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Cuban stories from this century. Discourse analysis of a purposive sample of fictional films from the last decade

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Abstract

Introduction. This article presents the partial results of a research study on the discursive features of contemporary Cuban cinema, based on the analysis of the thematic and formal components of a sample of national productions. The selection of filmmakers and films is based on various research techniques and consultation to film experts from Cuba and eight other countries. **Method.** The study is qualitative and is based on bibliographic-documental reviews, semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis of a sample of film productions. **Results and discussion.** After offering an outline of the history of Cuba and its national cinema, the article critically deconstructs the works of two Cuban directors who are great exponents of the contemporary national productions. **Conclusions.** The analysis highlights the main features and genuineness of the film narrative of the selected sample of films and the key generational approaches and concerns among the filmmakers under study.

Keywords

Cuban cinema; film production; discursive features.

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1. Introduction. 2. Method. 3. Results and discussion. 4. Cuban stories from this century. 5. Conclusions. 6. Notes. 7. List of references.

Translation by **CA Martínez Arcos**, Ph.D. (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas)

1. Introduction

In the last thirty years, profound political, economic and social transformations have taken place in Latin America. In addition to the crisis and the subsequent fall of the military governments in the region, neo-liberalism failed to become the main economic doctrine. Our continent is gradually standing out on the world stage, while the urban middle-class sectors become stronger in countries such as Brazil, Argentina and Mexico. The defence of the institutional democratic apparatus responds to the empowerment of these sectors, and more participatory modes of politics. At the dawn of the third millennium, liberal ideas are more popular, women are an active part in the administration of power, and traditionally marginalised groups (like indigenous people, gays and people of African descent, among others) begin to gain access to the media.

Cuba is behind these countries in terms of annual film production and the state of the film industry. However, Cuba cinema still deserves to be addressed because it hosts important institutions that have guided the seventh art in Latin America, like the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema, the New Latin American Cinema Foundation, and the International School of Film and Television (EICTV). In addition, Cuba's filmmakers and their works were instrumental in the consolidation of the aesthetics of the movement in the 1960s; and the latest works of several directors have stood out internationally.

However, those interested more in qualitative reasons than in statistics will agree that the history of the cinema in the region cannot be understood without the contributions made by Cuba: the creation of a continental movement in the utopian 1960s; the contributions of many filmmakers, who managed to shine even when filmmaking in Cuba was a highly complex activity from any point of view; and the hosting of important events and institutions that govern the regional cinematography, such as the Havana's popular International Festival of New Latin American Cinema and the International School of Film and Television of San Antonio de los Baños.

In addition, it is important to highlight Cuba's current cinematographic work because, after many years of silence –of unspoken but latent unconformities– filmmakers are demanding, beyond their rights as artists, a change of mentality in favour of a cultural film production in the country.

Filmmakers (depending on their specialties) await the implementation of the proposals made to renew Cuban cinema, which were adopted at the UNEAC's 7th Conference held in 2008, and the implementation of the 2009 draft decree law "that aims to recognise the status of the audiovisual author" (Del Río, 2013).

The important thing is that filmmakers are demanding funding and liberty to freely organise "the production of new films" with certain legal and financial advantages for filmmakers and, above all, are demanding an end to the absolute irregularity with which independent production companies operate. These actions are needed to promote the emergence of new filmmakers and films and to offer –as they have already done so– valuable opportunities to those with extensive experience in filmmaking.

These are the discussions that surround contemporary Cuban cinema, with regards to its operation dynamics. Without distorting the specific purposes of this research study, the summary of the previous issues also allows us to reflect on the interests and methods of contemporary filmmakers, who are immersed not only in their own reality but also in the global restructuring of cinema.

Based on the previous background, the general objectives of this study are: first, to identify the main discursive features of contemporary Cuban cinema, based on a purposive sample of fictional films; and second, to outline the fundamental history of Cuba's contemporary film production; to analyse the elements that characterise the narrative of the films under study; and to identify the main generational approaches and concerns of the ethos of the contemporary fictional films directed by two of the most relevant national authors in Cuba.

