suspect. Meanwhile, as 2016 came to a close, the island's political elites were partying with Hollywood stars and socialites from Vin Diesel to Paris Hilton while some Cuban Americans celebrated Fidel Castro's death by dancing in the streets of Miami amid Cuban flags and Trump signs. But by December 2017, Cubans were waiting to see what would happen to the reforms that seemed to have stalled just as soon as they began. Faced, on the one hand, with the threat that economic reforms on the island will turn into yet another version of postsocialist, authoritarian neoliberalism that benefits only a few and, on the other hand, with some Cuban Americans' willingness to embrace Trump's vision of a powerful America led by a strongman, especially if he makes good on promises to restore a "hard line" with Cuba, new political options are all the more important.¹⁸ It is with the hope of making even a small contribution to this end that this book explores how Cuban filmmakers have, in the late socialist era, attempted to open up conversations about the meaning and significance of the Revolution in a context permeated by suspicion.

Autonomy and the Public Sphere

To take Cuban cinema as a site of significant public debate and representation is to tangle with the ideals of autonomy that have long subtended understandings of the public sphere. From the 1960s on, Cuban filmmakers have varyingly insisted that cinema should address social problems, reflect the everyday lives of Cubans, and incite spectators to critical reflection, feeling, and social engagement, all functions that have often been associated with the work of the public sphere. Yet, in the liberal imaginary, mean-

ingful public debate and representation have historically been equated with an autonomy from the state and from the market to which Cuban artists are well aware that they and their work cannot lay claim.

In his seminal book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas ([1962] 1989) claims that the advent in eighteenth-century Europe of an art market and of new forms of subjectivity played key roles in the development of a literary and a political bourgeois public sphere. The production of art for the capitalist market freed works from the authority of the Church and the nobility, making them available for critical rational debate among citizens in which, at least in principle, social status and identity were bracketed. New forms of textual circulation, meanwhile, facilitated the public's inclusivity (36–37). At the same time, the rise of an intimate model of the family based not on economic necessity but rather on the free will and mutual love of its members helped foster a new perception of the individual as self-determining and autonomous, an ideal further cultivated through genres such as the domestic novel (46–49). Together, these developments provided a model for a political public sphere through which governance would be achieved not by dictate but rather by citizens coming together as equals to debate matters of public import.

This ideal of autonomy—whether at the level of art, politics, or individuals themselves—is cast into doubt by state socialism, which, as scholars have long pointed out, absorbs cultural production as well as large swathes of political, economic, and social life into its institutions. The growing role of the global market in Cuban arts in the post-Soviet era does not resolve these concerns. In their influential arguments about twentieth-century mass cultural production, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer ([1944] 1987) maintain that the culture industry reduces art to commodities, eliminating the capacity that art supposedly enjoyed in earlier stages of capitalism to act as a critical reflection on the economic system on which it nonetheless depended. In line with this argument, Habermas concludes that, from the late nineteenth into the twentieth centuries, the arts were subsumed by market demands in ways that transformed public debate into passive consumption. In their efforts to cater to a mass audience, he argues, book producers lowered the “psychological threshold” of the works they sold while the emergence of new mass media such as radio, film, and television favored passive group reception over the critical debate that had shaped bourgeois engagements with art (163, 166–67, 170–71).

The translation of Habermas's *Structural Transformation* into English in 1989, nearly three decades after its original publication in Germany, gave

rise to a new wave of scholarship on the public sphere. Numerous scholars queried the equation of the ideal democratic public with autonomy. Miriam Hansen (1990, 1991) argues, for instance, that early cinema opened up space to articulate what Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge ([1972] 1993, 14–15) referred to as a “social horizon of experience” that incorporated the life contexts of individuals—women, people of color, the working classes—excluded from the bourgeois public sphere, even as such inclusion often worked in the interest of reproducing capitalism.¹⁹

Others have explored the existence of publics in state socialist and authoritarian contexts. In the Cuban context, Sujatha Fernandes (2006), Geoffrey Baker (2005, 2011), and Nicholas Balais (2016) demonstrate how hip-hop and cinema gave rise to new forms of public expression in post-Soviet Cuba. Of particular relevance to this book, Alexei Yurchak (2006, 116–18) argues that the “hypernormalization” of political discourse in Soviet late socialism fostered *svoi* or “deterritorialized” publics. As public speech and mass media became increasingly formulaic in late socialist Russia, citizens devised new strategies that allowed them to fulfill the formal requirements of political rituals while shifting the meanings of these activities. The advantage of such strategies was that they allowed Soviet citizens to adopt stances that went beyond political binaries, enabling individuals to hold onto those elements of socialism that remained meaningful to them while ignoring or making fun of the rest.²⁰

These more expansive theorizations of publics are useful for considering how Cuban cinema works to involve spectators in a collective engagement with matters of general import to the nation. In the early decades of the Revolution, as I show here, Cuban intellectuals worked to establish an alternative public sphere, one that took political commitment instead of autonomy from the state as its basis, while nonetheless emphasizing the importance of citizen participation in debate.²¹ In the late socialist era, criticism took on new valences as filmmakers used their work to reflect on the legacy of the Revolution and the crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. These films frequently reflected both the growing disillusionment of filmmakers and their ongoing attachments to revolutionary promises and values.

