The Advent of the Magyar Illusion – Hungary and Cuba: The Cinematic Evidence

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"Hungarians, with their stubborn black eyes, are worshipers of Nature,
of naked passions, of an open home and a free and joyous countryside.
Their music is epitomized by Liszt, their poetry by Petofi,
their orators by Kossuth."
Quoted by Foner 1982, 127.

With these words, José Martí – the Cuban people's national hero, who is often referred to as the "Apostle of Cuban Independence" – introduced the art and artists associated with the Magyar, in his unique chronicle of *Christ before Pilate,* the acclaimed painting of the nineteenth-century Hungarian painter Mihály Munkácsy (20 February 1844 – 1 May 1900).

What did Hungary do for Cuba? What is Hungarian about Cuban arts and aesthetics? Some answers can be found within the context of Cold War culture in the analysis of the Soviet bloc dimension of the Cuban Revolution, the cinematic discourse of which cannot be understood without an understanding of Hungarian film theory and films, and particularly its experience during the Soviet experiment; yet little has been said until now about this artistic and cinematic exchange. In relation to the countries of the Soviet bloc, most studies published in English concentrate on the relationship with the former USSR from a political and economic perspective. Indeed, the strong economic and military relationship between Cuba and the countries of the Soviet bloc has produced many articles, studies, books and debates, but little has been said about the extent to which artists, and the aesthetic discourses from these countries, influenced Cuban arts and the cultural policy of the Revolution until 1991. English language bibliographical references to this subject show that experience in the Arts has been ignored, even in the latest publications. Cuban and Hungarian studies are not based on any artistic manifestation, and do not provide references to this unique cinematic exchange – including the most recent academic study, an influential referential work that was published in Hungarian and in Spanish: *La mirada húngara: estudios históricos sobre España y América Latina* by the late Hungarian scholar Ádám Anderle.[1]

In this paper, I attempt to fill this gap, in the context of recent studies on postcolonial perspectives not only within the geopolitics of the so-called Third World, but also regarding a transcultural contextualisation of the film history of Central and Eastern Europe, focused

[1] Anderle 2010.

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on the Soviet experience.[2] I seek to answer these questions by analysing the Cuban film, the works of artists, film critics or events in terms of the words or concepts surrounding them: in our case in relation to the Hungarian illusion. Indeed, film art (including the documentary), like any historical document, can easily be faked and manipulated by its creators and cultural mentors. J. A. S. Grenville once said: "After all the art of the cinema is the creation of illusion." In the present study, the term 'illusion' summaries those Hungarian filmic aspirations and ideals that came to bear as expressions of their aesthetics proposals. Illusion also refers to Hungarian cinematic discourse that expresses a profound commitment to the idea that the motion picture, as an art, has an imperative socio-political mission to accomplish. The use of the term 'illusion' alludes, of course to Sigmund Freud's works, particularly *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Future of an Illusion:* "What is characteristic of illusions is that they are derived from human wishes." Freud adds, however, that "illusions need not necessarily be false – that is to say, unrealizable or in contradiction to reality".[3]

Why focus on the moving image, on cinema? We need to remember that the first legislation of the Cuban Revolution concerning the arts was the promulgation of the Cinema Law. The Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) was created in the Revolution's first year (on 24 March 1959), a fact that demonstrates cinema's great significance within Fidel Castro's political project. Was this main function for cinema an original Cuban idea? Why was cinema the most important of all arts for the leaders of the revolution? Certainly, this recalls something that Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution, is alleged to have said: "…of all the arts for us *the most important is cinema*."[4]

How is it possible to examine all these cultural changes at the same time? Films and videos provide an excellent starting point. Audio-visual works are the twentieth century's cultural documents, chronicles, modernist texts *par excellence.* Motion pictures supply fundamental testimonies to the process of cultural change, which is the central concern of transculturation as a concept and of this paper. Cinema is seen appropriately as part and parcel of the transculturation process, but until now it has not been analysed in reference to Cuba's relation with Hungary. The moving image is an innovative and revolutionary art form, symbiosis and synthesis of other art forms. Borrowing from anthropology the notion of material culture, motion pictures are 'objects', which provide a reliable and dangerous form of knowledge. Their risk lies in the fact that they only reflect the views of those who produce them. Theirs is a 'reality' created by human manipulation. This applies to historical film, which uses chronological reality to tell a fictional story, and also to documentary films, which are a broad category of cinematic expression united by the claim to remain 'factual' or 'non-fictional'. As an historical source, each film, video and digital work bears the imprint of a particular era, and is an indication of the past reflecting the time and conditions of its creation. But at the same time, the moving image gives us the possibility to go beyond the boundaries of Space and Time, as philosophical categories, since both are temporary illusions like the moving image itself. Their great value lies in the capacity to

[2] See Kołodziejczyk–Sandru 2016.

[3] Freud 2001, 31.

[4] Lunacharsky 2002, 57.

register images in movement of historical moments, making them an irreplaceable source of information for a more in-depth knowledge and understanding of Cuban intellectual life over the last forty years.

This paper is based on the transcultural perspective, and an analysis of the impact of cultural changes in Cuba. As such it is another chapter in the study of the transculturation process, defined in 1940 by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, with an introduction by Bronislaw Malinowski:

> "Every change of culture, or, as I shall say from now on, every transculturation, is a process in which something is always given in return for what one receives, a system of give and take. It is a process in which both parts of the equation are modified, a process from which a new reality emerges, transformed and complex, a reality that is not a mechanical agglomeration of traits, nor even a mosaic, but a new phenomenon, original and independent…"[5]

This will help explain how Cubans understood what was Hungarian about cinema film theory and aesthetics, and what they did to promote Hungarian cinematic ideals and why cinema became the most important instrument for their work. In Cuba, ICAIC best identifies the cinematic discourse of the Revolution. It offers the best example for the interpretation and understanding of the dynamics of culture between 1961 and 1991.[6] The present study, which analyses motion pictures as cultural evidence, focuses on the most representative film critics, filmmakers and events that provide the facts of the Hungarian exchange established between 1961 and 1991. Essential testimonies are provided by the films and their posters, which were inspired by Hungarian cinema, creating a new kind of Cuban graphic art. Also of particular importance was a coproduction, the first one with Hungary and the last feature film co-produced with a country of the Soviet bloc: a film directed by Péter Tímár. This coproduction is a key testimony, which provides a great deal of interesting detail on the reality of historical moments such the 'período especial' (special period); and contributes to the current debate on the way filmic experiences from 'the other' Europe played a significant part in shaping and developing the cinematic discourse of the Revolution.

This is a critical study and a factual, historical one, in which the chronological events do not always dictate the flow of the narrative. It is intended as an introduction to the story of Cuba and its Revolution in relation to Hungary during those unique Soviet times, but only focused on the Cuban side. To complete the story, an analysis of the Hungarian side will be necessary, in which the Magyar interpretation of Cuban cultural matters is also considered. For this, the knowledge of the Hungarian language would be vital for a better understanding of the experience, and as such it is outside the purview of this paper.

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[5] Ortiz 1995, lviii–lix.

[6] Bueno 1977. See also Ciclo Literario 2016; Actualidad 2010; Toth 1983; Diego–Fernández Chericián 1973.