Applied to cinema, ethos is the rhetorical discourse structure established by the director/filmmaker in his or her condition as author of the film production. The director is the coordinator and the person responsible for the whole text (Rajas, 2005). For the purposes of this study, we will investigate the career paths of two filmmakers (before/during/after working in cinema) and sources that inspire their works (i.e. other films, important authors, production formats, etc.). The dimension of analysis refers, in turn, to the elements that condition the current reality that determine the film production of the Cuban directors under study.

2. Method

2.1. Research design strategy

This qualitative research study is based on the case study method, which is, in turn, based on different units of analysis.

While Cuba is behind other national cinemas in the region due to its low annual production and underdeveloped film industry, it deserves to be examined because, as mentioned, it hosts important institutions that guide the seventh art in Latin American (the Latin American Cinema Festival and the New Latin American Cinema Foundation and the EICTV); because its filmmakers and productions were instrumental in the consolidation of the aesthetics of the movement of the 1960s; and because the recent works of several Cuban filmmakers are standing out on the international stage.

2.2. Procedures

The bibliographic and documental research has allowed us to analyse documents related to the history, current situation and dynamics of Cuban cinema, and includes the criticism around the selected films as well as articles relating to the characteristics of the cinematography and the country under study.

Semi-structured interviews were applied to a sample of experts of national and international origin (Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay): film critics, journalists (specialised in cultural issues), scholars and creative professionals (directors, screenwriters, producers and actors).

A protocol of discourse analysis was developed to examine the sample of four Cuban fiction films [1]. The analysis of the films, the study took into consideration: 1) the plot/theme; 2) the space in which the dramatic action takes place (geographical space and dramatic space); 3) the narrative's time (time and sense of duration, duration of the film), the action's time (diegetic duration of the story), and perception time; 4) the characters and their conflicts; and 5) the relationship with

significant cinematographic elements/aspects (shot types / ellipses / depth of field / lighting / editing / links and transitions / metaphors and symbols / sound).

2.3. Sample selection criteria

The selection of the sample of films took into consideration the *expert judgement* of a small number of specialists from Canada, Cuba, Chile, Peru and Argentina. In the formation of the *researcher's judgment*, these criteria were verified through the review of specialised literature and statistics (regional and international awards won, for example). The list of the most significant filmmakers and films resulted from the contrasting of the *expert* and *researcher* judgements.

In short, the study examines four films directed by two filmmakers from Cuba, which is our case study: Alejandro Brugués's *Juan de los muertos* ("Juan of the dead", 2010) and *Personal belongings* (2006), and Ernesto Daranas' *Conducta* ("Conduct", 2012) and *Los dioses rotos* ("Broken gods", 2008). These filmmakers' "poetics", "native contexts" and active links to the island are addressed from the year 2000 to the present.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Fundamental history of Cuba's contemporary film production

Cuba has been a pioneer in Latin America in the implementation of numerous technological inventions (despite its current technological backwardness), political attitudes and the setting of trends. In the case of cinema, Cuba was one of the first countries in America to implement cinema. In 1897 Gabriel Veyre [2] made in the Havana the first ever film with Cuban atmosphere: *Simulacro de incendio* ("Fire drill").

Then in the 1920s, the Cuban cinema starts to show a remarkable energy. It is thanks to the newsreels made in Cuba in the 1920s that we have audiovisual records of the state of the country in those days.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Cuban cinema was characterised by some co-productions with Mexico but, according to Pércida Torres (n.d.), even these productions had some artistic significance.

With the triumph of 1959, "cinema became part of the new social project" (Padrón, 2011). That same year the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) was created. Thus, Cuba was the first Latin American country whose cinema was:

"innovative and avant-garde [and] was supported by state institutions, because the ICAIC produced non-conforming and reinvigorating films such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *La muerte de un burócrata* ["The death of a bureaucrat"] and *Memorias del subdesarrollo* ["Memories of underdevelopment"]; Julio García Espinosa's *Aventuras de Juan Quin Quin* ("The adventures of Juan Quin Quin"); and Manuel Octavio Gómez's *La primera carga al machete* ("First charge of the machete") and *Los días del agua* ("The days of water"), as well as [films that offered] profound reflections about the origin and fate of the nation, such as Humberto Solás's *Lucía* and Gutiérrez Alea's *La última cena* ("The last supper"), which marked the so-called golden age of

Cuban cinema, characterised by a unique search for complexity and originality at all levels” (Del Río, 2013).