In Cuba as in late socialist Russia, in other words, the attempt to articulate an ambivalence that escapes well-worn political antagonisms became an increasingly important and even an explicit goal of many filmmakers. What Cuban late socialist public culture also reveals, however, is how political paranoia haunts such efforts. As Yurchak (2006) argues, life in late

socialism cannot be reduced to binary oppositions between the state and citizens, surface and depth, oppression and resistance, freedom and complicity. But, as I show, such dichotomies nonetheless play an important role in citizens' imaginations of the state and other social actors, often to the detriment of attempts to move beyond them. Anxieties about autonomy further fuel suspicion and feed these dichotomies. Even early attempts in Cuba to theorize an alternative public sphere founded on revolutionary commitment were fraught with concerns about autonomy, as intellectuals worried both about the evanescence of the social energies they hoped might provide the basis for a revolutionary political order (see chapter 3) and about the threat that crowd affect might pose to individual capacities for critical reason (see chapter 2).

As artists and intellectuals grew increasingly disillusioned with the socialist state in the post-Soviet era, the ability to establish one's independence from both the state and the global market played an ever more important role in asserting one's credibility, but the allegiances and dependencies on which cultural production relied complicated such efforts. The broader points here are both, as scholars from Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge through Miriam Hansen and Alexei Yurchak have pointed out before me, that a meaningful public sphere can exist in the absence of autonomy from the state and the global market and, less commonly recognized, that anxieties about autonomy shape public debate and representation. In the pages that follow, I show how aspirations to autonomy along with the inevitably heteronomous bases of artistic creation, debate, and subjectivity fueled a paranoid public sphere, limiting what arguments and experiences could be heard as participants and onlookers struggled to distinguish freedom of expression from complicity.

Allegory and Political Paranoia

Key to my discussion of paranoia and ambivalence in late socialist Cuba is also a claim about how allegory can both enable and constrain public debate and representation. In making this argument, I hope to encourage a shift in work on allegory from thinking about it as a mode whose meanings critics should (or should not) reveal to approaching it as a social practice involving not only texts but also people with often competing interests and goals. I am not, of course, the first theorist to find Cuba a particularly rich site from which to rethink the politics of allegory. In 1985 one of Cuba's foremost postcolonial theorists, Roberto Fernández Retamar, and Cuban

essayist and screenwriter Ambrosio Fornet invited Fredric Jameson to hold the annual Marxist Literary Group's Summer Institute for Culture and Society in Havana at the Casa de las Américas, a cultural institution dedicated to fostering Cuba's relationship with Latin America, the Caribbean, and the world. Out of that meeting emerged Jameson's landmark essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," in which he makes the strong claim that "all third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as . . . *national allegories*" (1986, 69).

Jameson bases this argument on three claims. First, he contends that, contrary to the West, where the political is always supplanted by the libidinal and personal, in the Third World, there is a more direct relationship between public and private, the collective and the individual. Second, he argues that the social and economic situations of Third World countries are defined by their struggle with First World cultural imperialism, prompting intellectuals to think of their work as political interventions. This struggle, finally, accounts for why the allegories of Third World texts are specifically national. Suggesting that a turn to the national might in other contexts be regressive, he maintains that, in the Third World, it is the properly revolutionary response to these nations' embattled position in the global system of capitalism.

Jameson's argument was subsequently taken to task by several scholars, including Aijaz Ahmad (1987), who criticizes the literary theorist for glossing over crucial differences between the diverse literatures and societies that the latter grouped together as Third World and for reinforcing a too-rigid dichotomy between so-called First and Third World texts. Importantly, however, Jameson's argument about Third World texts is only one instance of his broader theory that all texts are political allegories and of a particular sort. In *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Jameson contends that the task of the theorist is to uncover the hidden allegorical meanings of texts, which in the final instance are always imaginary resolutions of class conflict. The difference between First and Third World texts for Jameson is thus not so much one of kind but rather of degree: in First World literature the allegorical meanings that reveal the work's engagement with class and modes of production are concealed; in Third World texts, these meanings are evident, perhaps uncomfortably so (1981, 79–80).

It is Jameson's broader argument about texts and allegory that became the focus of controversy in later years. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003, 123–51) and other scholars contest the predominance in Jameson's oeuvre, as in

critical theory more generally, of what they term “paranoid” or “symptomatic readings.”²² This work both builds on and departs from the analysis of political paranoia first advanced by Richard Hofstadter in his 1965 essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics.” For Hofstadter, as for later scholars, political paranoia might best be summed up as an interpretive style that weds a deep skepticism with the certainty that the “truth is out there”; that continuously scans events and objects for signs of hidden threats; that aspires to connect disparate events into totalizing narratives that themselves often remain worked through with gaps and uncertainties; and that sees politics and social life as struggles between opponents who are frequently cast in moral terms and determined in advance.

While Hofstadter was careful to distinguish political paranoia from its clinical counterpart, he nonetheless saw it as a deviation from the rational and even-handed debate that should characterize a healthy polity. Recent scholarship instead argues both that paranoia is a reasonable response to the often opaque and ambiguous workings of power and that it may be more central to dominant political and theoretical discourses than Hofstadter recognized. The question, then, as Sedgwick (2003, 124) puts it, is not whether paranoia is an accurate description of the world (it frequently is) but rather what effects such knowing has, what openings and what closures it might entail. If political paranoia, as some scholars show, can undermine and challenge dominant histories and systems of power, its repetitive recourse to predetermined enemies and narratives can also foreclose alternative takes on social and political situations.²³

Sedgwick’s (2003, 46–51) solution to this impasse is to propose that analysts undertake what she terms “reparative readings,” focusing attention, as José Esteban Muñoz (2000, 257) puts it in an essay on Cuban art, on “building and potentiality” and how “individuals and groups fashion possibility from conditions of (im)possibility” instead of working to unveil “conspiracies and the secret.” Here I take the debate over allegory and paranoia in a different direction, showing how both depth models of interpretation and criticisms of paranoid readings fail to fully capture the social and political dynamics of texts. Contrary to Jameson’s and Sedgwick’s arguments, I argue, allegory is neither immanent to texts nor an analytic tool that scholars can choose to take up or set down. Rather, paranoid readings, accusations thereof, and longings for meanings that might exceed reified political narratives are social processes that influence the production, circulation, and interpretation of texts as well as the social and political statuses of authors.