Context

The arrival of Fidel Castro and his 'barbudos' (bearded revolutionaries) in Havana marks the beginning of a new socio-political process – a unique cultural experience in the Western hemisphere. In the same year, ICAIC, and with it the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution, was born. *Semmelweis* (1952), directed by Frigyes Bán (1902–1969) was the film selected to introduce Hungarian cinema before Cuban spectators in Havana in 1959, as part of Valdés Rodríguez's film course at the Havana University. It needs to be asked why this particular film was selected. Hungarian cinema arrived at a highly critical and defining period of Cuban history. 1959 was a time in which Cuban artists and intellectuals were seeking an alternative way to establish a national film production, and to conceptualise a cinematic discourse that responded to the revolutionary moment of the times. The need for reliable information about what was happening in that distant country was satisfied through the showing of films. *Semmelweis* was a film about the well-known Hungarian physician, Ignác Fülöp Semmelweis, who discovered the cause of puerperal fever. Although capable and intelligent, Semmelweis's application for a post at the University in Vienna was repeatedly rejected. As a result, he remained in his country developing new ideas and methods. Most importantly for Cuban cultural mentors, this film showed how the historical film as a genre and this category, which consisted of 'great man' stories, offered the prospect of uniquely shaping national identity in cinema, fortifying patriotism. This Hungarian cinematic experiment with historical films about Semmelweis' dramatic biography, showed the working and fighting spirit of the Hungarian man of sciences, fighting against the odds, which was a vital principle in the new cultural project that was starting in the island. We need to remember that this period was formative for the aesthetic and cultural policy of the Cuban Revolution. This was a pragmatic transition from pure nationalism to the construction of a Marxist-Leninist political system.

The declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution, and the appearance of the USSR and the countries of the Soviet bloc as a new supplier, offered Cuban orthodox Marxists, members of the People's Socialist Party (PSP), the possibility of infiltrating Castro's government. In this period, it is possible to define an adaptation of the Soviet-bloc cultural experiment. Socialist Cuba was essentially the Sovietisation of the cultural policy of the Revolution and the ideologisation of intellectual life. In Cuba, socialist rule in its Soviet-bloc variant grew from within, not as in Hungary, where it was imposed from without. As we know, socialist rule in Eastern Europe was a creation of the Kremlin. This historical fact is essential, and needs to be taken into consideration, in order to understand the reasons why the leaders in the countries of the Soviet bloc took so long to recognise the government of Fidel Castro. János Kádár, the First Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party – the same one who, in 1956, called for the military intervention of the Soviet Union – never recognised them as comrades.[7] Certainly, Fidel Castro's guerrilla movement, established in December 1956 (the *Movimiento 26 de Julio*) did not enjoy active Soviet-bloc backing; nor did it receive support from the Popular Socialist Party (PSP), as the Cuban Communist Party was then known. Nevertheless, revolutionary Cuba became the most reliable ally of the Soviet bloc in the Western Hemisphere in order to defend and preserve

[7] Kádár 1985; Anderle 2010.

its national independence. As a consequence, the Revolution made an irreversible shift from nationalism to a Soviet-bloc-style one-party system: a Marxist-Leninist state.[8]

The colonial status of Cuba when cinema reached the island, unlike the rest of Latin America that had won independence almost a century before, made the beginning of cinema in the Caribbean island similar to the Magyar country, which was under the subjection of the Austro–Hungarian Empire. The 'national' film project in both these countries became tied up in the colonial and postcolonial construction of nationhood and identity. Of special importance in this was the film adaptation of literature, especially during the Soviet period. This particular practice intended to reinforce two main values in their cinematic discourses: nationalism and the status of cinema as the art of the moving image, films as expression of the art of the audio-visual image. Thus, for the cultural mentors of the Cuban revolution, the dissemination of Hungarian literary classics was an essential part of the experience. The first Cuban anthology of Hungarian literature was published in 1966, with a wide variety of poems, essays, short stories and excerpts from novels written by Hungary's foremost authors. This monograph provides an insight into the rich literary heritage of the country. Hungarian literature, similarly to Slavonic and other Eastern European literatures, displays a strong historical, social and often political commitment uncharacteristic of the Western tradition. Cuban editions demonstrate this fact, illustrating the specific role of literature in the formation of a national identity. This was particularly true of poetry, especially that of Sándor Petőfi.[9]

In April 1962, the first *Semana de Cine Húngaro* was presented in Havana. For the occasion, the filmmaker János Herskó and two actresses, Éva Ruttkai and Mari Törőcsik, travelled to Cuba. From then on, every year in Cuba there were Hungarian film retrospectives; and before each screening a representative of the cultural delegation or embassy responsible for providing the reels gave a short briefing, in their native tongue, on the background of the films. These introductions helped viewers to place the films they were about to see within their relevant contexts. Most of these films shown to Cuban audiences are now seen as masterpieces of Soviet and Eastern European cinema. Any screening of those films became a unique cultural event of growing significance largely because of their pioneering status for a Western audience. From then on, every year, on festive national dates, at least seven days were set aside for representatives of the film industries of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe to screen their films, to give talks and exhibit film posters around Cuba.

One important legacy of this experience is the contribution made by Cuban painters and graphic artists who designed the posters for the retrospective of Hungarian films and other materials used to promote the film production not only of Hungary but also of the countries

[8] Soviet style cultural policies were imposed from the beginning, bringing a consequence of events similar to those seen in Stalin's Russia such as the institutionalisation of the role of the intellectual. ICAIC's censorship of the documentary PM (1961); the so-called Cuban Gulags: the Military Units to Aid Production or UMAP's (Unidades Militares para la Ayuda de Producción, 1965–1968); and the Heberto Padilla case (1968), the latter as an example of Soviet-bloc show-trials in the Cuban context. New institutions and organisations such as UNEAC (The National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba) and the Ministry of Culture were also created to control public debate. The Congresses of Culture provided Castro with an opportunity to dictate his policy: "Within the Revolution everything […] outside it nothing" (Castro's words to the intellectuals), a tropical version of Lenin's idea: "Art through Revolution and Revolution through Art…"

[9] Diego–Fernández Chericián 1973.

of the Soviet bloc. These posters are historical documents that show the cinematic exchange between East European and Cuban artists and filmmakers from 1961 to 1991. They took expressive elements from films directed by Ferenc Kósa, István Szabó and others, in order to create original, unique, vivid and impressive images. These posters are also evidence of the collaboration between painters and filmmakers in order to create a new kind of poster design for the nascent film industry of the Cuban Revolution, which testifies to the work of the *Departamento de Carteles* (Poster Department), part of the *Centro de Información Cinematográfica* (Cinematic Information Centre), organised under Mario Rodríguez Alemán's leadership. Of international reputation, the posters produced by ICAIC, and created by Eduardo Muñoz Bachs, Olivio Martínez, Julio Eloy, Rafael Morante, Holbein López and many others, echo the revolutionary designs of film posters from the countries of the Soviet bloc. They grab your attention because of their wide chromatic range, excellent use of typography and wonderful serigraphic impression. Indeed, the silkscreen process gives them a unique texture and visual value, placing them in the vanguard of graphic design, and representing a significant development in Cuban visual arts. Today, they are internationally recognised as "Afiches del ICAIC".[10] These film posters record the presence in Cuba of many films produced not only in Hungary, but also in the countries of the Soviet bloc during 1961–1991. From the number of posters produced every year for three decades, it is possible to recognise the wide and systematic promotion of this cinematography during this period.

