Revolutionizing Modernities: Visualizing Utopia in 1960s Havana, Cuba

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Art History in the Graduate School of Duke University

2015
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

In 1967 a massive graphic print based on Cuban photographer Alberto Korda’s world famous image of Che Guevara was draped over the five-story Ministry of Interior Building in Havana’s Plaza de la Revolución. The print became the iconic image of the Cuban Revolution, reaching beyond its architectural surface into an international market of consumer-based goods. My dissertation is concerned with the ways in which Cuba’s architectural past was put to very different use by the Cuban Revolution, and how Cuban modernity was re-imagined in new architectural projects, in the governmentally supported visual arts, and in curatorial work which brought the fine and popular arts into Cuba’s new and re-inhabited spaces. Drawing from critical theory, formal analysis, and methodologies of art and architectural history along with visual studies, I explicate the ways in which art, design and architecture play a significant role in mediating a revolutionary mythology. I argue that national identity, or cubanidad, becomes reliant on such a mythology of revolution, defined by a Third World solidarity and Cuba’s position within a broader socialist world as much as it is by local elements.

My dissertation explores the history of the Cuban Revolution’s visual culture in six thematic chapters, looking at themes such as modernities, revolution, appropriation, utopia, propaganda, and postmodernity. Each chapter explores developments in the relationship between art and architecture, and situates 1960s Havana within Cuba’s broader history as a republic and a colony. Concerned with the role the visual and spatial played within a socialist setting, Cuba became a productive platform to engage in international debates regarding modernity at the height of the Cold War era. My dissertation examines how Cuba deliberately projected its modernity to the world via architecture and the arts, and how these visual and spatial manifestations speak to the
utopic character of modernity within Latin America and the Caribbean.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Roberto Segre, Ricardo Porro, and los ancestros.

May we reach beyond the polemics of the past, while we use the past as an exhuberant fountain to quench our imagination and construct prettier, more just worlds.
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They say Cuba is an exceptional place – many scholars have themselves described and critiqued Cuba’s exceptionalism, something espoused throughout the island and its diaspora. In the midst of my research and writing I desired to place my project outside of this self-proclaimed Cuban exceptionalism, to place the unusual story of Cuba within its broader regional and global contexts in order to highlight the construction of a revolutionary mythology. In many ways Cuban “exceptionalism” became a barrier throughout my research, as it translated to bureaucracy and politics around a host of archives. At the same time, my project was received with generosity by innumerable colleagues, institutions and friends. So while I attempt to deny a paradigm of Cuban exceptionalism, I recognize that the experience of doing research on revolutionary era Cuba is nothing but exceptional.

There are too many people to thank for the support I received throughout this project, and I apologize for the many I will forget. The Department of Art, Art History, and Visual Studies at Duke University has been immensely supportive throughout my tenure as a Duke student, and I am thankful for my many colleagues at Duke University. I’d like to particularly thank my dissertation committee, comprised of scholars who inspire me immensely. Lyneise Williams provides a spirit and energy essential to my dissertation, while also introducing me to new ways to analyze and think about the
archive. Laurent Dubois has been a close mentor, helping me think more broadly about Caribbean art and history, and allowing me to work on projects regarding Haiti and Miami during my tenure at the Haiti Lab of the Franklin Humanities Institute. Annabel Wharton introduced me to the practice of teaching, and is a scholar whose work and writing I aspire towards. Her demand to think about architecture critically and in a socially relative manner, as well as her passion for writing and theory, will follow me throughout my career.

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During the spring and fall semesters of 2010 I was hosted by the University of Miami’s School of Architecture as a Research Affiliate, thanks to the generosity of the IAC ACC Traveling Scholars program. During that year I received invaluable counsel, and am especially thankful to my host, former Dean Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and countless faculty and staff at the School of Architecture – Rafael Fornes, Jean-François Lejeune, Katherine Wheeler, Gilda Santana, and Alan Schulman, among others. I was also able to reconnect with Andrés Duany and Galina Tachieva during my time at University of Miami, my former bosses from when I interned at Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Company as an undergraduate. University of Miami proved an invaluable source for a scholar of Cuba, and I am indebted to the Cuban Heritage Collection (CHC) at the University of Miami Libraries, whose impressive collection and immaculate space were essential to my research. I am especially thankful to Lesbia Verona, Maria Estorino Dooling, Gladys Gomez-Rossie, and Rosa Monzón-Alvarez. I am excited to follow the developments of the CHC – I had the benefit of being present during their inaugural year of hosting fellows, and they have become a venerable institution for the scholarship of Cuba.