Padrón (2011) points out that although *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and *Lucía*, both produced in 1968, “explored very creole motives and concerns, the dimension that they reached thanks to the talent of their creators put them among the undisputed emblems of the regional screen, which experienced revolutionary movements and phenomena in several parts of the subcontinent (Brazil’s *cinema novo*, Argentina’s [first] ‘New cinema’ and ‘Third’ cinema, and Mexico’s New cinema, etc.)”

In the 1970s, when Cuban cinema was less dazzling than the previous formation and consolidation stages, some meritorious works were produced: *Un día de noviembre* (“A day in November”, 1971), *El hombre de Maisinicú* (“The man from Maisinicú”, 1973), *De cierta manera* (“One way or another”, 1974), and *Retrato de Teresa* (“Portrait of Teresa”, 1978).

Another development that took place in the late 1970s was the foundation in 1979 of the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema. The project initiated in Cuba in 1984, when the representatives of the Committee (Fernando Birri and Edgardo Pallero, from Argentina; Manuel Pérez and Julio G. Espinosa, from Cuba; Miguel Littin, from Chile, and Jorge Sánchez and Paul Leduc, from Mexico) supported the idea of creating the New Latin American Cinema Foundation and its main educational project: the EICTV in San Antonio de los Baños.

3.1.1. The intermediate new generation

The processes of economic reform (Perestroika) and information transparency (glasnost) that took place in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries were, according to Del Río (2013), some of the socio-political factors that influenced the satirical and humorous Cuban cinema of the 1980s.

An important feature of Cuban cinema during the 1980s was its attempt to build an “efficient” industry model “in both commercial and artistic terms” model and its inclination to capture the daily lives of Cuban people.

In addition to feature films, in the 1980s there were documentaries and short films that critically explored city life, reproved bad habits established in our daily lives or denounced negative traditions related to social or governmental negligence, such as Enrique Colina’s *Estética* (“Aesthetics”, 1984), *Vecinos* (“Neighbours”, 1985) and *Chapucerías* (1987); Mario Crespo’s *No es tiempo de cigüeñas* (“This is not a time for storks”, 1987); Gerardo Chijona’s *El desayuno más caro del mundo* (“The world’s most expensive breakfast”, 1988); and Rigoberto López’s *La soledad de la jefa de despacho* (Torres González, n.d.).

The matrices of this impulse can be found, according to Del Río (2013), after 1982, when the super production *Cecilia*, directed by Humberto Solás, “caused a change of direction in the ICAIC in favour of Julio García Espinosa and he tried to distance himself from any hermetic or elitist brand and to reinforce the character of cinema as an expression of popular art”.

3.1.2. *The century of enlightenment (or of blackout?)* [3]

Art and context, a historical love-hate relationship, also (necessarily) marked Cuban cinema (and the life of all Cubans, like never before in the revolutionary process) in the 1990s. In the late 1980s, as the east European “real socialism” ended, the film industry in Cuba ran out of partners and the ICAIC was left with co-productions and self-financing as the only survival options.

Different trends came to the defence of the Cuban cinema in the 1990s. Maintaining some of the features of the 1980s, the following decade Cuban cinema continued exploring historical themes and comedy of manners. Examples of these films are Humberto Solás’s *El siglo de las luces* (“The century of enlightenment”, 1992), Fernando Pérez’s *Hello Hemingway* (1990) and Gerardo Chijona’s *Adorables mentiras* (“Lovely lies”, 1991). In addition, there were experimental films like *Pon tu pensamiento en mí* (“Put your thoughts in me”), *El elefante y la bicicleta* (“The elephant and the bicycle”) and *La ola* (“The wave”); or the most popular: *Kleines Tropicana*, *Zafiros* (“Sapphires”), *Locura azul* (“Blue madness”) and *Un paraíso bajo las estrellas* (“A paradise under the stars”). On the other hand, there were films that opted for “rethinking the utopias” and the disenchantment or decided to address the difficult issues of emigration and survival during the Special Period (Torres González, n.d.); in this sense the two great icons were, according to the national and foreign critics, *Fresa y Chocolate* (“Strawberry and Chocolate” 1993) [4] by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío, and *Madagascar* (1994) by Fernando Pérez.