For decades, the film production of the countries of the Soviet bloc were the most wide-ranging and systematically available to the Cuban viewer, and statistics provide further evidence of this film experience that was unique in the Western hemisphere.[11] The most important films and filmmakers from Hungary were reasonably well known to the Cuban audience. For example, Márta Mészáros's full-length directorial debut, *The Girl* (*Eltávozott nap,* 1968), was the first Hungarian film to have been directed by a woman. It won the Special Jury Prize at the Valladolid International Film Festival. Mario Rodríguez Alemán was the author of the first Cuban theoretical-critical study on Hungarian cinema. It was published under the title *Hungría: curso de cine por países.*[12] This text became a compulsory referential work for many in Cuba, both nationals and visitors, Cuban university students and those from the countries of the Third World. This brief and informative text is a pioneering work on Hungarian film history about which most scholars on Cuban and film studies know nothing. Today, Rodríguez Alemán is recognised as the great promoter of film production and theories from the 'other' Europe, and in particular of the cinematic discourse from the countries of the Soviet bloc. In this period of institutionalisation and Sovietisation of Cuban intellectual life, Rodriguez Alemán devised the first TV programmes on film analysis, such as *Cine debate, Noche de cine, Cine vivo* and *Tanda del doming,* fundamentally in order to disseminate and celebrate the cinematic discourse from the countries of the former Soviet bloc. Alemán facilitated

[10] See Mosquera 1989, 210. On Cuban film posters see Vega 1996; Constantine–Fern 1974; Vega 1997; García-Rayo 2004.

[11] Douglas 1996, statistics are on 318–323. Regarding the Cuban film poster inspired by Márta Mészáros's full-length directorial debut, *The Girl (Eltávozott nap)* of the Cuban designer Antonio Pérez "Ñiko" González, please see Soytimido s. a.

[12] Rodriguez Alemán 1962–1963.

their dissemination on television, reaching a wider audience than cinema. He very well understood this social advantage. If people stop going to the cinema, they will watch more films on television than they did before, and this will result not in a decline, but an increase in Soviet-bloc cinema's role in Cuban intellectual life. This cultural mentor knew that the Cuban viewer had already become accustomed to it and they could not stop watching TV programmes. There was no choice. Rodríguez Alemán's work was essentially an ideological analysis of the cinematic phenomenon, which reduced art to its ideological and political values, with a party commitment.[13]

The Cuban television day is short because of the lack in both funds and materials, and with the limited schedule for only two channels they were mainly broadcasting programmes from USSR and Eastern Europe. When Mario Rodríguez Alemán decided to incorporate television into the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution, television, the 'vulgar and popularised' medium, was intended to be improved with the addition of the artistic and educational goals of many TV programmes from the countries of the Soviet bloc. In this way, it was hoped to accelerate a change in moral values. As part of this, historical films, particularly those about the Second World War and film literary adaptations, including Hungarian, were on Cuban channels. In addition, theatrical and ballet performances as well as cartoons and documentaries were broadcast. Other popular Eastern European series broadcasted in Cuba included *Máté Bors* from Hungary.

Another example is the reception of Hungarian pop music. *Ne sírj (Do not Cry)* is a song that became very popular in the island, when the Hungarian pop singer Klári Katona made it known during her performances in Havana. A very well-known Cuban TV producer of the period, Pedraza Ginori wrote a Cuban version of the song for Mirta Medina, entitled *De ti, de mí (From You, from Me)*.[14] Certainly, if we look at the schedule for a typical day's programmes, we realise the level of Soviet-bloc television experiment in Cuba, a unique experience in the Western hemisphere, in a country of the so-called Third World.

Rodríguez Alemán's programmes on film criticism gave him a reputation as 'the man who teaches cinema on TV'. Certainly, the Cuban viewer perceived this film critic as such by giving the illusion of a teacher intimately and directly addressing a specific person and a specific family. This kind of programme pretended to reveal more profoundly the ideological, political, social and aesthetic meaning of films. Western films were also shown on these programmes – for example, film adaptations of Hungarian literary classics or those which 'denounced' the imperialist system and reflected the 'decadence' of capitalist societies. Other films that could have 'problems of ideology' had their 'message' clarified by the film critic in charge. He analysed films in the same way as a literary critic would analyse literature. He observed films as a reading text, emphasising their ideological values. Films were for him an important visual art, from which people learnt more quickly. Rodriguez Alemán saw cinema and TV as interdependent cultural forms and both were also assigned the role of what he called 'cultural educator'. According to him, his 'method' of watching movies on TV could revolutionise the traditional American-style viewing patterns already

[13] His book *La sala oscura* could be considered a classic of film criticism written in the best Soviet style because of its explicit partisanship, didacticism and rhetoric.

[14] See Pedraza Ginori 2016, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, as well as the blog of the Cuban TV director and producer Pedraza Ginori 2013. For the Cuban version of Katona's song, sung by the Cuban Mirta Median, please see Median s. a.

established in Cuba. With the nationalisation of the media, both cinema and television became state institutions, thus there could not be any commercial competition between them. Television received the right to broadcast all the films imported into the country, and also received the right to televise all the plays and ballets performed in the theatres. In addition, a great number of adaptations of literary works, fictional and documental films were commissioned for television.

Rodríguez Alemán's work, in giving a central place to television within the cinematic discourse, was followed by ICAIC, which created its own programmes such as *Historia del cine, Cinemateca de Cuba* and *24xSegundo.* These included cycles of broadcasts featuring motion pictures and appearances by filmmakers, film specialists, sociologists and psychologists. Did these efforts over more than twenty years produce any substantial change in the behaviour, interests and demands of Cuban audiences?

It is a very difficult task to measure this experience in terms of value. He linked television with cinema, and both, as a result, became primarily an educational cultural medium controlled by the state. Overall, by showing this number of programmes, Cuban television established a unique standard for cultural activity in the Western hemisphere: this was a celebration of the arts from the 'other' Europe. It was certainly a fascinating, complex and controversial experiment of innovation. Perhaps the most important achievement for that particular Cuban generation, bombarded for more than two decades by Soviet-bloc film production, was the primary information that later became knowledge about the existence of this kind of film and the culture of these countries. It is particularly important to acknowledge Rodríguez Alemán's remarkable work for the improving knowledge and understanding of Hungarian cinema in Cuban media, particularly on television.[15]

The Cuban Revolution was a historical moment that shook the whole continent, and throughout the so-called Third World there was a resurrection of Marxism in its Soviet version, Marxism–Leninism.[16] This made the influx of reliable sources from such unfamiliar and distant cultures as the countries of the Soviet bloc, the 'other' Europe, particularly current and relevant. In this period, several Cuban editions of key Marxist film texts were published by Ediciones ICAIC, such as Lev Kuleshov's *Tratado de la realización cinematográfica* (1964), John Howard Lawson's *El cine en la batalla de ideas* (1964) and Sergei Eisenstein's *El sentido del cine* (1967), among many others. In terms of film theory and aesthetics, two Hungarian classics became compulsory references: György Lukács and Béla Balázs.

György Lukács (1885–1971) was one of the founders of Western Marxism, who developed the theory of reification, and contributed to Marxist theory with developments of Karl Marx's theory of class consciousness. In Cuba, he was also known as the philosopher of Marxism–Leninism because he organised Lenin's pragmatic revolutionary practices into the formal philosophy of vanguard-party revolution. As a literary and film critic, in

[15] A respectable number of articles on Hungarian cinema, filmmakers and film theory were published in Cuba between 1961–1991; for those texts published in *Cine Cubano,* please see García Carranza–Cabalé 2014, 147–148; 208.

