THE HERESY OF CUBAN CINEMA

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Heresy is not easy. However, to practice it is a source of profound and encouraging satisfaction, the better when the rupture with, or ignorance of, the generally accepted dogmas is authentic. (Alfredo Guevara 1963)

Throughout the 1960s Cuban cinema privileged the present, a reflection of the generalized sense that the Revolution itself provided more than enough dramatic material from which to cull foundational narratives for the newly sovereign island nation.1 In the 1970s, however, there was a marked shift away from tackling the present, to the projection of the past. The reasons for this shift in historical perspective were complex, but historians generally agree that a watershed event in this shift was the Padilla affair of 1971, where Cuban poet Herberto Padilla was forced to publicly acknowledge the ideological shortcomings of his 1968 book Fuera del juego. The affair also compelled many artists and intellectuals to radicalize their positions in favor or against the Revolution, and the most public fallout had Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa and Jean Paul Sartre, among others, withdraw their support of the Revolution. Within Cuba, the affair set the stage for the First National Congress on Culture and Education in 1971, whose primary goal was to prevent repeats of the Padilla affair by making explicit the role artists and educators were to play in the process of institutionalizing the gains of the Revolution’s first decade. In general terms, the Congress called on educators, artists, and other intellectuals to help increase the revolutionary awareness of the masses, while in the concrete case of filmmaking, it called for the “continuation of and increase in the production of Cuban films and documentaries with a historical character as a means to link the present with the past” (qtd. in García Borrero, La edad de la herejía 78). Thirty years after the Congress, Humberto Solás recalled its effect as follows:

[T]he clumsily executed “Marxist institutionalization of culture” meant a stop to spontaneity, that indispensable ingredient for the progressive development of art. All of a sudden, artistic culture came very close to becoming facile philosophizing, and in fact, “scientific systems” emerged to explain art, and above all to condition it. We artists became “cultural workers.” All of this became an obstacle for the

1I wish to thank Michael Predmore for his lucid comments on a first draft of this essay, and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Stanford University for its financial support to present a summary of this study at the Annual Conference of the American Comparative Literature Association, held in Puebla, Mexico, April 19-21, 2007.
initial plan that the Film Company ICAIC had gestated. (qtd. in García Borrero, *La edad de la herejía* 99-100)

While it is tempting to use this description to attribute a cause-effect relationship between the 1971 Congress and the ensuing shift in Cuban cinema, it is more productive to think of the Congress as an defining moment in a rapid transition period, during the late 1960s and the early 1970s, characterized by the intensification of political debates over the direction of the Revolution, and over the role of art in defining that direction. Two films in particular—*Lucía* (Humberto Solás, 1968) and *Memorias del subdesarrollo/Memories of Underdevelopment* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1968)—are not only consistently voted the best Cuban films of all time, they also exemplify what could be called the heterodox or heretical position in this crucial debate, as opposed to the orthodox or dogmatic position espoused by a Communist Party that insisted on prescribing pedagogical art forms, in particular socialist realism.³

On the surface, *Lucía* and *Memories of Underdevelopment* are as different from each other as two films could be. *Lucía* is an epic of three allegorical heroines during key transition periods in the history of the island nation, while *Memories* follows Sergio, a petit-bourgeois anti-hero, during a period of roughly one year, between the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1962 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1963.⁴ However, both films share a heterogeneity of form that is directly linked to their heterodox representation of Cuba’s past and present. *Memories*, for example, the two conflicting narratives, that of the anti-hero’s individual meanderings and that of the collectivity’s heroic and resolute march, confront each other in such a way that, according to Alea, the truth of the film does not lie with one narrative or the other, but rather in their confrontation and in what that confrontation tells us viewers about our own place in society (Gutiérrez Alea, *The Viewer’s Dialectic* 81). Alea’s comment applies to the styles of the two narratives as well: that is, whereas Sergio’s story is told in a combination of the filmic styles of Goddard and Fellini, the narrative of the collectivity remits the viewer directly to the radical documentary practices of Cuba’s own Santiago Álvarez. This double-voicing of the individual and the collective through corresponding fictional and documentary modes can be linked to the debate between orthodox Marxists—who favored agitprop à la Alvarez or else the kind of socialist realism prescribed by Soviet art manuals—, and heterodox Marxists such as Alea and Solás, who called for experimentation in form and content as the best means to explore Cuba’s complex reality. On this point, one may paraphrase Alea by observing that the truth of the debate did not lie in one position or the other, but rather in their confrontation, and in what that confrontation tells us about Cuba’s own contributions to the longstanding Marxist debate on the relationship between form and content.