3.1.3. *We are Cuba...*

Cuban cinema starts the new millennium with a change of direction in the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC): Alfredo Guevara, one of the founders of the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema, was replaced as president of the ICAIC by Omar González and went to only direct the film competition.

During this time they people who continued making films were Fernando Pérez, Daniel Díaz Torres, Gerardo Chijona, Juan Carlos Tabío, Manuel Pérez, Rogelio Paris and Enrique Pineda Barnet; as well as Juan Carlos Cremata, who produced his first feature fiction film, and new directors such as Pavel Giroud, Lester Hamlet and Esteban Insausti.

Other aspects that marked this decade include the successful implementation of *Proyecto 23*; the restoration and digitisation of the cinematographic heritage; the blossoming of an independent, youthful, critical cinema that dealt with contemporary issues and implemented new technologies; and the continuation of co-productions, especially with Spain.

As a way of conclusion to the study of the Cuban filmography, Pércida Torres González (n.d.) points out that Cuban cinema has a noticeable relation with the historical, political and cultural life of society. However, it is necessary to explain the characteristics of each stage of cinema and of course the institute that supports it have shown significant differences, which have highlighted a developing cinema and the formation of an increasingly respected aesthetic line and the big international producers.

3.2. Cuban stories from this century

Cuban Film critic Dean Luis Reyes, in an interview carried out for this research study, rightly pointed out that

“...one cannot understand an aesthetic process, without understanding the production process. In other words, the mode of production of ICAIC, allows us to understand its works. ICAIC is a sort of author. It is a state institution, generated by the state, funded by the state, with the public mission of creating art, instead of profiting, making money, or building an industry based on the accumulation of millions of money. Its mission was basically to establish a bridge of dialogue with the people. In this sense, we can understand why it is not interested in certain topics; because they are not part of its agenda.”

From this point onwards the study describes in details the films by Cuban director Alejandro Brugués, a young filmmaker and scriptwriting currently working in Los Angeles while he finds funding for his next projects. The author of such films as *Juan de los muertos* has commented that [5]:

“With all the respect the ICAIC deserves...making a movie only with the ICAIC is relying on a funding system which I don't think anyone understands, on a budget limit that does not necessarily fit the story, the working conditions which may be out of our control, on some script notes that perhaps are of no interest for you, and lastly and perhaps most important, on a very limited sales and distribution system outside Cuba. The ICAIC only works within our borders. The public is also abroad. A filmmaker should have territorial limits. The world is full of stories to tell.”

The other director analysed in this article, Ernesto Daranas, has produced his two feature films completely with Cuban money. As a result of his latest film, premiered in 2014, the author said supported the debates that are taking place in the country around the subject of production. For him “it is a necessary controversy in which everybody agrees that it is urgent to legalise the independent production and to enact a cinema law that organises, promotes and supports the national cinema in all of its dimensions”. However, the production of his film *Conducta* (2013) did not face significant obstacles.

Taking into account the diversity of Cuban cinema and having briefly described its current production, the following sections will provide an analysis of the discursive features of these two authors in order to detect the Cuban stories from this century that are explored in cinema.

4.1. *Zombies's personal belongings*, by Alejandro Brugués

In *Personal belongings* (2006) the author stood out for addressing the issue of emigration from a more human and intimate, instead of political, perspective, which

“approaches the immigration problem from a perspective that highlights the tragedy implicit in the family division and unworkable affection, but complicates the emotional dimension, since it concentrates on the private sentimental sphere –almost oblivious to political considerations– and the reasons for leaving or staying are not exposed from a critical perspective.” (Del Río, 2008).

In *Juan de los muertos*, on the other hand, the filmmaker, our object of study, becomes the fascination of the public and a historical landmark for Cuban cinema. This time the filmmaker filled the Havana with zombies.

In his two films, Brugués demonstrated that he is more interested on “genre and commercial cinema” [6] than on certain topics when writing his scripts:

“It is true that at some point I was a little obsessed with the theme of emigration, which is explored in my two films. At each moment, each film, in its own way, dealt with things that I observed in the reality that surrounded me. In *Personal...* it is the people that leaves (or stays) and in *Juan...* the town’s inertia, and also the dilemma between leaving or staying. But it is not that I want to address something specific from my reality. One tries to find universal themes and, through them, tell a local story. It is the only way to reach a larger audience.”