To understand how allegory shapes public debate, in other words, we must analyze how artists and spectators mobilize the mode, often to competing ends. This is especially—although not exclusively—true for Global South, state socialist, and authoritarian contexts. In these societies, long-standing traditions of political engagement through art, practices of skirting censorship through aesthetic indirection, and demands for depictions of the nation imposed by international art worlds often foster a search for hidden meanings in works that sometimes cooperate and sometimes conflict with artists' aesthetic and political goals.²⁴ Under such conditions, finally, questions of intention can become key sites for social contestation, as audiences impute strategies to artists who in turn struggle to clarify their political allegiances.

Reading Ethnographically

Over the years that I have worked on this project, I ran into different and often diametrically opposed sets of challenges from scholars in both of the disciplines in which I am trained and to which this work is indebted. While anthropologists complained that I focused too much on texts and spent too little time on people and social contexts, film scholars wondered why I was talking to the filmmakers in the first place. During one campus visit, for instance, a scholar who was interviewing me observed, not unsupportively, that artists lie or mislead audiences about what they mean all the time. If this is the case, then why use what they have to say about their work to understand the politics of texts?

While I take both sets of challenges seriously, my aim is to show how an interdisciplinary approach can challenge artificial divides between texts and contexts and shed new light on the social dynamics and effects of film. Achieving this goal has entailed interweaving the careful reading of films with archival and ethnographic research. I treat films not as self-enclosed and stable but rather as archives to be examined alongside other forms of data—film reviews; newspaper articles and editorials; personal letters and emails; interviews with filmmakers, cultural functionaries, and spectators; and participant observation at events and institutions key to the Cuban film community—for signs of the struggles and debates that went into a film's production, circulation, and interpretation.

Following preliminary field trips to Havana in 2003, 2004, and 2005, I conducted the bulk of my research for this project while living as a full-time resident in Cuba from October 2007 to August 2009, just after Fidel

Castro retired from active office and in the midst of Raúl Castro's first years in power. The EICTV generously accepted me as a foreign exchange student and I spent my first month at the school in San Antonio de los Baños where I attended classes with the students in the film direction and screenwriting streams of the school's regular program. After relocating to an apartment in Vedado, Havana, I continued to return to the school regularly on weekends to copy, watch, and discuss movies; hang out with friends; and catch up on the latest gossip. In Havana, meanwhile, I spent my days collecting and taking notes on films; scouring the archives at the Cinemateca de Cuba, an institution whose offices also served as an important site for gathering information about Cuban film history or the latest scandal; and attending and observing film production, press conferences, screenings, festivals, and academic conferences.

To take stock of the new economic and political transformations that got under way with greater force as of 2010, I returned to Havana in December 2011 to observe the release of the blockbuster hit *Juan de los muertos* (*Juan of the Dead*, 2011) at the New Latin American Film Festival. In the summer of 2014, I spent several weeks with Carlos Machado Quintela and Yan Vega as they worked on the editing of *La obra del siglo* (*The Project of the Century*, 2015). And in the summer of 2016 and in December 2017, I returned to Havana to follow up on recent controversies and observe the release of films—Alejandro Alonso's *El Proyecto* (*The Project*, 2017) and Ernesto Daranas's *Sergio y Serguéi* (2017)—relevant to the aesthetic developments tracked in this book. I also supplemented fieldwork in Havana with a trip to Miami to observe the release of *La obra del siglo* at the 2015 Miami International Film Festival and by keeping up through phone calls, social media, and visits with friends and interlocutors who remained in Cuba and those who subsequently emigrated and became part of the island's ever-more-flexible diaspora.

Moving back and forth between the textual, archival, and ethnographic data gathered through the above activities has had several benefits. For instance, it often revealed tensions that I might not have detected had I only been focusing on one type of information. On more than one occasion, for instance, talking to spectators or reading between the lines of film reviews made me aware of controversies that had been provoked by films. Asking filmmakers about these debates in turn unearthed stories about their struggles to balance their own aesthetic and political inclinations with the demands and requirements of state officials, foreign contributors, and audiences, sometimes through aesthetic and narrative devices adopted during

production and editing, and at other times through retroactive interpretations and defenses of their work.

Listening to what filmmakers have to say about their work is also important for political reasons. Part of my effort in this book is to refuse the temptation to dismiss artists' insistence on their own and their films' revolutionary allegiances as mere self-defense, behind which some other and truer political position might be discovered. Such arguments are often instrumental in ignoring the ambivalent relationship to the Revolution that filmmakers insist that they feel and that there is no real reason to doubt. Indeed, it is noteworthy that several of the artists with whom I worked were quite open with me about the jokes about important political figures, including Fidel Castro himself, that they had included in their films, demonstrating both how meanings that might once have been considered heretical have become run of the mill and, at least in some cases, how such jokes went hand in hand with attachment to the revolutionary project.