In *Lucía*, as in *Memories*, the dialectic between the individual and the collectivity between form and content is also explored through a corresponding confrontation of narratives and

³See García Borrero, *Guía crítica del cine cubano de ficción* 30-31; which lists the results of two surveys on the question of which have been the best Cuban feature films ever produced.

³See Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* 167-81; where he gives several concrete examples of ICAIC’s resistance to the imposition of socialist realism.

⁴For a detailed analysis of *Memories* within the context of Cuban cultural politics, see Schroeder 19-66.
styles. However, a major difference is that in *Lucía* the confrontation takes place not within a single time-space narrative but across time and space, and in a way that makes *Lucía* not a simple accumulation of three successive narratives, but rather a dialectical meta-narrative whose very structure underpins and reinforces the film’s Marxist historiography. By Marxist historiography I mean, pace Frederic Jameson, one that describes history either “subjectively, as the history of class struggle, or objectively, as the development of the economic modes of production and their evolution from their own internal contradictions” (297). By dialectical meta-narrative of national history, on the other hand, I mean a narrative like Solás’ *Lucía*’s, which combines several relatively independent episodes into a coherent whole by placing them in successive and dialectical relationship to one another, in such a way that each of these semi-independent episodes may be read allegorically as a stage in the dialectical development of national history.

Indeed, the film’s stagist historiography is graphically suggested by the film’s silkscreen poster by Raúl Martínez, with the first *Lucía*—the aristocratic Lucía of 1895—occupying the position of thesis, the second Lucía—the bourgeois Lucía of 1932—occupying the position of antithesis, and the third Lucía—the peasant Lucía of the 1960s—occupying the position reserved for the synthesis. This Marxist reading of *Lucía* comes very close to Solás’ own interpretation of the film, as evidenced in his most famous quote:

The woman’s role always lays bare the contradictions of a period and makes them explicit... *Lucía* is not a film about women; it’s a film about society. But within that society, I chose the most vulnerable character, the one who is most transparently affected at any given moment by contradictions and changes. (qtd. in Avelar 29)

Clearly, *Lucía* is a film about women as much as it is a film about society, and Solás’ provocative assertion that it is not a film about women functions here as an invitation to think beyond the obvious. Specifically, Solás’ use of the terms ‘contradictions’ and ‘changes’, plus his privileging of a social as opposed to a gendered reading of the film, reveals a decidedly Marxist (and more specifically, stagist) understanding of history as a process that moves forward through the dialectical unfolding of the contradictions that arise from within modes of production over time. Following Solás’ lead, and that of other Marxist readings of the film,3 one could rephrase the poetic descriptions that have been made of *Lucía* as “a woman in three mirrors” (qtd. in Caballero 173) and “a mirror with three faces” (Capdenac 232) so that they apply not only to Lucía as an individual, but to Cuba as a whole. By reading *Lucía* allegorically, that is, we could also read the film in two additional ways as the representation of (a) the successive modes of production in Cuba’s history (Figure 1), and (b) the class struggle that emerges from the contradictions in these modes of production (Figure 2), where implied historical events (independence from Spain and the Cuban Revolution) mark the transition between modes of production and their attendant class struggles.

Keeping in mind Jameson’s distinction between objective and subjective descriptions of history, we can therefore say that Figure 1 summarizes the film’s objective representation of Cuban history as one that has been successively dominated by plantation production (*Lucía* 1895), small industrial production (*Lucía* 1932), and cooperative agricultural production (*Lucía* 1966...). Indeed, the film’s interpretation of national history matches perfectly with classical Marxism’s understanding of ‘universal’ history as one that evolves from feudalism (as in *Lucía* 1895) to

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3See Biskind; Kovaks; and Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* 273-88.
bourgeois nationalism (as in Lucia 1932), to socialism (as in Lucia 196.). Figure 2, on the other hand, summarizes the film’s subjective representation of Cuban history as one that has been characterized by successive class struggles, first between a nationalist criollo aristocracy and peninsulares under colonialism (Lucia 1895), then between a progressive middle class and a U.S.-backed ruling elite under neocolonialism (Lucia 1932), and finally between a revolutionary working class and the remnants of a false consciousness under socialism (Lucia 196.).