[16] For a long list of titles of books which were available in Cuba at that time, please see page 403 in Mosquera, Gerardo: *Estética y marxismo,* a text written as a preface to the Cuban edition of *Aesthetics and Marxism* by Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, a book that did not get to be published. Mosquera's text is currently available online Mosquera s. a.

the 1960s Lukács was to become an important presence in Latin America and especially in Cuba. His texts – from the early twenties – were, forty years later, a significant incentive to Cuban left-wing intellectuals and artists. Lukács was especially attractive to the cultural mentors of the Cuban revolution because of his approach to the question of national identity, and his definition of the responsibility of intellectuals. For them, the Hungarian, from a Marxist perspective, associated Marxism with human liberation and emancipation. These were relevant, core values for the aesthetics and cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution. They are very powerful topics, which play a considerable role in Cuban self-consciousness. Indeed, national identity was bound up with the Cuban ideal of independence. Tzvi Medin, in her book *Cuba: The Shaping of Revolutionary Consciousness,* suggests that "Cuban revolutionary leaders introduced Marxism–Leninism into the Cuban revolutionary message by grafting it onto the images, symbols, values, and concepts of Cuban nationalism".[17] The cultural mentors mobilised all forms of the arts for the creation of images in correspondence with the new ideological status of the Revolution: a fusion of Cuban nationalism and Marxism–Leninism, or to put it in Fidel Castro's own words: "I believe that my contribution to the Cuban Revolution is to have synthesised the ideas of Martí and Marxism–Leninism, and to have applied it to our struggle."[18]

Lukács's developments of realism and of the novel as a literary genre, argued for the revolutionary character of novels. The same conceptualisation was applied to audio-visual culture. Lukács's Cuban edition came out from the official national publishing house *Arte y Literatura,* in a translation by Juan José Sebrelli, with an introduction by José Antonio Portuondo. This was going on mainly in the Department of Aesthetics at Havana University and ICAIC: the two-main centres for the study of Hungarian texts in the island.[19] Lukács was seen in Cuba as the first and foremost theoretician of Marxist aesthetics.[20] Thus, it is essential to determine which aspect of his work has contributed most significantly to the philosophical and critical thought, and the cultural project and cinematic discourse, of the Cuban Revolution.

Lukács's first article published in *Cine Cubano* was entitled *Sobre el romanticismo* (About Romanticism); and the question it poses was why this text was selected.[21] We need to remember that Karl Marx was fundamentally a result of romanticism. It was a very complex movement in modern Europe, with all its sense of hope, liberation and social transformation. This was a very Lukácsean idea, to link the values of flourishing individuality, which is a very romantic notion, with the idea of social practices as justice and democracy. For ICAIC's mentors, to talk about those ethical ideals of romanticism was to refer to the core moral and ethical values of Marx as a person and Marxism as a philosophical proposal. His understanding is based on the principle that every social matter has an ethical dimension. This text by Lukács helped to establish an understanding of aesthetics and romanticism within a Marxist frame. Thus, his essays became essential texts and were taught at the University. Cuban editions of his work were not only the tribute of the Cuban Revolution

[17] Medin 1990, 530.

[18] *Fidel y la religión. Conversaciones con Frei Betto* 1985, 163–164.

[19] As David Craven explains: "The case for and against George Lukács was made in Cuba by José Antonio Portuondo (in favour), and by Gerardo Mosquera (against)." Craven 2006, 204.

[20] Lukács 1978. See also Lukács 1964, 126–148.

[21] Lukács 1966, 34–37.

to a legendary Marxist philosopher, political and literary theorist; these publications were testimonies of the extraordinary breadth and variety of Lukács's thought. They permitted Cuban readers to sense the evolution of a powerful intellectual personality from Hungary.

Béla Balázs (1884–1949) was a Hungarian film aesthetician who published in Hungarian and German. His books, *Der sichtbare Mensch* (Visible Man, 1924) and *Der Geist des Films* (The Spirit of Film, 1930) remain amongst the founding stones of modern film theory, though the latest was not published in Cuba until 1980. However, his texts had been circulating even before 1959, since the years of Valdés Rodríguez's summer film school. In general, Balázs strove to offer to modern man possibilities for overcoming his particular state of estrangement by designing a utopian visual culture in which film plays an essential role. The ambition of Balázs to describe film as a language brought him close to the Russian Formalists; he was actually able to advance views on montage that would be too mechanistic even for Eisenstein's standards. However, a genuinely philosophical component enters his work through complex reflections on cinema, and *The Spirit of Film* was a seminal contribution to the conceptualisation of film language. Certainly, Balázs is routinely acknowledged alongside Rudolf Arnheim, André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer as a central figure in film theory of the classical period from the 1920s to the early post-war years. Yet it is not primarily on early works like the *Visible Man* that Balázs's reputation rests.[22] Despite widespread acknowledgement by Balázs's contemporaries that his pre-war German-language works were the first significant contributions to a 'dramaturgy' of film, reception of his work in the Spanish-speaking world has remained dependent on *The Spirit of Film,* with a 1952 translation (from the 1948 Italian edition). Balázs's two major works on silent and early sound cinema, were acknowledged by Cuban film critics, theoreticians and filmmakers such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Osvaldo Sánchez and Julio García Espinosa as influential contributions to the 'dramaturgy' of early film; yet Cuban interpretations of Balázs's works have remained unknown. In a book on film criticism, entitled *Cine o Sardina,* appears an essay by Cabrera Infante entitled *Literatura y cine – Cine y literatura* (Literature and Cinema – Cinema and Literature), which may be considered one of the most interesting interpretations on the film theoretical legacy of Balázs. The Cuban film critic wrote: "In 1924, Balázs produced a famous phrase, now the film is about to inaugurate a new direction in our culture."[23] Cabrera Infante was right. In his ninety-page treatise, Balázs stakes a claim for film as an art that may restore to modernity the lost expressive capacities of the visual body. Under such headings as *Type and Physiognomy, The Play of Facial Expressions, The Close-Up* and *The Face of Things,* he presents a typology of expressive elements that together comprise the "only shared universal language", the image-language of film. Cabrera Infante's article refers to the comments of Balázs on the new cinematic visibility of the human body, together with extracts from his theoretical sketches on performance,

[22] In those days, we had several meetings in Havana and in London. At that time, I was writing my PhD paper and the project of the UCL Festival of the Moving Image, FoMI 2008b. In living memory, it was Julio García Espinosa who introduced me to the film theory of Balázs (in particular on the idea of visibility). My eternal gratitude to Julio for that, my copy of the Cuban edition of Balázs's work, it was a present from Julio – together with a copy of the journal *Cine Cubano* – the edition where his text, *Por un cine imperfecto* was published for the first time. Another evidence of the transcultural condition of film art.

[23] Quoted in Cabrera Infante 1998, 23. The extract given here by the Cuban film critic derives from a first full translation of *Visible Man.*

close-up and montage. For Cabrera Infante, the contribution of Balázs ranks among the most valuable documents in film history. The Cuban edition of his work *La estética del filme* (The Spirit of Film, 1930) was from an Italian translation of the text by Giannina Bertarelli. In the film journal *Cine Cubano,* Osvaldo Sánchez published his review of the book of Balázs, where he said: "Beyond its historical value, the book contains the theoretical vitality of a man, whose aesthetic intuitions, open lines of meditation that continue to be current."[24]

One of the main questions facing the emergent revolutionary 'intelligentsia' in Cuba was whether they should have revolutionary art, or art for the Revolution: that is, the State. Somehow the role played by artists and intellectuals was misunderstood. They believed that they had found the path to play an active role in society. The *Sociedad Nuestro Tiempo* provided the principal names for ICAIC. From that moment, there was a radical change in the way the film industry was conceived. Certainly, Cuban political leaders, along with cultural mentors and filmmakers, shared the idea of 'remaking the nation'. In order to achieve this, the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution had to be different from previous years. Alfredo Guevara, the first director of ICAIC, defined its discourse in six aspects.[25] In that context, the filmic experience of the countries of the former Soviet bloc was a necessary reference point for the mentors of ICAIC. Like Alea and other founders of the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC), Espinosa had studied film in Italy in the renowned Centro Sperimentale di Roma, where he learned the neorealist style and to express the relationship of politics and art from a Marxist perspective. How did Cubans come to know the works of Balázs and Lukács for the first time?