At the same time, I do not reduce the meanings of films to what either spectators or artists have to say about them. There are, of course, many reasons for which an artist might be reluctant to openly admit to the meanings that they may or may not have deliberately included in their works, ranging from fears of political repercussions to, more simply, a desire to let audiences make their own meanings out of their films. Perhaps even more importantly, as any person who has ever participated in the making of a creative—or, for that matter, scholarly—work knows, those who get attributed with the authorship for a work neither operate alone nor are they always cognizant of the social and political patterns and habits that inform what they produce, and which in turn may play a role in the ways in which audiences interpret these works.

Indeed, there is no reason to treat what artists and spectators tell the ethnographer as any more or any less unmediated or free from broader social patterns than the films themselves or any other form of expression. As readers of this book will soon discover, in many cases I make my arguments by bringing together analyses of the aesthetic tactics and narrative patterns of films with discussions of the discursive strategies adopted by Cuban artists, political leaders, and spectators. In so doing, this book also suggests how an interdisciplinary approach to genre might help us better understand the social lives of films. As Christine Gledhill (2000) observes, studies of genre in cinema studies have repeatedly run into at least two key problems: first, taxonomic efforts to identify specific genres are often confounded by the actual hybridity of films; second, while film scholars turned to genre in an

effort to think about the social effects of the cinema, the question of how such categories relate to broader social patterns is often left undertheorized or reduced to more or less sophisticated versions of arguments that films “reflect” the social.

Here, I instead follow linguistic anthropologists in defining genre more broadly as a set of norms according to which texts ranging from verbal utterances to films are constructed and interpreted by both authors and audiences, and which are subject to contestation and transformation.²⁵ This more flexible and socially oriented definition owes much to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who theorizes genres as “relatively stable types of . . . utterances” that could range from “the single-word everyday rejoinder” to “novels, dramas, [and] all kinds of scientific research,” which, he argues, themselves often rework simpler, primary, genres (1986, 60–62). From this perspective, then, genres may be linked to particular media and contexts but can also move between them, with some artistic and other works deriving their meaning at least in part from the ways in which they draw on, refer to, and remediate speech genres with specific social and political resonances.²⁶

Building on these arguments, I show how filmmakers pick up on genres key to everyday conversation and intellectual and political discourse and incorporate these into their films, just as audiences and filmmakers sometimes incorporate narrative patterns from films into their own life stories and speech. Importantly, every adoption of a genre can either stay close to its conventional use or push at its limits in ways that open up new meanings, while spectators’ familiarity with these intermedial genres influence the debates to which films give rise. By reading individual films both against what is explicitly said about them and in relation to the broader genres that they engage and transform, I shed light on how these works serve as nodal points for debates about life, politics, and art.

Finally, let me say a word about the films I address. *Fidel between the Lines* draws on new ethnographic and archival information about the production and reception of several canonical Cuban films that served as key points of conflict or transition in Cuban cultural production. These include Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, Daniel Díaz Torres’s *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas*, and Alejandro Brugués’s *Juan de los muertos*. This book also examines lesser-known films by younger Cuban filmmakers, such as Laimir Fano’s *Oda a la piña* (*Ode to the Pineapple*, 2008), Susana Barriga’s *The Illusion*, Carlos Machado Quintela’s *La obra del siglo*, and Alejandro Alonso’s *El Proyecto*. I do not claim to present a comprehensive history of Cuban cinema; indeed, there are many key filmmakers

whose work I have not had the space to consider. With the exception of Yan Vega's *Memorias de una familia cubana* (*Memories of a Cuban Family*, 2007), discussed in chapter 5, I have also chosen to focus on films produced on the island, thus emphasizing works that reflect changing institutional politics and dynamics within Cuba while also situating them in the context of debates between Cubans on the island and those in the diaspora. By moving between canonical and lesser-known films, this book aims to shed light on how changing practices of social criticism and censorship, conflicts over allegory and authorial intention, and recurring genres—modernist and modern allegory, criticism of the bureaucracy and bureaucrat comedies, stories of staying and fighting for an improved nation—have shaped Cuban filmmaking and public debate on and about the island.

Title and Outline of This Book

The title of this book, *Fidel between the Lines*, is meant to invoke a number of interpretations. First and most obviously, it refers to the pervasiveness of allegorical methods in the production and the interpretation of Cuban cinema and, especially, the importance of such tactics in a context shaped by censorship. This is a meaning implicit in the phrase in Spanish, “entre líneas,” and its English translation, “between the lines,” which my interlocutors sometimes used to invoke efforts to convey controversial meanings through films and other artwork. Second, the title is also a play on the name “Fidel.” In the context of Cuba, Fidel most readily invokes the Revolution’s charismatic political leader, who, as I show, has often been the butt of more or less veiled jokes in Cuban films. Also significant is the fact that the Latin word *fidelem* from which this name is derived means faithful. Ironically, then, the common use of the term *fidelista* to describe those Cubans who are loyal to Fidel might more creatively be interpreted to refer to those who are faithful to faith itself. In a similar sort of separation of affective orientation from its supposedly original referent, many of the intellectuals and artists whose work this book describes have continued to hold on to the ideals and values of the Revolution in part by becoming increasingly critical of the Cuban state, its policies, and even its top political leaders. Finally, *Fidel between the Lines* also invokes the fading importance of this leader toward the end of the period under examination in this book. While I do not pretend to predict what lies in store for the island, it is my hope that this book’s analysis of intellectuals’ attachment to revolutionary values and ideals, their growing dissatisfaction with the socialist state and its policies, and the way

in which political paranoia complicates public debate and the articulation of a collective horizon of experience will contribute something to the efforts to feel out the shape of this new era.