The film’s tightly constructed dialectical meta-narrative is underscored by the use of highly differentiated styles appropriate for the expression of the subjectivity of each class and historical period. This correspondence between form and ideology has not gone unnoticed. For example, in an interview published in Jump Cut in 1978, Julianne Burton observed that “Lucia is notable for its dialectical narrative and the virtuosity of its three visual styles” (qtd. in Avelar 27). In the same issue of Jump Cut, John Mraz explored in depth the role of mise-en-scene in Lucia to show how “conflicting visual styles are used to represent the perception of individuals from different historical periods or belonging to different classes” (22).

My intention now is to elaborate on this correspondence by analyzing how Solás effectively uses not only visual styles but also identifiable genres to underscore both the film’s dialectical meta-narrative and the subjectivity of each protagonist’s class, even as he transforms the genres he appropriates. Thus, Lucia 1895 uses the narrative and stylistic conventions of classical melodrama, Lucia 1932 of film noir, and Lucia 196. of social comedy. The result is a composite film that relativizes the very heated Marxist debate over which artistic forms are best suited for a revolutionary message. In other words, by having three successive episodes in three different styles and genres, but all with the same underlying message that a woman can only advance as far as her society will permit, the overall film undermines the presupposition that one art form is intrinsically more revolutionary than another, simply based on that form’s class origins. Crucially, the reception of the film at the time of its release missed this point, and instead reproduced the orthodox position that the relationship between form and content is direct and overdetermined.

Needless to say, the film does something else, and in fact comes very close to Che Guevara’s understanding of art as creative expression based on free inquiry:

[W]hy try to find the only valid prescription in the frozen forms of socialist realism? We cannot counterpose “freedom” to socialist realism, because the former does not yet exist and will not exist until the complete development of the new society. We must not, from the pontifical throne of realism-at-all-costs, condemn all art forms since the first half of the 19th century, for we would then fall into the Proudhonian mistake of going back to the past, of putting a strait-jacket on the artistic expression of the people who are being born and are in the process of making themselves. (12)

Guevara’s position on art is consistent with his position on the nature of revolutionary change. As Michael Chanan has noted, for Guevara, a radical shift in consciousness is the sine qua non for revolutionary change, and therefore a heresy vis-à-vis the economism of Marxist orthodoxy (“Cuba and Civil Society” 391). In film, the corresponding heresy would be the articulation of narratives privileging psychological conflict over moral certitudes, as in Lucia and Memories of Underdevelopment.

In the following sections, where I analyze each of the three episodes in Lucia separately, the nature of Solás’ heretical art should become clearer, especially in light of the very different reception each episode received. I will then conclude by further contextualizing Lucia within
contemporary debates over the relationship between form and content, and by highlighting the film’s contributions to those debates through a reconsideration of the film’s central visual metaphor of light as lucidity.

Lucia 1895

In The Melodramatic Imagination, Peter Brooks notes that melodrama first emerged after the French Revolution as

a response to the loss of the tragic vision. It comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their installation as a way of life, is of immediate daily, political concern. (14-15)

When Lucia was first released the reception of the first episode was less positive than the reception for the second and especially the third episodes, in part because many thought that melodrama was an inappropriate genre in a country where traditional imperatives of truth and ethics had already been superseded by revolutionary ones. This attitude was not only expressed within Cuba, where critics unanimously praised the third Lucia at the expense of the first two and even at the expense of the overall interconnectedness of the film, but also in as mainstream a publication as The New York Times, where Nora Sayle wrote that

the first part is too overacted. Women yell and play, making these scenes look like a parody of virginity. The operatic music vibrates each time that the lovers’ glances meet, and the apologetic battle scenes look like they were taken from a Western; it’s strange that a Cuban filmmaker would use such a worn-out capitalist model. (240)

In another article, published in the countercultural Uruguayan journal Marcha, Roberto Meyer criticized the first Lucia for being

too closed in its exploration of private passions that only by chance are connected to history, [and] too subject to stylistic searches that range from poetic realism to expressionism. (244)

These remarks reflect an underlying prejudice not so much against the first Lucia’s experimental style as against its use of a traditional genre at a time when such genres were being thoroughly deconstructed and criticized. In many ways, these criticisms parallel those hurled against Visconti for his decision to explore the melodramatic world of Italian aristocracy in Senso (1954), and like those criticisms, the ones cited above against Lucia seem today both misplaced and reflective of an orthodox leftist worldview.