In the case of *Personal belongings*, it is a love story between two young lovers who had very clear goals in life: the young man (Ernesto) has spent years visiting different embassies hoping to get lucky and be able to leave “this country”. However, in the case of the young woman (Anna), decided to stay in the country and show her family, which family migrated to the United States by raft, that “it is possible to live here”.

In the style of a beautiful love story, Brugués presents the characters and their inherent conflicts. Ernesto, the leading character, will live in his your car on the seafront and will go anywhere with his briefcase goes and a few personal belongings –for him, the must-have personal items–. In contrast, Anna is alone in her huge house and has decided to remove any personal belongings that remind her of those that left the house.

“The limitations of resources and economic opportunities, as well as the existential anxieties that manifest the «small», private dissatisfactions push this film towards topics and subtopics that have been poor explored by the cinema of the island. The film combines the universes of intimacy and daily life, romantic love and some family or generational tensions, the particular decisions that affect the future and the existence of all of the protagonists (who are very young people for a reason), the degree of belonging and commitment to immediacy, and individual aspirations not necessarily integrated to the macro social project.” (Del Río, 2008)

Ernesto’s friends –who accompany him every morning/day to the embassies to wish each other “luck”– are precisely the characters that embody: those who have failed to leave the country through all the legal ways possible and decide to leave the country by boat, and the hard-liners who won’t give up until they manage to get out of the country, and those who have been waiting for their chance to leave but are not in hurry because they have something to hang onto: the love of a woman.

In the case of Ernesto and Ana, although they agree to not fall in love because both have defined their paths, the love that inevitably arises between them makes them to put their futures in each other’s hands. The end is revealing: the young man waits to be interviewed at an embassy and through the window sees Ana coming (who has just discovered that Ernesto had not left Cuba yet). There is a final dialogue, for lovers, and a last intentionally romantic scene. Ernesto is not leaving, and argues:

“Here I found a woman who taught me that no matter how bad things are, the important thing is to move forward... and that is so right. Here I will be better than anywhere else... she is here, isn’t she? You can decide whatever you want, sincerely I don’t care.”

Despite including zombies and blood, in the end of *Juan de los muertos* (2012) the protagonist, after living rough episodes, stays in Cuba.

In this case, the novelty of the film for the history of Cuban cinema was perhaps conditioned because, according to the author, with *Juan de los muertos* he would stop seeing “the Cuban cinema of certain age as if it were the same film. If you examine it, you will only see comedies and dramas, there is no place for horror or Sci-Fi”.

Without a doubt, *Juan de los muertos*, with its premiere in the country and around the world, achieved prestige, although incipient, as a bizarre and unique film. The successful reception the film had Cuba and in the numerous festivals in which it was presented applauds its grace and irreverence. However, the intention of making people laugh is sometimes also what puts the film “in the trap of excesses” (Pérez, 2011).

Juan is characterised as a slacker, not in the sense that he is lazy, but based on the fact that he earns a living by doing things that are not considered as “honest” work: embodying the most Cuban style, taking advantage of any situation. One of his first dialogues reads: “... here I am a collector, which involves taking a seat and waiting for something to show up”. This 40-year-old man lives in Cuba and spends his days doing absolutely nothing. In his idleness, Juan is accompanied by Lazarus, his friend and accomplice in his shady dealing. His other friends (*La china* and *El primo*, who steal and threaten people) and Lazarus’s son, Vladi California (a man who dropped out of school and spends the day flirting on the street, believing he is so “handsome”) embody some of the idiosyncrasies of the Cuban people - is not a generalisation but an undeniable categorisation of the native. Humour and irreverence reflect the social criticism towards those who inhabit the streets of Cuba: those who sell “anything” illegally, those who are prostituting themselves, those who steal, etc.

As ordinary human beings, they all have a weak point that makes them unstable, sublime and susceptible; in the case of Juan it is his daughter Camila; who, in this case, will address the issue of migration from the perspective of the children and the parents who split up.

Juan de los muertos will briefly address everyday issues of Cuban people such as the meetings of the so-called Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR), and will parody the “typical partisan leaders”. In his film, Brugués positions the President of Juan’s Committee as the first “zombie”.