My research would not have been possible if it were not for the support and funding from the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, where I was the Andrew W. Mellon predoctoral fellow from 2011-2013. The fellowship permitted me to conduct research
abroad, the majority of the time spent in Cuba, followed by a year in residence at the Center. My time at CASVA was awe-inspiring and I cherish the community of scholars who came to feel like a family. I am especially thankful to the deans at CASVA – Elizabeth Cropper, Peter Lukehart, and Therese O’Malley – for their support and generosity during a wonderful time in residence. My fellow predoctoral fellows in residence - Susanna Berger, Meredith Gamer, Marius Bratsberg Hauknes, Jessica Horton, Nathaniel Jones, and my office mate and superb chef Yanfei Zhu – formed a close knit family in DC. This would not have been possible with our fellow research associates – Kathryn Barush, Joseph Hammond, Alexandra Hoare, Emily Pugh, and Guendalina Serafineli – who immediately welcomed us with the tradition of hosting dinners after ShopTalks, and who became part of our close circle. Staff members at CASVA, especially Helen Tangires, Bryant Johnson, Susan Cohn, and Elizabeth Kielpinski, also created a wonderfully welcoming environment.

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Most importantly, CASVA provided the opportunity to conduct extensive
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There are too many people I am neglecting to thank, some people who’ve impacted the way I think about our world, art, architecture, and the built environment, and others who brought simple enjoyment into my life. During my final year of writing I had the opportunity to participate in two academic workshops abroad, both defining the close of my dissertation. In the summer of 2014 I participated in the two week long mobile Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism, where we traveled great
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The last couple years have been arduous personally and professionally. All the people listed above have been beacons, helping my dissertation reach a point of maturation. I’d like to close with thanking my parents. While they often were at a loss with regards to understanding my professional endeavors, they were eternally
supportive and proud of my accomplishments. My dissertation is a product of past sacrifices, and I am eternally grateful for the family that brought me into this world and the families I have created in my travels across this globe.
Introduction
Heroic Modernities and their Aftermaths

On October 18, 1967, a massive banner featuring Ernesto Che Guevara was hung over the grid façade of the Ministry of the Interior, serving as a backdrop for Fidel’s grand eulogy at the Plaza de la Revolución (Figure 1.1). The famous 1960 Guerrillero Heroico photograph by Cuban photographer Alberto Korda had reached its most monumental platform to date. Within one year, Italian graphic designer Giangiacomo Feltrinelli’s graphic remake of the photographic print became a commonplace image worldwide, especially upon the May 1968 protests. As Ariana Hernández-Reguant highlights, the print became a “principle icon of the Cuban revolution and anticolonial movements worldwide”, reaching beyond its architectural surface into a network of global commodities. Recreated on everything from French cigarette cartons, urban graffiti across the globe, to t-shirts at tourist stands throughout Cuba, the Guerrillero Heroico has become one of the most iconic images of the 20th century. Its application onto the urban space of Havana’s Plaza de la Revolución in October 1967 – both through its placement on a building and by individuals carrying copies of the image with them at the eulogy – is indicative of the role of media and the graphic arts in 1960s Cuba. It

1 “Copywriting Che: Art and Authorship under Cuban Late Socialism”, 1.
presents a graphic revolution, one that highlighted both the role of patriarchal heroism in the construction of Cuban nationalism and its association with the idealization of Cuba as a quintessential model for global decolonization.