It would be more productive, instead, to ask how melodrama suits the specific narrative of Lucia 1895 and how it functions within the overall meta-narrative of the film. In a more recent article, Cuban critic Eduardo López Morales did just this by noting that Solás consciously assumes the form of melodrama and its attendant kitsch "as a denystifing expression of our cultural personality, as a de-alienating vehicle for Cubans to recognize themselves without false prudishness" (210). Even more relevant in terms of our discussion, López Morales adds that, "the political, sentimental and existential treason against [the first] Lucia is... reflective of an obliterating colonial society that is based on swindling and on treason" (210). That is, the use of melodrama in Lucia 1895 serves as a conduit to explore the crisis in Cuba’s relationship with Spain precisely because melodrama underscores the crisis of the protagonist’s class and its truth impera-
tives. One of the ways the episode underscores this crisis is by contrasting the protagonist’s social class in decline with an ascendant Cuban collectivity represented by the young, Black and naked *mambises* who defeat the older, clothed Spaniards in the episode’s climactic battle sequence. Similarly, when Lucía’s (Raquel Revuelta) crisis reaches a turning point, it is not her own class but rather a procession of Afro-Cubans who give her the strength to redeem herself.

The procession is part of the episode’s denouement, which begins when Lucía realizes that her lover Rafael is in fact a Spanish spy who has used her to find and destroy the rebels’ hideout in her family’s coffee plantation. Taken together, the expressive acting, the shift in the soundtrack from the melodramatic to a subjective point of hearing, and the overexposure of the film stock, all signal to the viewer that Lucía has become hyperconscious of her condition as an object within the hegemonic colonial and patriarchal order, or more precisely, as a means used by Rafael (Eduardo Mouré) for the protection of that order.

Lucía’s exact moment of lucidity comes as she is franticly hanging her hands against the wall and pacing back and forth within her mansion-cage. Suddenly, in a flash-forward so short it is almost imperceptible, Lucía sees herself walking towards the plaza where she will meet and kill Rafael. She calmly steps back from the wall and slowly walks out of the darkness of her home’s interior and into the light-drenched patio where she sits down and looks straight into the camera, as if asking for the viewer’s complicity in the plan she is about to carry out. Throughout the sequence the character’s lucidity is underscored by the overexposed film stock, by her intense gaze, and by a subjective point of hearing that suggests hyperconsciousness.

The next and final sequence of the episode begins in a side street with an old frail woman, dressed as a *santera*, informing a disoriented Lucía where to find Rafael. The second shot of the sequence opens with the brief flash-forward described above, and zooms out to reveal the Afro-Cuban procession in front of the cathedral where the two lovers had first met. In a handheld medium shot, we now see Lucía stride towards the plaza as one of her friends appears out of nowhere to try to stop her. Lucía easily breaks free. The camera stays in place and turns to follow her as she continues on her way, so that we are no longer looking at Lucía but rather with her, and over her shoulder at the Afro-Cuban procession. Finally, Lucía immerses herself in the procession’s collective dance, and with the strength of that collectivity now backing her, she lunges forward to finish off her plan, transformed now from an act of personal revenge to an act of collective retribution. The closing shot, an overexposed close-up of a visibly alienated Lucía, with Fernandina’s hand (Idalia Anreus) gently supporting and consoling the bereaved lover, illustrates the women’s common fate and underscores how colonialism relegates visionary lucidity to the realm of madness.