In 1951, Manuel Valdés Rodriguez, the father of film studies at Havana University, sent a letter of introduction to Mario Verdone, who was teaching at the *Centro Sperimentale Cinematografia* in Rome, Italy, where translations of the theoretical work on cinema by Balázs were read and discussed. The letter was to introduce two Cuban amateur film makers, Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. It would become the meeting place of the new generation of Cuban film students with Hungarian theoretical works.[26] Valdés Rodríguez and Verdone knew each other from Moscow VGik film school, where they were both in Eisenstein's film class. The letter also served to introduce Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa to Umberto Barbaro and Luigi Chiarini,[27] who had translated Balázs.[28]

Espinosa's way of seeing filmmaking was common among a type of intelligentsia that in Latin America and within Cuba had grown distant from the politics of market capital and its system of intranational and international domination, and was attracted to a variety of Marxisms and socialisms. In April 1963, García Espinosa published in *La Gaceta de Cuba* a text entitled *Conclusiones de un debate entre cineastas cubanos.* This was a sandpaper

[24] Sánchez 1983, 94–95.

[25] Guevara 1960, 3.

[26] *Cinema Nuovo* (Guido Aristarco, founder and director of the Italian film journal, who wrote the prologue of the Italian edition of Lukács's book *The Destruction of Reason* and the Centro Sperimentale Cinematografia connected those pioneering film theory works of the Hungarians Béla Balázs and Lukács with the founders of the New Latin American Cinema Movement: Gabo – Gabriel García Marquez, Fernando Birri and later the Cubans Titon – Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa; another evidence of the transcultural condition of film art.

[27] Bondanella 2001.

[28] Mario Verdone himself attended the opening day of the EICTV film school in Havana, he was invited by Gabo and Birri, Casa del Cinema s. a.

of the main topics discussed concerning aesthetics in relation to cultural politics, and was signed by the best-known Cuban filmmakers. In this document, there appeared ideas that echo the postulates of Lukács and Balázs, such as *cultura sólo hay una* (there is only one culture) or *las categorías formales del arte no tienen carácter de clase* (the formal categories of art do not have a class character), which were in opposition to the central Soviet concept that postulates the class character of the art. Once again, Alfredo Guevara, as Director of ICAIC, had to 'clarify' the political position of these filmmakers in order to save their future within the cultural project and the future of the cinematic discourse of the Revolution.[29]

Humberto Solás: The Lyrical Element (Balázs within ICAIC)

"…and looks can express every shade of feeling far more precisely than a description, than words […] what matters in film is not the storyline but the lyrical element" said Béla Balázs. Already in 1924, in his seminal book *Visible Man,* Balázs claimed that cinematography has the power to reshape the 'face' of the world. Humberto Solás's film-work presents the major concepts on which Balázs's film theory is built, especially his views on the thematic of mirror-shots, "closeness" and his understanding of the interplay of close-up, montage and conjecture. Balázs's *Visible Man* had already claimed the cinematic close-up as the "true terrain of film". In his first book about cinema, Balázs considered the close-up to be the cornerstone of any genuine film dramaturgy, the core feature of the new art and the major means to establish a visual culture that transcends the boundaries of traditional aesthetics:

> "The close-up is the technical precondition of the art of facial expressions and hence of the highest art of film in general. A face has to be brought really close to us and it must be isolated from any context that might distract our attention (likewise something is not possible on the stage); we must be able to dwell on the sight so as to be able to read it properly… Both soul and destiny can be seen in the human face. In this visible relationship, in this interplay of facial expressions, we witness a struggle between the type and the personality, between inherited and acquired characteristics, between fate and the individual will, the 'id' and the 'ego'."[30]

The Cuban filmmaker, like the Hungarian film theorist did before him, borrowed and transformed different concepts provided by romantic and formalist aesthetics, ideas from different sources, to set up a framework in which one can detect many sources of inspiration for his own films as film theories to come. To understand Solás's film theory in its own right, one has to reconstruct the literary milieu of his times and the social network of artists and intellectuals in Havana after 1959, in particular after 1961 with the declaration of the socialist character of the Revolution. Born in December of 1942 into a middle-class Havana family of very modest means, Humberto Solás joined the insurrectionary movement against the Batista dictatorship at the age of fourteen. He made his first experimental film

[29] See also Guevara 1963, 14. For the opinions of the filmmakers in the meeting, see also in the same number, *Conclusiones de un debate entre cineastas cubanos,* 32–47.

[30] Ibid.

in 1959, the year of the triumph of the Revolution, at the age of seventeen; and became a member of ICAIC. In 1961, he directed his first film in collaboration with Héctor Veitía and under the supervision of visiting Dutch documentarist Joris Ivens. He subsequently worked as a producer of documentary shorts while directing portions of the *Latin American Newsreel* and the Popular *Encyclopedia* series.

Humberto Solás spent his first two years at the Film Institute working on *Cine Cubano* magazine; and it was in that period that he came across the text by Béla Balázs published in Cuba, entitled *Heroes, Beauty, Stars and the Case of Greta Garbo,* amongst others, in which Balázs considers such factors as audience identification and implications of the close-up for the evolving art of film.[31] For Béla Balázs, though, Garbo's face epitomises not transcendence, but a suffering of the here-and-now. The screen face, which comes to us most fully in the close-up, is rather like a screen within a screen, a second screen on which viewers can project their own impressions and fantasies – within, of course, the stylistic and cultural confines of that gigantic image. For example, one could see Garbo's beauty as spiritual or bland, compelling or over-perfect, but one probably could not see her as "downright ugly" without wilfully misreading the image.[32]

The Visible Balázs in Solás's Lucía: On Acting

Gender in ICAIC film production has been a persistent topic in Cuban film studies. ICAIC, as the state-sponsored film institute, in which the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution was engaged, explored questions of gender since its very early years. This has been central to the academic work of Marvin D'Lugo (1993), Catherine Benamou (1995, 1999), Julianne Burton-Carvajal (1986, 1993), and others, who have examined ICAIC films such as *Lucía* (Humberto Solás, 1968), *Portrait of Teresa* (*Retrato de Teresa,* Pastor Vega, 1978), *One Way or Another* (*De cierta manera,* Sara Gómez, 1978), *Up to a Point* (*Hasta cierto punto,* Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1980), and *Far Away* (*Lejanía,* Jesús Díaz, 1986). These explored the representation of Cuban women in a socialist society and issues of gendered spectatorship.[33]

An important reference on the topic of gender in/on films is Humberto Solás. His early films were highly experimental and somewhat hermetic. With these empirical indications of the new medium's potential in mind, it is quite comprehensible that Solás expected an overwhelming cultural shift to result from his work in cinema. He thought it would be able to change the 'face' of nearly everything in a profound manner. Only the medium-length feature *Manuela* (1966) hinted at the masterpiece he would produce two years later at the age of twenty-six. Solás achieved international success in 1968 with his first feature film, *Lucía;* an ambitious period film piece that was told in three stories set at different moments of Cuban history. Like Kalatozov's film *Soy Cuba,* Solás's film is divided into stories or 'saltos'

[31] This information came from the filmmaker himself, after a long conversation with Humberto Solás, at my parent's place in Havana, in the summer of 2007. At the time, I was working on the programme for the 2008 UCL Festival of the Moving Image, FoMI 2008a. Solás was invited but he died in the same year. Regarding Balázs's article that Humberto mentioned, please see Balázs 1970, 72–77. See also Bisplinghoff 1980, 79–85.