Thus, other issues are explored in the film: the functioning of Cuba’s media (for which the country’s problems are caused by “Yankee imperialism”). On the other hand, the film presents the solution that Cubans have historically believed will solve their problems: go to the United States. The waterfront is flooded with rafts.

Juan earns money “by killing the loved ones” of those who request his services; but when the situation worsens dramatically with frustration he invites his friends go to Miami: “at the end, capitalism takes its toll on them”.

Demonstrating the inventive power of the Cubans, these characters build a sort of boat-car to travel to the USA. However, when everybody is ready to leave, Juan - in one of the most moving moments of the film – decides to stay in Cuba:

“I’m a survivor: I survived Mariel, Angola, the special period, and this thing that came after... I’m going to be fine, I just need an opportunity”.

Alejandro Brugués, a graduate of the EICTV, is part of the new wave of filmmakers that are interested in developing genre cinema, always thinking in the film market. This idea, almost purely commercial, is perhaps what confirms that this author does not see himself, in any way, as a contributor of the new Latin American cinema movement: “I don’t even know what that is. I grew up watching a kind of movies, *Tiburón*, *Star Wars*, *E.T.*, *The Goonies*, etc. This is the cinema that I like. They are the films that made me love cinema in the first place. When I got into the EICTV, those were the films that I watched again, all those films that I remembered watching as a child, because what I wanted was to feel the original feeling.” [7]

4.2. Broken gods and conducts in the films of Ernesto Daranas

In contrast to Brugués’s comedy and even drama films, Ernesto Daranas’s rhetoric appeals to the deepest emotions of the viewer. The Cuban cinema has two memorable stories of this director; *Los dioses rotos* (2008) and, more recently, *Conducta* (2013).

In *Los dioses rotos* Daranas rescues the story by Alberto Manuel Francisco Yarini and Ponce de León –the most distinguished gigolo in Havana during the early 20th century, who was shot to death as a result of a vendetta– to explore the old Havana of the third millennium, which a century later was also characterised for its violence, corruption, procuring, prostitution, sexism as well as its passion and love.

On the occasion of the premiere of his film, the director stated:

“We know that beyond procuring there are other thousand ways of prostitution and that each of us is, somehow, exposed to them. *Los dioses rotos* does not overlook this issue, although the truth is that society, politics and history are never my main motivations because I believe that the true expression of all that is in real life; in the way in which people lives, acts, thinks, dreams and feels. They are the men and women who really interest me, as protagonists and as viewer. If you deal with them you will also be dealing with many things” (Acosta & Hernández, 2009).

Although it is clear that in both films the director has bet more on shocking the viewer than on making political or social demands, in the writing of the history of Cuba during the new century, Daranas’s films will be a unique reference.

In the first film, Laura, a university professor who tries to demonstrate the validity of Yarini’s myth and put a finger in the Havana’s sore spot one hundred years later, “ends up involved in a tale of personal transformations under the influence of a frequently unnoticed and hard, but real Havana” (Polanco, 2009).

In fact, to build the character of Rosendo, Héctor Noas fed on the significant research conducted by Daranas about the subject as well as on the contact with real people who lived in the Havana and were similar to the fictional character.

Around a love story, the filmmaker explored marginality, religiosity, deplorable living conditions, hostile environments, business, prostitution, incarcerated women; but gave priority to love, from the hearth and soul, which at the end triggers all the terrible events.

Alberto, beyond being a pimp and a con artist, is possessed by feelings that become the source of his tragedy. For Alberto, the problem is not that Rosendo makes a living by exploiting prostitutes, but that Rosendo manipulates him and pushes him away from what gives purpose to his life (his love for Sandra).

Each of Daranas's stories has a common narrative in the habitat where he grew up. With regards to the old Havana depicted in this film, Daranas pointed out that:

“...a city is an inevitable part of the destiny of its people. So maybe I shouldn't have been so surprised when, several years ago, in La Merced's Church I heard someone dedicating a mass “Don Alberto Yarini and Ponce de León”. From that moment I started discovering an entire liturgy among those who move today in that world in which Yarini was a King. If there are flowers on his tomb, if his name is invoked in several temples in the Havana, if offerings are left under the ceiba tree that grew up in the corner where he was shot, if one find recent films that are too similar to that of 1910, then the myth and the legend are part of a concrete reality” (Acosta & Hernández, 2009).