Notwithstanding the centrality of transformation in these sequences, the episode closes with the assault’s quick suppression and therefore keeps to the melodramatic convention that social structures revert to the *status quo ante*. However, this ensuing return, with Spaniards still in charge and women still in positions of submission, is not a nostalgic yearning for a lost order, as in a typical melodrama, but rather the condemnation of a colonial order that held back the historical development of both individual women and the nation as a whole. If anything, the assault’s quick suppression underscores the insufficiency of the nationalist aristocracy’s actions for the successful liberation of the island nation. From this perspective, Lucía’s personal heroism is a necessary but insufficient element for her own liberation and the liberation of Cuba. The missing element, in this episode as in the next, is the development, at a strategic level, of a political alliance between the nationalist elite and the popular masses.
Lucía 1932

In the second Lucía Solás employs narrative and stylistic conventions of film noir for several reasons. For one, the use of noir conventions such as dimly-lit interiors, rainy backdrops, and long takes in enclosed spaces heighten the sense of hopelessness, disillusionment and lost time that permeated Cuban politics when, between the overthrow of Machado in 1933 and the reactionary crushing of the general strike of 1935, opportunistic forces conspired against the progressive government of Ramón Grau San Martín to return Cuba back to the kind of neocolonialism that led to the overthrow of Machado in the first place. In terms of narrative, film noir’s emphasis on self-doubt, questionable morality and uncertain future makes this genre an appropriate vehicle through which Solás can explore the kind of insecurity and anxiety that gripped Cuba, and especially Cuban men, after the World Crash of 1929. For example, because the Crash forced many women to look for work outside the house, male dominance was directly questioned, thus fueling the kind of male anxiety towards women that is one of the hallmarks of film noir. In this regard, René Méndez Capote has contextualized the second Lucía by noting that

Under pressure from the economic collapse men began to lose the moral authority that came with their role as providers. Women began to be faced with the necessity of assuming their share of the home’s economic survival, and when, following Machado’s fall, public jobs and positions in private offices were opened to them, they threw themselves at this new opportunity like swallows who migrate in search of better climes. The miserable wages continued, and men had no choice but to bow their heads and let their daughters, mothers, wives and fiancées work outside the house. (223)

While the kind of extreme male anxiety that one finds in Black Widow film noirs is missing in Lucía 1932, Aldo (Ramón Brito) and Berto (Rogelio Blain) do see Lucía (Eslinda Núñez) and Flora (Flora Lauten), their respective mates, as primarily domestic subjects who will return to their ‘proper’ domestic roles of housewife and mother once the political struggle is over. In effect, what this marginalization and domestication of women represents is the bourgeoisie’s own marginalization and domestication of its radical wing, underscored as it is in the episode’s final sequence of a pregnant but isolated Lucía contemplating suicide while framed by a noir landscape: dark and dissolute, with nowhere to go but down and under the river in front of her.

Finally, the use of film noir conventions in this episode highlights the ideological limits of a bourgeoisie that identifies with what Paul Schrader calls the

overriding noir theme: a passion for the past and present, but also a fear of the future. Noir heroes dread to look ahead, but instead try to survive by the day, and if unsuccessful at that, they retreat to the past. Thus film noir’s techniques emphasize loss, nostalgia, lack of clear priorities, and insecurity. (221)

Indeed, Aldo and Lucía, the noir heroes in Lucía 1932, are doomed precisely because they cannot see far into the future. Critically, they fail to realize that their struggle against tyranny and neocolonialism cannot be won through the kinds of Romantic and isolated attacks Aldo helps to organize and carry out against soft targets of the dictatorial regime, or even through the kind of collective mobilization Lucía engages in during a tobacco workers’ protest against Machado, but rather through the strategic coordination of both armed struggle and a political mobilization that incorporates the island’s majority population in the countryside. This seems to me the primary political lesson of Lucía 1932: that even though the progressive bourgeoisie had the right intentions, it lacked the necessary ideological grounding and strategic foresight to realize that they
Courtesy of New Yorker Films
needed the support of the island’s rural proletariat and an understanding of their needs and interests if they were to be successful not only in their attempts to seize power, but in using that power to lift the masses out of poverty and break Cuba’s neocolonial relationship with the United States.

Lucía 196.