[32] See Balázs 1970, 72–77.

[33] For a study on this, see Baron 2011.

with each dealing with a different class: the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and the peasantry. His film 'jumps' through historical periods exploring three different women from colonial times: in 1895 during the Spanish–American war; the struggle against Gerardo Machado's dictatorship in the 1930s; and the emancipation struggle of a peasant girl in the 1960s whose education, despite the Revolution, is held back by obsolete Cuban machismo. All are seen through the eyes of three different women, each named Lucía.[34] Today, *Lucía* is considered a key work of ICAIC. For the British film critic Michael Chanan:

> "Lucía was a tour de force: three episodes in three different cinematic styles about three women, each called Lucía set during three different moments in Cuba's history. Lucía 1895 is shot in a histrionic style, influenced by the Italian director Luchino Visconti, replete with the extraordinary image of naked black liberation fighters riding out to meet the Spanish cavalry. Lucía 1933 turns to Hollywood models and adopts the more sedate style of domestic melodrama by Cukor or Kazan, while Lucía 196? takes on the hue of the nouvelle vague."[35]

According to Marta Alvear, Solás's film is: "Remarkable for the dialectical complexity of its narratives and the virtuosity of its three different visual styles."[36] As the critics affirmed, Solás worked extensively and effectively with tableaux, choreography, minimal scenography and expressionistic lighting in an attempt to integrate various modes of popular culture into film. To the question: having chosen to make a film about historical transformation and the revolutionary process, why did you choose to cast a woman as the central figure rather than a man, a couple, or a group? Solás responded:

> "Women are traditionally the number-one victims in all social confrontations. The woman's role always lays bare the contradictions of a period and makes them explicit. There is the problem of machismo, especially apparent in the third segment, which undermines a woman's chances for self-fulfilment and at the same time feeds a whole subculture of underdevelopment."

As he has had to argue many times, for him: "*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 transcendentally affected at any given moment by contradictions and change."

For exactly the same reason, Solás also cast a woman as the central figure in his previous film:

> "My point of departure was the same premise, that the effects of social transformations on a woman's life are more transparent. Because they are traditionally assigned to a submissive role, women have suffered more from society's contradictions and are thus more sensitive to them and hungrier for change. From this perspective, I feel that the female character has a great deal of dramatic potential through which I can express

[34] Raquel Revuelta is Lucía I (1895), Eslinda Núñez is Lucía II (1930) and Adela Legrá is Lucía III (in the 1960s).
[35] Chanan 2008.
[36] Burton–Alvear 1978, 32–33.

> the entire social phenomenon I want to portray. This is a very personal and a very practical position. It has nothing to do with feminism per se."[37]

This portrayal of Cuban history resonates with Solás's film. Indeed, as Béla Balázs stated:

> "The cameraman has to be a conscious painter. First, because as an optical art, a film has primarily to be a feast for the eyes. Secondly, because every lighting effect, every colouring, has a symbolic value and expresses a specific atmosphere, whether the cameraman desires this or not. So he has to desire it."[38]

The close-up, like the still-life painting, is powerful in the art of suggestion. Cinema is essentially a visual art; thus, the use of painterly techniques can be useful in film. How can we see all this in Solás's films? The inward struggle which is 'readable' in the dramatic change of facial expressions lends cinema the power to convey psychological insights beyond those that are available in the theatre, where the audience looks at the actors from a great distance and a fixed position. Therefore, the crucial innovation that sets cinema apart from stage drama is the variance of viewpoints, and especially the close-up that is inserted to intensify the viewer's empathetic understanding. In his films, Humberto Solás, the modern man, is more attracted by the human face; but he is also the ancient man, much more attracted by the entire human body. We need to remember those sequences in his films from *Lucía* to *Cecilia,* which are all replete with the extraordinary image of naked Afro–Cuban mambises (liberation fighters) riding out to meet the Spanish cavalry.[39]

One of the most fundamental questions that is increasingly facing ethicists and society alike is: "What does it mean to be human?" "In what consists the act of being human?" Indeed, there are many interpretations about these sentences, and in every area of philosophical concern, including of cinematic discourse, we are always thrown back to these basic questions. Another important fact to consider is alluding to the passage in *Visible Man* where Balázs expected the film to unite the psyche of the white man. It is interesting that it was Balázs's early allegiance to race theory that made his work available for appropriation by Nazi film ideologues, who do not consider some human beings to be human persons. These differences in view indicate that here we are faced with a problem about the recognition of what we take human beings to be as we experience them, and so as we experience ourselves.

The cinematic discourse of the ICAIC holds that every human being is a human person, and every human person is a human being. ICAIC film production focused on the real experience of inequality and social-racial discrimination of women and Afro–Cubans. This fact began to be recognised in Cuban films thanks to ICAIC productions. Great examples of this fact are the films directed by Humberto Solás. His cinematic work is mainly about the emancipation of Cuban women, particularly those living in the countryside. Solás's most memorable filmic characters are women of all races. This distinction between the evident

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[37] Burton–Alvear 1978, 32–33.

[38] Carter 2010, 76.

[39] The term *mambises* (mambí: definition as per the Royal Spanish Academy of Language dictionary in the singular) refers to the guerrilla Cuban independence soldiers who fought against Spain in the Ten Years' War (1868–1878) and Cuban War of Independence (1895–1898).

and the visible is telling, and I can refer to the differences between the two colossuses of the cinematic discourse of the Cuban Revolution: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Humberto Solás. This difference brings Solás close to an Italian filmmaker, whom he really admired. In his essay *The 'Cinema of Poetry'* (1965), Pier Paolo Pasolini claimed that cinema might be apt for exploring a 'poetic' style, because the medium has an "irrational nature". Due to a slippage of terms, however, Pasolini does not so much come to define a 'cinema of poetry', but he will examine the conditions of a 'free indirect discourse' in cinema instead.[40]

One of the catalysts that contributed to Solás's return was István Szabó's *Mephisto.* Intertextuality is an idea that any text has been influenced and shaped by texts that have come before it (anything read, or seen in case of movies). Therefore, no film exists on its own and consciously or not, all films borrow ideas from other films, past or present. Humberto Solás's *Un hombre de éxito* is also another example of intertextuality, in this case with *Mephisto,* a 1981 film adaptation of Klaus Mann's novel of the same title, directed by István Szabó, and starring Klaus Maria Brandauer as Hendrik Höfgen. Szabó's Oscar film was a significant reference for Solás's film, a fact that has not been acknowledged yet.