Chapter 1 shows how new openings facilitated by digital technologies and the state's strategic relaxation of censorship exacerbated the political paranoia that has long shaped public debate in Cuba. It takes as its case study what was commonly referred to as the "email war," a 2007 debate about censorship that took place among Cuban intellectuals on and off the island shortly after Fidel Castro first fell ill and retired from public office. To many of those involved, this debate seemed to showcase the potential of digital technologies to enable a public sphere free of state control and open to all Cubans, regardless of geographic or political affiliation. Yet such hopes quickly ran aground on political paranoia as participants in the debate struggled to discern the contours of state powers or exile agendas that they suspected were operating just behind the scenes. In recounting this debate and the history that led up to it, the chapter also shows how, in the early years of the Revolution, Cuban intellectuals worked to establish an alternative public sphere that took political commitment as its foundation, and how new aspirations to autonomy in the post-Soviet era went hand in hand with suspicion.

Chapter 2 expands on this analysis of repressive tolerance and its consequences, demonstrating how new openings for the representation of social problems in the post-Soviet era complicated paranoid readings of Cuban films. In the early decades of the Revolution, I contend, Cuban filmmakers turned to allegory both to produce socialist spectators who could think for themselves and as a way of incorporating controversial meanings into their work as open secrets, there for "sophisticated" spectators to see but opaque enough to be undetectable by censors, or at the very least easy to deny. In many cases these strategies suggested a political ambivalence that exceeded binary takes on state socialism. Yet spectators accustomed to directors who expressed controversial positions between the lines all-too-often reduced these veiled allusions to stances for or against the Revolution, leaving Cuban filmmakers struggling to shape perceptions of their work and their politics. To track how these dynamics changed over time, I begin by revisiting one of Cuba's most renowned films, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, on the basis of new ethnographic information about its production. I then analyze the reception of Alea's final two films—*Fresa y chocolate* (*Strawberry and Chocolate*, 1993) and *Guantanamera* (1995), both codirected with Juan Carlos Tabío—as well as reactions to contemporary

digital and film shorts, including Eduardo del Llano's *Monte Rouge* (2005) and Laimir Fano's *Oda a la piña*. The strategic relaxation of state censorship, the growing orientation of filmmakers to the global market, and, as of the twenty-first century, the rise of digital technologies, as I show in this chapter, have both enabled filmmakers to produce ever-more-openly critical films and rendered criticism itself suspect.

The remaining chapters of this book take up specific case studies and genres to examine how paranoia and ambivalence shaped late socialist Cuban cinema. Chapter 3 takes as its central case study one of the most important censorship scandals in the history of Cuban cinema, the controversy over Daniel Díaz Torres's *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas*. A play on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the film tells the story of a naïve but enthusiastic theater instructor whose attempts to rally the apathetic inhabitants of a town to address their problems are thwarted by the autocratic bureaucrat in charge of the local sanatorium. Party officials argued that the bureaucrat in the film was a satire of Fidel Castro and that the film itself was counterrevolutionary. My reading of these events instead takes seriously Daniel Díaz Torres's claims that the film was founded on revolutionary ideals. I argue that the scandal over *Alicia* reveals both the centrality of criticism of the bureaucracy to political and intellectual discourse under state socialism and the ideological precariousness of this genre. Criticism of the bureaucracy normally contains tensions within state socialism by deflecting blame for the corruption of revolutionary energies from top political leaders onto mid- and lower-level administrators. But as disillusionment with state socialism set in, Cuban intellectuals began mobilizing the genre to criticize Fidel Castro's rule as itself a reification of the vitality that ought to animate the Revolution, a strategy that *Alicia en el pueblo de maravillas* anticipated.

Chapter 4 shows how, from the Special Period into the twenty-first century, bureaucrat comedies were combined with a critical version of nationalism and endings in which characters choose to stay in Cuba and fight to improve the nation. Reading these endings against intellectuals' use of this genre in their own life narratives, I argue that such stories were often mobilized to articulate political ambivalence; specifically, they articulated a commitment to challenging state policies combined with an ongoing attachment to revolutionary values or, more simply, to Cuba. Yet these endings also provoked suspicion. In order to avoid accusations of counterrevolution, filmmakers have always had to be careful that the open endings of their films suggested that social problems were ongoing but could eventu-

ally be resolved within the context of state socialism. In the disillusioned post-Soviet era, however, filmmakers also confronted suspicion of endings deemed excessively optimistic or too proximate to official state ideology. To show how filmmakers worked to navigate this quandary, I draw on film analysis and participant observation of the Havana premiere of *Juan de los muertos*, Cuba's first zombie comedy and the first major commercial success by independent filmmakers. I contextualize the reception of *Juan de los muertos*' ending through analyses of two key post-Soviet bureaucrat comedies—Arturo Sotro's *Amor vertical* (*Vertical Love*, 1997) and Juan Carlos Tabío's *Lista de espera* (*The Waiting List*, 2000)—as well as new ethnographic and archival information about the production, censorship, and reception of *Lista de espera*.