The last Lucía is not, as one might expect given the film’s overall dialectical structure, a historical synthesis where the working class has already achieved its paradise on Earth. Rather, the episode uses social comedy to present machismo as the main impediment to the full development of the revolutionary process, and more specifically, as a problem that is symptomatic of customs and manners requiring reform at that level, rather than as a problem whose solution requires structural changes in the economy. Crucially, then, the machismo in the last episode is shown to belong to a resilient tradition of patriarchal customs that have been little affected by changes in economic structures across time. The title of the last episode gives us an important clue on how to interpret the film’s take on this problem. Just as 1895 and 1932 are three years before the historical breaks of 1898 and 1935, respectively, perhaps the third Lucía takes place two, three years before another historical break. The fact that the ellipsis is incomplete—it only has two periods—suggests that this break is just about to take place, and that we as spectators have a role to play in finishing that narrative.

In this reading, the 1959 Revolution is but a prelude to a more thorough revolution that goes beyond economic changes to a radical transformation of patriarchal customs and manners; and ideologically, beyond crude Marxism (which posits that changes in modes of production mechanistically change social relations), to a Marxism that is more nuanced, open, and self-critical. This second position is visually and narratively encapsulated in the closing shot of the laughing girl. The girl is many things at once. Narratively, she is a convention of socialist realism, and therefore represents the next generation that will overcome the outdated customs and attitudes of both Tomás (Adolfo Llauradó) and Lucía (Adela Légrá), and fulfill the promise of communism. However, in the context of contemporary debates over the direction of the Revolution, her laughter may also be directed at orthodox Marxists who argued that because patriarchy arose alongside capitalism, patriarchal relations will mechanistically give way to egalitarian relations between the sexes now that Cuba has advanced to socialism. In addition, the girl’s irreverent laughter may also be directed at orthodox feminists whose only solution would be for Lucía to abandon Tomás. The fact that Solás did not choose this plausible end signals the film’s project of promoting an inclusive imagined community identified with the interests and needs of an agricultural cooperative whose social relations are egalitarian and even matriarchal, as underscored in the salt-flats sequence, when Tomás is brought down from his position of power by the collective force of Lucía’s female co-workers. In light of this project, which is itself a radical redefinition of the Revolution, the successful integration of Tomás into the agricultural cooperative is of paramount importance, and comedy a fitting genre to frame his potential transformation.

Whether or not Tomás heeds Lucía’s words is irrelevant, ideologically speaking, for she has already committed herself to the collectivity. However, Lucía’s attempt to transform Tomás is still important, and what she tells Tomás in the last sequence is directed as much to her husband as to viewers of both sexes:
Lucía: I have returned because I cannot live without you. But, but... I cannot go on the way you were treating me. I have to work. Understand me, Tomás. I have to be productive at something. Otherwise, what is the reason for living?

Tomás: Coño, if that’s what you wanted to tell me you should not have come! To tell me all that trash you might as well go to hell! You hear me? Go to hell!

Lucía: No, I am going to stay with you! I will work at the farm! I will stay with you and I won’t leave you! I will stay because that’s why I married you!

The lesson here is obvious without being didactic: men and women need each other, but for their relationship to be productive, men have to overcome their machismo and women have to claim and practice their rights as equal partners to men. This final exchange between Tomás and Lucía and its accompanying lesson supports Camila Henríquez Ureña’s feminist reading of the film:

Through women and within the broader society we see how the concept of love evolves, from that where [Lucía] is a toy, ilusory and semiconscious, of the male’s concupiscence, through her attempts to become the male’s helper, until she matures to become the companion who does her duty, but also exercises rights as a human being on equal footing with men. (217)

Henríquez Ureña’s description, while framed in terms of the evolution of love as a central theme of the film, rests on a dialectical understanding of the history of women’s liberation as parallel to the objective and subjective Marxist historiographies outlined earlier. In other words, the history of gender relations (Figure 3) is understood as parallel to and inseparable from the history of class struggle (Figure 2) and the succession of modes of production (Figure 1).

In this sense, the final exchange between Lucía and Tomás cements the film’s Marxist premise that the abolition of all forms of exploitation is an ongoing struggle. It is a struggle centered most obviously on the transformation of patriarchal social relations, capitalist and otherwise, but as the girl’s irreverent laughter suggests, it is also a corresponding struggle, at the artistic level, to transform the melodramatic impulse that underlines all three episodes in the film, regardless of their genre, into a politically viable alternative.