Regarding this personal observation of mine, Nelson Rodríguez Zurbarán – Solás's partner in life and work, the great editor not only of Humberto Solás's films, but also of many key films of the ICAIC – explained that: "Humberto marked his intention to connect his film *Un hombre de éxito* with Szabó's *Mephisto* in the sequence that you mentioned, which is loaded with signs but only subtly." The one that I mentioned to Nelson was a panning long shot of the stairs, where for the first time the well-known Nazi swastika, with all its symbolism, appears in Cuban cinema, bringing all its sinister atmosphere to an ICAIC film production. The Hungarian film was very influential on Solás. As it is well known, the Cuban filmmaker always focused on a female rather than a male protagonist, different to Szabó's film tradition, with *Un hombre de éxito,* since *Un día de noviembre,* like Szabó in his film, Solás used the symbol of the swastika in a context of anti-Nazism; and both filmmakers shared a recurrent theme throughout, the most common being the relationship between the personal and the political or historical. Like Szabó, Solás used history to make references to the present. Both films are chronicles of the moral decline of the establishment, cinematic essays on opportunism, ambition, betrayal and deception.[41] Indeed, Humberto Solás was a human. On Humberto Solás, we can paraphrase what the Italian film critic said about Béla Balázs: "An exemplary life of a social and free man, that is to say of a man totally human. His life and his work were a tenacious and constant struggle for this human emancipation."[42]

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[40] Pasolini 1976, 542–558. This text was read in Italian by Pier Paolo Pasolini in June 1965 at the first New Cinema Festival at Pesaro. The present version is from the French translation by Marianne de Vettimo and Jacques Bontemps which appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma,* No. 171, October 1965, under the title *Visible Balázs and the Spirit of Film: Pier Paolo Pasolini and Humberto Solás.* I wrote an essay on their similarities as filmmakers where "the lyrical element" of Balázs, this was a perspective shared and conceptualised in those poetic films by Pasolini and Solás; they both made supremely cinematic use of close-up, eye contact, giving that lyrical element, transcendent meaning to their films.

[41] On the political context, see Cunningham 2014, 54–81.

[42] Quoted from the prologue by Umberto Barbaro in the Cuban edition of Balázs 1980, 7.

István Szabó at the EICTV (The School of Three Worlds, the Film School of Gabriel García Márquez)

István Szabó is the best-known and one of the most critically acclaimed Hungarian film directors of the past few decades. In the 1960s and 1970s he directed amateur films in Hungarian, which explore his own generation's experiences and recent Hungarian history (*Apa* [1966]; *Szerelmesfilm* [1970]; *Tűzoltó utca* [1973]). His signature film trilogy consists of *Colonel Redl* (1984), winner of a Jury Prize at the Cannes Festival, *Hanussen* (1988) and *Mephisto* (1981), which received the Cannes Award for the Best Screenplay. Szabó was the first Hungarian director to win an Oscar.[43] He was the winner of an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film for *Mephisto.* He made a switch to English-language films with *Meeting Venus* (1991), *Sunshine* (1999), *Taking Sides* (2001) and most recently *Being Julia* (2004), which garnered an Oscar nomination for actress Annette Bening.[44]

In 1988, István Szabó visited Havana, invited by Cuba's International Film School (the EICTV), a project on the moving image created by the Nobel Prize of Literature, Gabriel García Márquez.[45] On 27 April, he held a meeting with EICTV students, scholars and filmmakers. Szabó's conversation with the EICTV community was published in an anthology of meetings and conferences celebrated between 1987–1988. This volume includes the visits of Robert Redford, George Lucas, William Kennedy, Fernando Solanas, Francisco Rabal, Harry Belafonte, among many others.[46] For obvious reasons, the first question asked was regarding the evolution of Szabó's film style, from his early films to the internationally successful *Mephisto.* On this point, the filmmaker explains that his first films were based on his own ideas, until someone recommended Klaus Mann's literary work. Szabó did not like the book at all, however he "felt that the story refers to something very serious, something that moved him". He is of the opinion that:

> "There is no need to make film adaptations from great works of literature because their messages are in words, thus, when you convert words into images, the result is a duplication. Therefore, I believe, for me, it's impossible to make a film adaptation from a novel such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*."

[43] Although a Hungarian–American director, Michael Curtiz (Mihály Kertész), also won an Oscar previously for directing *Casablanca.*

[44] Cunningham 2014. In January 2006, it became public that Szabó had been an agent of the III/III department, a former communist agency of interior intelligence. After the revolution in 1956, he was blackmailed and forced to cooperate, though later he was considered willingly cooperative. Allegedly, he wrote reports about fellow Hungarian directors, actors and actresses such as Miklós Jancsó, Mari Törőcsik, Károly Mécs. An acknowledged Hungarian journalist Zsolt Bayer said: "This is the time to re-watch Mephisto (1981). It has just become obvious that Szabó directed his own life in the movie, masterfully." Szabó has never denied the charges and considers his agent work heroic and needful, claiming he saved the life of a friend sentenced to death for his involvement in the revolution of 1956.

[45] The EICTV is also known as the School of Three Worlds, the School for Every World. It is based on the challenge of constantly adapting to new cultural and technological trends under the guiding principle of "learning by doing". As well as many workshops, the school offers a regular course of three years.

[46] For István Szabó's text, please see Fowler Calzada 1996, 98–109.

For Szabó:

> "Each film has its own world of colours. *Coronel Redl* is cold blue and grey, because they were the colours of the uniform of the Austro–Hungarian army. *Mephisto* is purple, red and gold, because that was the theatrical world of Central Europe: baroque, full of gold and velvet."

To the question about his opinion on the cinematography of Latin America and his recommendations to the future generations of filmmakers in these countries, Szabó recognised that he did not know much about Latin American cinema because "these films do not reach Europe, I know very few film, thus, I am not in the best position to give you any advice", he said. "I would suggest you leaving behind that mania of asking for advice. Just make your films, make mistakes and you will realize how to make movies, because my experiences are from Budapest, which may serve there but not here", concludes the Hungarian filmmaker. Indeed, these are some of the great dilemmas of the moving image created in small – and poor – countries: to try to imitate foreign experiences and the distribution (commercialisation) of their films. As a response to internationalisation, film co-production offers both benefits and drawbacks.

"Hagyjátok Robinsont!"

Many of the films co-produced in Cuba during the Soviet period (1961–1991) have seldom been studied to this day. For Soviet-bloc and Eastern European film criticism, these were experiments beyond their cultural borders of interests, and were therefore ignored. Film historians and critics misunderstood these films.[47] The film, *Leave Robinson Crusoe Alone* (*Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe,* 1989) directed by Péter Tímár, is a Hungarian–Cuban addition to the cinematic adventure tales that reconstruct the structural elements of Crusoe's island story. It was the first film that Cuba co-produced with Hungary, and the final one that it co-produced with a country of the Soviet-bloc. The film was released in Hungary on 4 January 1990, but it was never shown in Cuba.[48] Indeed, film co-production as the fusion of cultural diversity and national specificity is a difficult topic to deal with.

The synopsis of the film is as follows: Daniel Defoe (Dezső Garas) takes home a drunken sailor, Robinson Crusoe (played by István Mikó), from the pub and lets him tell his stories about an uninhabited island. Crusoe explains to Defoe that he was dropped from a ship as a punishment. After early encounters on an island with cannibals, he finds a beautiful girl whom he names Péntek (Friday, Milagros Morales). From the very beginning, Crusoe is attracted by the exoticism and eroticism of the young cannibal girl. After persistent efforts to approach her, little by little Crusoe manages to persuade her to become his lover; soon after, the couple have to deal with the arrival of a sales agent (Max Alvárez – for the Hungarian version of the film voiceover, Gábor Máté), a commune

[47] On this topic, please see Smith-Mesa 2011.