Chapter 5 takes films themselves as a significant site of reception, examining how a new generation of filmmakers explored the legacy and significance of revolutionary filmmaking for an uncertain present. In this chapter, I turn my attention to a series of films by young Cuban filmmakers working outside the ICAIC that focus on another theme that dominated post-Soviet filmmaking: the crisis in historicity that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of certainty in the socialist future. Produced between 2005 and 2017, the films examined in this chapter demonstrate how the sense of living in a historical impasse or parenthesis lasted well into Raúl Castro's presidency, in spite of the hopes for change that initially accompanied this political transition. They also show how a new generation of filmmakers turned to the montage experiments of the 1960s and 1970s to criticize the teleological certainty that shaped early revolutionary filmmaking and to find tools with which to make tangible the uncertainty of the late socialist period. Paying homage to the work of Afro-Cuban filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián, whose films were long censored on the island, as well as to French filmmakers Chris Marker and Agnès Varda and Afro-Cuban director Sara Gómez, these films challenge the classificatory impulses of Cold War politics and of filmmaking itself by revealing the difficulty and violence involved in producing meaning out of an ambiguous reality.

The coda considers key political events from 2014, when Barack Obama and Raúl Castro announced the normalization of relations between the United States and Cuba, to Donald Trump's election in 2016 and the imposition of a new chill on relations between the two countries in 2017. The events described in this chapter—including several new censorship scandals, Cuban filmmakers' efforts to secure a cinema law, and Hollywood's first big-budget ventures onto the island—revealed ever-more-forceful demands

for political and economic reform on the part of artists and intellectuals on the island. But they also suggested a nascent nostalgia for older forms of political patronage. Documenting filmmakers' involvement in and reaction to these events through participant observation and ethnographic interviews, the coda shows how, in the 2010s, Cuban artists grew increasingly resistant to state censorship, even as they worried about what change might bring in a context where legal status for independent producers was slow in arriving and the cultural institutions that had once supported and protected critical and experimental art—if always within limits—appeared to have lost the political power that they had once held. In the midst of this renewed historical and political impasse, this book unfolds the story of how Cuban artists and intellectuals have historically attempted to negotiate a more nuanced relationship to state socialism and the Cuban Revolution, one that, at its best, aspired to a democratic and participatory public, while also refusing the impoverished political options produced by binary approaches to the Revolution and its promises.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 All translations of field notes, recorded interviews, films, and other primary documents in Spanish quoted in this book are my own.
- 2 In Cuba, the terms *la Revolución cubana* (the Cuban Revolution) or, more simply, *la Revolución* (the Revolution) and even *el proceso* (the process, for the revolutionary process) are used to refer to all events following 1959. This use of the terms thus ties a historical period to a set of values and ideals that include solidarity, social justice, national sovereignty, and a commitment to public health care and education, although, as I point out throughout this book, many Cubans contest whether or not the actions of the state have in fact always lined up with the values and ideals associated with the Revolution. I capitalize Cuban Revolution and Revolution to reflect standard practice in Cuba and to indicate where I mean to refer to these historical and conceptual uses of these terms.
- 3 Cuba, of course, is in fact an archipelago, not an island. Throughout this work I adopt the more conventional term *island*, which is how most Cubans I worked with refer to Cuba.
- 4 José Esteban Muñoz notes a similar ambivalence at work among the Cuban American Left and describes this position beautifully: “This ambivalence is not a passive ambivalence. It is more nearly a passionate investment in Cuba that sees the promise of the revolution, its potential, and its various failures and shortcomings” (2000, 258).
- 5 For key accounts of Cuban film and cultural history, see Amiot and Berthier (2006); Balaisis (2016); Burton (1997); Chanan (2004); Fehimović (2018); García (2015); Miller (2008); Paranagua and Cobas (1990); Stock (2009); and

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Venegas (2009). For analyses of Cuban cinema within the broader continental context of the New Latin American cinema, see King (1990); López (1997); and Pick (1993).

- 6 I take this general definition of allegory from Fletcher ([1964] 2012, 2–3). For other incisive overviews of allegory, see Copeland and Struck (2010) and Xavier (2004).
- 7 There is some debate over when to date the end of the Special Period. While some take the custody battle over Elián González in 2000 as a significant bookend to this era (Hernández-Reguant 2009c, 9–10, 17), others identify the end of the Special Period with the official removal of the US dollar from circulation in 2004 and Fidel Castro’s suggestion in a speech given on International Women’s Day in 2005 that the Special Period might finally be coming to a close (Whitfield 2008, 2, 159). My periodization here, shifted slightly from an earlier version (Humphreys 2017a), attempts to highlight that pervasive sense of uncertainty that characterized the years following Fidel Castro’s withdrawal from public office due to illness in 2006 through to the first definite announcements of economic decentralization in 2010, as Cubans waited to see what direction Raúl Castro’s new government would take.
- 8 The decisive announcement of the beginning of the Special Period was made in the international edition of the Communist Party newspaper, *Granma*, on December 30, 1990, after several months of mixed statements about the possibility that Cuba might be forced to adopt wartime economic measures in order to survive the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Hernández-Reguant 2009c, 4). See the essays collected by Ariana Hernández-Reguant (2009a) for changes in cultural production during the Special Period.
- 9 For a similar argument about openings made for social criticism in the arts in the 1990s, see Baker (2011); Fernandes (2006); and Hernández-Reguant (2006, 2009c).
- 10 My engagement with Marcuse and Haraszti warrants some clarification. What I find insightful in their arguments is the notion that the tolerance of divergent positions or artwork may sometimes work to consolidate the political status quo. Suspicions that this is the case, as this book will show, often shape debates in Cuba, reinforcing political divides. Contrary to their arguments, however, I believe that criticism articulated within the framework of existing political systems does sometimes result in important change, no matter how incremental. I also depart from their understanding of what motivates participation in dominant systems. Marcuse adopts a strong false consciousness theory of ideology, arguing that citizens acquiesce to repressive tolerance because they are steeped in the ruling political discourse and incapable of autonomous thought. In Haraszti’s text, meanwhile, artists and intellectuals are primarily motivated by cynical self-interest. My emphasis on ambivalence offers an alternative to false consciousness or cynical reason theories of ideology, allowing us to recognize how individuals may continue to support or at least fail to directly rebel against the existing political system