About *Conducta*, the director explains that:

“In fact, *Conducta* does not aim to talk about the Cuban education system. The film focuses much more on the risks faced by children, including the way in which the social and economic conditions affect the family unit and the school. About these and other issues there are many discourses and slogans that are called upon to attend what we live every day. Teacher Carmela puts aside this rhetoric in her attempt to make her classroom a different space.”

However, once again his film makes cinema the closest medium to the viewer with regards to depicting realities.

This 2013 film, the director does not only appeal to feelings to watch his old Havana, but also impregnates each story with so much truth that viewers will see their life in every scene or story and some viewers will even will go from questioning traditional aesthetic or thematic elements, to delving into the even bigger problem that *Conducta* depicts.

The film does not only frame characters, their conflicts and complaints to the government; but also questions and challenges the government.

“*Conducta* reflects the marginal world caused by the material deprivations of the social reality that is ignored by the media, and where life is surrounded by illegal activities and activities that should not be illegal, and where arbitrary and restrictive, legislation based on the precepts of a mistaken socialism, has filled civic existence with prohibitions and taboos that restrict individual initiatives” (Colina, 2014).

Chala, the protagonist of the film, is much more than a child with violent attitudes or bad behaviour; he is the wound that bleeds because he has been beaten by the reality of a drug addict and alcoholic mother, a house in the most precarious conditions, the need to earn its own money at age 12 (obviously, through some illegal activity, which in this case is dog fights) in order to be able to eat. Chala is a child who has grown up without receiving affection and without even knowing who his father is.

However, Chala lives happily in this environment that also negatively affects his *conduct*. Thanks to teachers like Carmela, who is intransigent, accurate and truly committed to the future of a child who is learning, Chala gets to know the good in people; but thanks to people like Raquel, Chala gets to know of bureaucracy, false positions and disdain. In this regard, Enrique Colina, a director and critic of Cuban cinema, has pointed out:

“The child is the debated subject, the metaphor of an uncertain future only hypothetically salvageable by the actions and ethical commitment of a female educator willing to face the harassment of a structure marked by the bureaucratic, hypocritical, and insensitive mechanism that the systemic deformation has created in all of its institutional expressions: a censorial character that decides what is politically correct and silences the dissonances that cause discomfort to its superiors, questions their reliability, and affects their petty interests.”

Thus, *Conducta* hit the screens to denounce, openly and very emotionally (in fact assisted by the resources of melodrama), police corruption, the dilemma of the emigrants in La Havana, the so-called schools of conduct (which rather than re-educate, re-habilitate, can degenerate), the issue of political prisoners; and, openly, the dissatisfaction with some vertical structures.

The discourse of this film does not aim to intimidate the public with the Cuban realities but to reflect on them, put them into people’s mind and to give evidence of an increasingly intolerable general feeling; it is, in fact, the evidence of a feeling that is stripped off cowardice and makes clear people are not afraid to protest.

Perhaps, the intentions that unite Ernesto Daranas and Alejandro Brugués, both incomparable in every way (in terms of age, cinematic style and depth used to explore issues) are the hints of dissatisfaction which no longer translate into big reporting and judging narratives; but into a confusion that is told through characters, from a more intimate perspective. “Although *Conducta* is part of Cuban society and reflects the deficiencies of its education system, it does so from the perspective of each character: the child’s, the family’s, the teacher’s”. [8]

The case of Lester Hamlet [9], for example, confirms this assertion. The stories favoured by the young Cuban filmmaker are those that excite him, without ever dismissing the conditioning contextual factors:

“I prioritise a tranquil emotion, an emotion that I like to be born, as the build-up caused by reflection. I would not like people to be watching my films all the time, [but] I do like to throw punches of moments and tell stories that allow me to make the spectator an accomplice in the stories, to engage it emotionally with the narrative, to allow it to discover areas that I don’t depict in the film, because I definitely like the emotions that arise from your recognition.”

Cuban filmmaker Manuel Pérez Paredes [10] points out that works such as *Melaza*, *Conducta* and *Fábula* depict today’s reality. Everything that humanise a story enriches it: sometimes, one receives a transcendental and successful message through a love story. Time age can be understood as the vindication of the personal story over the collective story.