[48] Tímár's film is not included in a study on film adaptations of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe.* See Stam 2005, 63–98.

organiser (Raúl Pomares – voiceover Frigyes Hollósi) and a missionary (Miguel Navarro – voiceover Zsigmond Fülöp). Maximillian E. Novak, in his study *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions,* in which he queries whether the story of Robinson Crusoe was in fact based on the accounts of the sailor Alexander Selkirk, notes the following: "He (Selkirk) expressed a dislike for alcoholic drinks when they were offered him, and he seemed to have lost some of his ability to use language, a fact that supported those who believed that language was neither a natural nor a necessary human acquirement."[49] Although Tímár appears to defend this perception in principle, the Hungarian Crusoe is quite different from the Scottish Selkirk. The film character is a loquacious alcoholic.

The Cuban–Hungarian Crusoe Film

Tímár's film is less an inquiry into Defoe's inspirational source and more an indication of the particular film production values in the countries of the Soviet-bloc at that time, when traditionally negative characters such as drunks, prostitutes, dubious individuals and intellectuals were given a sympathetic representation. Tímár's other significant departure from Defoe's original story is the introduction of three new characters, the sales agent, the Utopian socialist philosopher and the missionary (those roles were played by Cuban actors). Tímár depicts them arriving on the island at different moments, at which point each makes his rhetorical speech in front of Robinson and his girlfriend. Crusoe does not question these new arrivals; instead he contents himself with the enjoyment of contemplating them, until he decides, with the help of Péntek, to put them in cages. Tímár makes powerful use of editing techniques to caricature these characters, speeding up short impulsive movements to accentuate how unconvincing they are, or slowing the characters down to show them wallowing in their own narcissistic attitudes. Certainly, Tímár's film is a great example of a glasnost film, the East European use of the joke in a cinematic context, of reflective laughter and also of the Cuban, to mock serious topics such as philosophy, religion and the economy, which were three major linchpins of Soviet ideology (Marxism–Leninism).[50]

Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe is a bizarre filmic experiment, a humorous depiction of a negative reality. Tímár's view of the false options offered by philosophy, economics and religion is notable for its satire, which highlighted the collapse of the Soviet ideal. As a film, it reflects the pessimism that was felt in relation to the Soviet reality of those days: centred on the absence of hope, feelings of frustration and ideological disbelief. Tímár has an interesting cinematic idea that does not entirely succeed as a film proposal in using the metaphor provided by Daniel Defoe's original story to observe the human condition and spirit and, in the particular case of this Hungarian film, to testify to the deep confusion of the time in the Eastern European state of mind. Tímár, like any good cinematographer of the glasnost period, from a country of the Soviet bloc, considered sexually explicit matters to be another vital aspect of contemporary filmmaking. His presentation of people of African extraction, of women and sex as pleasurable and vital aspects of life, also calls to mind

[49] Novak 2001, 539.

[50] For a relevant publication on this topic see Prieto Jiménez 1997. Prieto Jiménez is the current Minister of Culture in Cuba.

Freudian references to female sexuality. Indeed, *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* can also be read as a cinematic exploration of Freud's theory of female sexuality.

Colonialist Ideology in Postcolonial Times: Representation of 'the Other'

As Robert Stam has pointed out, "…despite Defoe's attempts to distance Friday from blackness and Africa, any number of filmic adaptations (not to mention illustrated versions) of Robinson Crusoe have intuitively turned Friday back into an African and black man, thus restoring precisely what Defoe himself had gone to such pains to repress".[51] In the Hungarian film version, Friday is turned into a black African female character, and thus the film-maker gets rid of the clearly homoerotic subtext of the original literary story, keeping intact the 'social contract' of enslavement and adding a sexually explicit storyline to the film narrative. The film-maker also keeps the ideological use of the cannibalism storyline in the novel to differentiate the white European from the native inhabitant of the island, giving the same colonialist representation of the 'other' as an inferior human being. In this sense, Tímár managed to maintain the colonialist ideology of Defoe's novel, a fact difficult to believe of a so-called 'socialist' cinematic discourse. Tímár's treatment of female sexuality brings to mind the English term 'dark continent', which was a nineteenth-century term for Africa, so used because it was largely unknown and therefore mysterious to Europeans. In *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe,* the spectator sees in close-up a group of half-naked cannibals in a ritual dance around a monumental female figure, lying on her back with her legs apart. The figure's colossal vagina, the most sensitive part of a woman's body, is exposed and penetrated by an artificial black giant erect penis. It is an unashamedly and transparently sexual scene.

The film-maker displays a certain understanding of naturalistic erotic art, but mainly seems to have taken this as a good excuse to present beautiful, naked bodies in explicitly sexual movements. The selection of Afro–Cuban people to play these roles suggests that the European colonial perception of 'the dark continent' of the nineteenth century had changed little in Tímár's twentieth-century film, confirming the persistent European male sexual fantasy about African bodies. However, is the Hungarian Crusoe nothing more than an erotic film? In *Erotic Cinema,* Douglas Keesey and Paul Duncan suggest that "erotic movies are a dream world where we live out the sinful, shameless and infinitely gratifying sexual fantasies that are off-limits in real life".[52] This kind of film focuses on a subject with either suggestive or sensual scenes, illustrating human nudity and lovemaking, though not of an extremely explicit nature. Erotic films appeal to the emotions of the viewer, with their emphasis on pleasure and human companionship. Bringing together the exotic and the erotic, *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* encourages us to explore this aspect of the aesthetic meaning of primitive art, by observing half-naked bodies in erotic ritual dances. However, if there is one general characteristic which can be applied to *Dejen en paz a Robinson Crusoe* as an erotic film, it is its comical quality. The comic aspect of eroticism is deftly

[51] Stam 2005, 72.

[52] Keesey–Duncan 2005, 9.

demonstrated in several sequences of the film. Ultimately, Tímár's Robinson Crusoe is a visual celebration of sexuality. The film music helped to confirm this quality; played by Cuban boy band 'Moncada', who were very popular at the time, it provided the film with a convincing sense of carnival and disorder.

The Advent of the Magyar Illusion testifies to a fact: for Cuba, Hungarian filmmakers, film theoreticians and films turn out to be truly immeasurable, forever suggesting and demanding new readings. This is precisely the meaning of Hungary to the Cuban cinematic discourse, the significance of the Magyar Illusion to the moving image of the island of Cuba, another evidence that Art inspires other arts and artists inspire other artists.[53]

By way of a conclusion, I would invoke Jorge Luis Borges's thought:

> "The word 'precursor' is indispensable to the vocabulary of criticism, but one must try to purify it from any connotation of polemic or rivalry. The fact is that each writer creates his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future."[54]

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[53] Further reading: Aitken 2012; Aguirre 1988; Amaya 2010; Balski 1992; Barnet Freixas 2002; Cunningham 2004; Chanan 1985; Douglas 1989; García Espinosa 1997, 71–82; Hernández Otero–Serpa 2000, 88–100; Illés 1993; ICRT 1990; Lapointe 1983; Lukács 1966b; Lukács 1967; Lukács 1970; San Juan 1973; Nemes 1986; Pérez Betancourt 1990; Portuges–Hames 2013; Portuondo 1979a; Portuondo 1979b; Tóth 2011, 47–52; Valdés Rodríguez 1966; Varona Domínguez–Rodríguez Pérez 2014.

[54] Borges 1999, 365.

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