in the hopes that the values, promises, and ideals with which they have vested it might yet come true, even as they recognize its shortcomings and failures. In addition to José Esteban Muñoz (2000), for this argument I am inspired by Lauren Berlant's (2011) account of cruel optimism, in which individuals remain attached to narratives of the good life in spite of repeated disappointment, and Alexei Yurchak's (2006, 93–98) description of how citizens in late socialist Russia separated the state and its practices from the original ideals of socialism. As elaborated in the next section, I also depart from Yurchak's argument in important ways. For seminal accounts of cynical reason, see also Sloterdijk (1987) and Žižek (1989).

- 11 Originally named the Instituto de las Artes or National Arts Institute, the ISA was later renamed the Universidad de las Artes or the Arts University while retaining the original acronym.
- 12 See Stock (2009) for a comprehensive summary of the state and nonstate organizations that played an increasingly active role in Cuban film production as of the 1990s, which also include the Asociación Hermanos Saíz (Saíz Brothers' Organization), a state organization founded in 1986 to promote the work of artists under the age of thirty-five; the Movimiento Nacional de Video (National Video Movement), a state organization founded in 1988 with the goal of promoting video work; and the Fundación Ludwig de Cuba, a nongovernmental organization backed by German philanthropists that aims to promote the work of young Cuban artists. Since 2014, the Norwegian Embassy in Havana has become one of the main sources of funding for independent Cuban cinema (Reyes 2017).
- 13 For writings on the paquete and the debates it provoked in Cuba, see, for instance, Humphreys (2017a); Pertierra (2012); and Rodríguez (2016).
- 14 I discuss early suspicions of the Muestra in chapter 1. The Muestra subsequently faced censorship scandals in 2008, 2009, and 2018, when films previously approved by the organizing committee were ultimately excluded from exhibition following conflicts with ICAIC officials. In 2009 this led to well-known filmmaker Fernando Pérez's public decision to leave his position as director of the Muestra. For a report of Pérez's decision and its motivation by censorship, see Inter Press Service en Cuba, "Fernando Pérez renuncia como director de la Muestra Joven," March 15, 2012, <http://www.ipscuba.net/cultura/fernando-perez-renuncia-como-director-de-la-muestra-joven/>.
- 15 One of the first certain signs of the new era of economic reforms was the announcement of state plans to move 500,000 workers from the state to the private sector. "Pronunciamiento de la Central de Trabajadores de Cuba," *Granma*, September 13, 2010, <http://www.granma.cu/granmad/2010/09/13/nacional/articulo1.html>. In October 2010, municipal offices began processing applications for business licenses. Other significant events included the release in draft forms of the plans for reform, the "Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social," in November 2010, and the official adoption of this document in May 2011. For an overview and a timeline of the reforms, see Peters (2012a, 2012b).

- 16 New cuentapropista regulations were announced in July 2018, to be put into effect in December of that year. These regulations, which included the restriction of licenses to one per individual and new taxation and banking requirements, were justified by the government in the name of limiting tax evasion and preventing excessive income disparity. But they also immediately provoked much controversy both on the island and among international observers.
- 17 While Fidel Castro quickly became the most internationally known figurehead of the new Cuban government following the 1959 defeat of Batista, he did not officially step into the presidency until 1976. Prior to this, Castro served as prime minister and as first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba, while the presidency was held by a former lawyer, Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado.
- 18 Hernández-Reguant (2016) provides a compelling analysis of Miami-based Cubans' support for Donald Trump in the 2016 elections.
- 19 For this account of how commercial public spheres, including cinema, have historically provided opportunities to articulate the life experiences of those marginalized by the bourgeois public sphere, see especially Hansen (1990, 1991); Negt and Kluge ([1972] 1993); and Stewart (2005).
- 20 Yurchak has elaborated on these arguments and their relevance for late liberalism in the Global North in conjunction with Dominic Boyer (Boyer and Yurchak 2010).
- 21 I deliberately use the term *alternative public sphere* rather than the more common *publics* and *counterpublics* (Warner 2002) or, in relation to the publics that formed in late Soviet Russia, *detrterritorialized publics* (Yurchak 2006). The type of public sphere that Cuban intellectuals theorized and attempted to bring into being in the early 1960s shared many characteristics with the political and literary bourgeois public spheres described by Habermas ([1962] 1989), including an emphasis on critical rational debate among citizens coming together as equals to debate matters of public import. However, in the early decades of the Revolution, Cuban intellectuals challenged the assumption that the public must be autonomous from the state and adopted a different addressee: revolutionaries instead of humans as such. Cuban intellectuals' reconceptualization of the public sphere thus cohered with a broader attempt at the time to articulate an alternative modernity opposed to liberalism and capitalism. As I show, intellectuals' efforts to articulate an alternative public sphere were nonetheless plagued by anxieties about autonomy from the first. These anxieties were then exacerbated in the late socialist era.
- 22 The debate over paranoid or symptomatic readings has been elaborated in two special issues of *Representations*: Best and Marcus (2009) and Freedgood and Schmitt (2014). Several scholars object to the alternatives proposed to paranoid readings on the grounds that these methods often adopt an acritical notion that the text means just what it says it means (Rooney 2010; Weed 2012). Here I do not so much abandon interpretation as alter its locus. As described in the next section of this introduction, I approach films as archives to be analyzed alongside other forms of archival and ethnographic material in

order to determine signs of the debates and struggles that have gone into film production, circulation, and reception.