This time is possibly the end of an era when there was faith in change and society was portrayed in order to take it by storm; and the present of another era in which –perhaps incredulous and damaged by so much inertia– filmmakers preferred to narrate social problems from the perspective of those experiencing them first-hand.

5. Conclusions

Both filmmakers and their works share certain codes, *generational concerns and approaches* that allow them to refer to meeting and rupture points. The use of a panel of experts as a resource to identify/verify/support the researcher's judgment made it possible to approach some specific and common aspects among some of the most important works produced in Cuba since the 2000.

Cuba is a unique case. With an annual film production relatively modest by the standards of the continent, Cuba is currently re-evaluating the relations between national film industry, the ICAIC, and the so-called independent production. Within this context, there will be an *Ernesto Daranas* who will bequeath very important films such as *Los dioses rotos* and *Conducta*, which are entirely national works that are immersed in the heart of the capital to unravel “the underworld” of prostitution, marginality, the political reality, social structures, police corruption, internal migration, political prisoners, etc. Making use of a style that is very similar to melodrama, the author manages to amazingly educate his audience.

Alejandro Brugués chooses a completely different style. Although contextualised to the Cuban reality, he addresses the issue of emigration from almost unprecedented perspectives in Cuban cinema, in order to entertain rather than to raise awareness. This director reflects the features of the youngest cinema in the region, interested in a global market, with witty stories designed to entertain in most cases. Brugués, therefore, seeks the economy of his productions in independent companies or by making use of the Internet and global mechanisms. He also reflects the increasingly more widespread decision of appropriating genres to narrate.

The influence of the cinema schools that educated the bulk of young directors, as well as the foundations that fund their projects, the festivals that exhibit them and the critics who so far have legitimised their aesthetic innovations, confirm the existence of a seventh art that rejects the “coarse salt” and bets on minimalism, even to tell great stories. All of the aforementioned filmmakers say they feed on other referents that are far from the formality and the thematic elements proposed by the old New Latin American Cinema movement. Political and systemic questioning, marginalisation, corruption and drugs converge with inner psychological worlds in a national cinema that in contemporary times *is produced* and *is known to be* different.

6. Notes

1. As Mario Rajas (2005) points out, film narrative discourse (*narratología fílmica*) “deals with the study of film narratives, i.e. the texts that present a story”. According to Rajas, one of the dimensions of analysis of film narrative is the story or narrative content (what) composed, among other things, by space, time, characters and their conflicts. In addition to the thematic analysis, this categorical dimension deals with the relations of the so-called “cinematic signifiers” (*significantes cinematográficos*) of the films under study.

2. Gabriel Antonie Veyre, an operator of the Lumière cinema, filmmaker and photographer born in France. He is mainly known for his work in Mexico, Indochina and Morocco. He was the ambassador, of the French invention, in Cuba.

3. For Padrón (2011), Humberto Solás's *El siglo de las luces* ("The century of enlightenment", 1992) is one of the most important Cuban films of the early 1990s, and "a worthy closure to the Latin American films that reflect on their own fate, from the point of view of those who direct the industry: a cinema that bets on utopias, on the reinstatement of that faith, of those ideals that guided, largely, the –overrated or not– 1960s".
4. "*Fresa y Chocolate* is one of the Cuban films that has had the most impact abroad. This bittersweet comedy, which was the first film that openly dealt with the issue of homosexuality in Cuba and also presented critical aspects that were common in the work of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, one of the most important directors from the Revolution, and his disciple and collaborator, Juan Carlos Tabío, also the author of two important satirical comedies from the 1980s: *Se permuta* ("Up for swap") and *Demasiado miedo a la vida* ("Too afraid of life") and *Plaff!*. *Fresa y Chocolate* apparently crosses all boundaries (...) to make sour and harsh criticisms on the system, dogmatism, the exclusion of dissent, etc." (San Miguel, 2013).
5. In interview carried out especially for this research study on 24 April, 2014.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Iván Giroud, director of the International Festival of New Latin American Cinema. In interview carried out especially for this research study on 16 May, 2014.
9. In interview carried out especially for this research study on 14 April, 2014.
10. In interview carried out especially for this research study on 16 April, 2014.

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