Conclusion

A testament of Solás’ creativity is the fact that none of the episodes in Lucía is an uncritical appropriation of the genres in question, but rather an example of his thorough assimilation and subsequent transmutation of those genres into appropriate vessels for the film’s overall meta-narrative of national liberation. In Lucía 1895, for example, Solás inserts into the overarching melodrama several highly stylized, documentary-like sequences that serve at least three functions: (1) to anchor the episode’s sentimental narrative to a very concrete and brutal historical context, (2) to contrast the worlds of the exploited and those who benefit from their exploitation, and (3) to highlight the intensity with which characters, especially Fernandina and Lucía, experience transformative events such as rape, treason or sexual awakening. Likewise, Lucía 1932 plays with the conventions of film noir by incorporating historical events such as the overthrow of Machado into the narrative, and by having a female instead of a male as the protagonist. Finally, the third Lucía mixes social comedy, whose sympathetic critique of customs and manners is ideologically reformist, with socialist realism, a Soviet genre which calls for working class heroes and a narrative closure identified with revolutionary praxis.
The film’s hyper-heterogeneity—that is, the fact that there is heterogeneity between and within episodes—has as its corollary a corresponding heterodoxy in meaning. From this perspective, *Lucia* is much more than the Marxist-feminist re-reading of Cuban history I have outlined in this essay; it is also a film manifesto that exemplifies the kind of unorthodox praxis that Alfredo Guevara, the founding director of Cuba’s film company (ICAIC), approvingly called heretical:

[H]eresy is not easy. However, to practice it is a source of profound and encouraging satisfaction, the better when the rupture with, or ignorance of, the generally accepted dogmas is authentic. [...] No adult life is possible without systematic heresy, without the commitment to continually take risks. And while this adventurous attitude towards life implies the possibility of failure, it is nevertheless the only real way to approach truth: from its many edges. (1)

Written in 1963 in the context of a bitter polemic between Alfredo Guevara and orthodox Marxist politician Blas Roca, Guevara’s position prevailed for the rest of the decade and became identified with ICAIC for a much longer period. The polemic was part of a broader debate on the limits of artistic expression, which incidentally included Fidel Castro’s 1961 speech, “Words to the Intellectuals,” and its celebrated yet ambiguous refrain, “Within the Revolution, everything, outside the Revolution, nothing” (n.p.). Recently, Cuban critics Rufo Caballero and Joel del Río picked up on Alfredo Guevara’s thesis and concluded that Cuban cinema “has been a cinema of a ferocious heresy which reflects, like a luminous mirror, a self-image as subverted as it is transparent, as devout as it is uncomfortable” (114). While overly generous, their description of Cuban cinema as both subversive and devout, a good definition of heresy as well as of heterodoxy, applies especially well to *Lucia*. Specifically, the heresy in *Lucia* consists of being at once devout to, and subversive of, Marxism. It is devout because the meta-narrative’s dialectical and materialist teleology points towards communism; and it is subversive because the film embodies that evolving telos in three lucid protagonists whose motivations and actions cannot be reduced to their class position. Rather, each Lucía is caught between equally valid collective aspirations and individual desires at odds with each other. The resulting identification of lucidity with conflict—underscored as it is by a dialectical heterogeneity of narrative and visual forms—reduces orthodox forms of thinking such as patriarchal authoritarianism (which by definition is orthodox), as well as orthodox forms of Marxism and of feminism, to shallow simplifications of reality.

Narratively, the three episodes are connected by a dialectical meta-narrative thread whereby each Lucía develops and assumes, through struggle and circumstance, a position of lucid awareness and commitment to her liberation and the liberation of the nation. Visually, the awareness and commitment are underscored in the film as a whole and within every episode through an elaborate semiotics of light and darkness. For example, *Lucia* 19395 develops a baroque chiaroscuro exemplified in the sequence described earlier, where Lucía steps out from the darkness of her home’s interior into the blinding light of the patio. In *Lucia* 1932 the overall mood is dark, as is the lighting, with only sporadic love sequences between Lucía and Aldo bathed in a muted light appropriate to the lover’s melancholic disposition. Finally, the last *Lucia* is narratively and visually the lightest of the three episodes. Yet even here the dialectic of light and darkness is not resolved within the narrative, but rather with the promise of the girl at the very end of the film who embodies both lucidity and lightness: dressed in white with a white headscarf and framed by a bright sky that is almost white in its brightness, the White girl watches, from a distance that is both healthy and critical, as Tomáš and Lucía struggle with each other. She then laughs and
runs away, leaving only the bright sky to fill the entire frame during the episode's (and the film's) last few seconds.