- 23 In addition to Hofstadter and Sedgwick, I also draw my understanding of political paranoia from the rich anthropological engagement with the concept since the 1990s. For this work, see, for instance, Boyer (2006); Comaroff and Comaroff (1999); Lepselter (2005, 2016); Marcus (1999); Ryer (2015); Walton (2010); and West and Sanders (2003). This scholarship has often involved compelling accounts of how the marginalized or disenfranchised may turn to political paranoia either to make sense of global systems of power whose workings are otherwise abstract and obscure (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999) or, conversely, to destabilize dominant histories by drawing out the ambiguity inherent in all narratives (Lepselter 2005, 141). My own sense is that the uses and consequences of political paranoia vary greatly depending on how it is mobilized and under what circumstances. Like the anthropological literature on the topic, I take paranoia to be an entirely reasonable response to the ambiguity and indirection often deliberately at play in Cuban art and politics, and one that may on occasion produce its own insights or even open up fissures in dominant narratives. Nonetheless, much of this book is concerned with demonstrating the ways in which political paranoia can limit public debate. Not only is political paranoia equally a tool of those in power—a fact that is especially evident in a context shaped by Cold War politics—in Cuba, paranoid speculations frequently end in resurrecting the political binaries that have long plagued national politics and that the work of artists might otherwise put into question.
- 24 Scholars have long maintained that artists and spectators turn to allegory and other tactics of aesthetic indirection to communicate illicit meanings in contexts shaped by censorship. A smaller number of works show how a growing orientation to the global market in Global South and postsocialist contexts can spark concerns that art plays into stereotyped representations of the nation or acts as propaganda for authoritarian states. My emphasis on allegory as a contested social process draws attention to how artists both capitalize on and attempt to interrupt such suspicions in an effort to articulate more ambivalent takes on social and political dynamics. For work on the importance of aesthetic indirection under conditions of censorship, see Fernandez and Huber (2001); Humphrey (1999); Jacobs (1988, 1997); Loseff (1984); Maltby (1996); Rofel (2007); Taruskin (2000); Wedeen (1999); and Yurchak (2006). For analyses of the effects of the global market on art from the Global South and late- or postsocialist contexts, see Larkin (2009); Ong (2012); Ross (2011); Whitfield (2008); and Winegar (2006).
- 25 See Briggs and Bauman (1992) and Silverstein (2004) for this definition of genre.
- 26 If we adopt a more expansive and flexible definition of genre, then the distinction between genre and mode might best be viewed as a categorization issue, with the more encompassing concept of mode designed to capture the ways in which meaningful aesthetic and narrative patterns recur across forms

that we might otherwise want to categorize as separate genres (Gledhill 2000, 229). For simplicity's sake and with the exception of paranoia (traditionally referred to as a style) and allegory (which I label as a mode to distinguish it from the more specific subsets of allegory also relevant here, e.g., modernist vs. modern allegory), I default in this book to *genre* as the label for these socially meaningful discursive patterns.

1. SYMPTOMOLOGIES OF THE STATE

- 1 Cuban writer and intellectual Ambrosio Fornet coined the term *quinquenio gris* to describe the period of heightened censorship of the 1970s, using it in his book *Las máscaras del tiempo* (1995, 56, 62). See Fornet (2008) for a discussion of this term and an analysis of Cuban cultural politics in the late 1960s into the 1970s.
- 2 For accounts of the Mariel exodus and memories of homophobia in the Revolution more broadly, see Hamilton (2012, 117–48) and Lumsden (1996, 78–80).
- 3 See Navarro (2008) and Ponte (2010) for summaries of the email war from opposing political views.
- 4 Paranoia is neither exclusive to state socialism, nor did it begin in Cuba with the Revolution, but it certainly acquired a specific structure and pervasiveness in this era. Paul Ryer (2015) traces political paranoia in Cuba back to the nineteenth century, discussing in particular the various conspiracy theories that surrounded the 1898 explosion of the USS *Maine* in the Havana harbor during the Cuban war for independence from Spain. As he notes, this incident was varyingly attributed either to Spanish loyalists or to the Americans themselves, who were suspected of blowing up the ship in order to justify US intervention in the war and, subsequently, in Cuban politics.
- 5 For analyses of the CDRs and the ways in which they have fomented suspicion, see Fagen (1969, 69–103) and Routon (2010, 19–38).
- 6 This interpretation of these events was suggested to me, for instance, by Ambrosio Fornet, interview by the author, Havana, November 15, 2003. Older intellectuals described other famous cultural conflicts, such as the debate between Blas Roca and Alfredo Guevara over cinema (see chapter 2), as motivated as much by specific political and aesthetic commitments as by a struggle for control over the cultural field between different factions of intellectuals. Manuel Pérez, interview by the author, Havana, September 21, 2008.
- 7 See Chanan (2004, 133–43); G. Muñoz (2011); and Robbins (2009) for accounts of the censorship of *P.M.* and analyses of the aesthetic style and politics of this documentary. Guevara provided a retrospective explanation of his decision to censor *P.M.* in an interview for the December 1992 issue of *La Gaceta de Cuba* (reprinted in A. Guevara 1998, 85–99).
- 8 An expanded number of intellectuals' interventions during the sessions at the Biblioteca Nacional have been made available in recent decades. Alfredo