The film's semiotics of light therefore facilitate two complimentary readings: one where light is identified with the kind of lucidity that transforms mere female rebels into the embodiment of revolutionary forces with a long and distinguished history in Cuba, and another reading based on the final sequence of the laughing girl, where light is identified with a historical synthesis where class and gender struggles have been worked through and productively resolved. Significantly, in this final sequence the spectator is positioned so as to identify with the girl's irreverent disregard of the struggling couple, and more importantly, with her final act of running away from a past characterized by exploitation, and towards a future as bright as the Caribbean sky.

The film's guiding visual metaphor, where light equals lucidity, helps then to interweave the three episodes into an aesthetically cohesive whole, and underscores the allegorical meta-narrative of successive class struggles as seen from the perspective of women. The visual metaphor may also explain the decision to cast light-skinned women for the leading roles in all three episodes. This is not to say that the film is systematically racist, for as we have seen the film identifies Cuba's liberation with Black mambises in the first episode, while in the third episode, the model revolutionary couple, Ange and Flavio, is played by Black actors Tété Vergara and and Flavio Calderín. In the final analysis, however, the film does reproduce conventional categories of race (and sexuality), even as it develops a thoroughly unconventional narrative of national, gender and class liberation.

Glauber Rocha once told Julio García Espinosa that, "we are not interested in the problems of neurosis; we are interested in the problems of lucidity" (qtd. in García Espinosa 74). Rocha may have well been speaking of Lucia, whose multiple protagonist embodies, as her name suggests, the lucidity to see beyond a conflictive present to a future utopia where, as Che Guevara put it:

The material possibilities for the integrated development of absolutely all members of society make the task [of creating the human being of the 21st century] much more fruitful. The present is a time of struggle; the future is ours. (12)

By locating the drama of history precisely at the intersection between a present time of struggle and a future that is ours for the making, Lucia (like Memories of Underdevelopment) participates in the creation of a new national history based not on the linear organization of facts characteristic of bourgeois historiographies, but on their confrontation. The result is an understanding of national history as essentially dialectical, whereby commitment to the ideal of liberation necessarily comes into conflict with the limits that concrete historical circumstances place on the practice of a fully liberated life. Finally, the film's framing of that dialectic as dramatic conflict remits the viewer to the equally dramatic contemporary debates over which direction the Revolution—and revolutionary art—should take: should it adhere to Marxist doctrine, and closely follow the by-then ubiquitous Soviet manuals, or should it teach the world a few new things about Marxism and revolutionary art? Lucia clearly opted for the latter, and in so doing cast its lot with what came to be known—in political, philosophical, and artistic circles—as the Cuban heresy:

4In a political context that saw the emergence of détente as the official policy of the Soviet Union, the Cuban heresy "centered on the advocacy of guerrilla warfare in Latin America and elsewhere as a means of creating revolutionary conditions" (Chanan, "Cuba and Civil Society" 392); while in philosophy, "the Cuban heresy adopted Gramsci unselfconsciously, even when he
committed and principled in its Marxism, yet open, dialogical and critical in its practical formulations. To borrow Lezama Lima’s definition of the Latin American Baroque, *Lucia* is, like the best of Cuban cinema since 1959, “errant in form yet deeply rooted in its essences” (385).

Feudalism ← [Independence from Spain] → Capitalism

plantation production under Spanish colonialism small industrial production under U.S. neocolonialism

[Cuban Revolution]

Socialism

cooporative agricultural production for national market

Figure 1. *Lucia* as the succession of modes of production in Cuban history

Nationalist aristocracy ← [Independence from Spain] → Progressive middle class

vs. Spanish colonizer vs. U.S. neocolonialism

[Cuban Revolution]

Revolutionary working class

vs. remnants of old order (i.e. machismo)

Figure 2. *Lucia* as history of class struggle

Semiconscious object ← [Independence from Spain] → Male’s helper

[Cuban Revolution]

Companion on equal footing with men

Figure 3. *Lucia* as the history of women’s liberation in Cuba

remained very problematic in the USSR and in Eastern Europe” (Martinez Heredia, 373).
Works Cited