While the legacy of Che’s *Guerrillero Heroico* image has been subsumed into a global market of consumer goods, its original draping over the Ministry of the Interior was permanently emblazoned onto the building’s plaza facing façade in 1995 through a bronze wire sculpture. Immediately across from the late Republican era marble monument dedicated to José Martí, the two icons orient the 1950s-built political center of the city today. They are signs of Cuban modernity – presenting the interface of the visual arts and architecture as a mediatic force. This dissertation examines the legacy of revolutionary modernities in Cuba through an exploration of urban visual culture in Havana. The placement of such figureheads, whether on architectural surfaces or as a sculptural monument, recalls the symbolic value of a modernism figured through the heroic patron – to a utopia identified with the ideas and actions of great men past and present, whose apparitions stand defiantly in public and private spaces throughout the island of Cuba. As Henri Lefebvre writes, “Under the cover of State power, we find the dictatorship of things and signs, in other words, money, capital, and merchandise…”

In the figureheads of Martí and Guevara, however, this material and symbolic

\[2 \text{ Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment, 30.}\]
“dictatorship” points less to capital and more to structures that legitimize power through the creation of a mythical modernity.

My dissertation is about how the mythology of (the) revolution(ary) is created in Cuba’s varied cultural manifestations – ranging from the visual to the spatial – leading to, amid and following the political revolution of 1959. I aim to understand how these manifestations fix our understanding of revolution and the revolutionary – and how mythology contributes to histories of the revolution. In his book *Caribbean Discourse*, Martinican theorist and writer Edouard Glissant writes: “myth anticipates history as much as it inevitably repeats the accidents that it has glorified; that means it is in turn a producer of history.” Drawing from the model of Glissant, my dissertation looks at artistic and architectural practice as contributing to a mythology of the revolutionary, and hence to the history of the Cuban Revolution. I explore the ways mythology may anticipate history through its earlier manifestations, and how such mythologizing manifestations become present in the new art, design and architecture following the 1959 revolution.

This interrogation of revolution and history as mythology in no way attempts to delegitimize the Cuban Revolution’s varied accomplishments nor admonish its criticisms, but rather seeks to understand the visual and spatial logic of a nationalist, revolutionary identity. The peculiar contexts of the Cuban Revolution, as a televised

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3 *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, 71.
event on a global stage at the height of the Cold War, gave the historical moment a mythological status unmatched in a decolonizing world. Cuba today remains an arbiter of socialist revolution and anti-imperialism. This reputation is indicative of efforts made by the state, in its primary years, to make Cuba a bastion of revolution for the “Third World”. My dissertation traces a narrative where notions of revolution and the revolutionary reach beyond the realm of myth, to inform propaganda and become an operative term within the ideological apparatuses of the state. I argue that the mythology of the revolution contributed in forming a nationalist identity (“cubanidad”) that became more defined by Cuba’s participation in a Third World solidarity and the broader socialist world than by local elements. Such a mythology results in a branding of the nation as a bellwether of decolonial resistance amid growing totalinarianism, resulting in modernities redefined by a global positioning that made Cuba’s case exceptional. This is most vividly seen in the dynamic relation between art, technology and architecture throughout the 1960s.

In her book *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971*, Lillian Guerra highlights the means by which power consolidated over the long 60s, particularly through mass social gatherings and media. Her groundbreaking work looks at the Cuban revolution and forms of resistance within it, and calls for a closer study of visuality in the era. Guerra explores “the Revolution as a dynamic of
redemption and resistance that involved citizens as much as the state". Pivoting her work in between narratives of betrayal on the side of exile and one of eschatological redemption in the figure of Fidelismo on the Cuban side, she locates her narrative in between such dominant discourses – investigating how resistance was expressed counter to the dichotomy between the communist, authoritarian state and its exilic, reactionary outside. Hence, she explores notions of resistance in the formation of a revolutionary ideology, both through the personal narratives she shares as well as in the official discourse of the Cuban Revolution.

A revolution of redemption suggests, perhaps, the creation of martyrs and saints at the realm of the modern political state, of a symbolic patriarchal figuration akin to the mythologizing role ascribed to the founding fathers of the United States. Such sentiments is powerfully expressed in an iconic poster by Cuban artist Alfredo Rostgaard, the 1969 mass produced offset color lithograph Christ Guerrilla (Figure 1.2). Here, the image of the guerrilla is transposed onto the image of Christ, despite the proclaimed atheism of the new Cuban state. Created in conjunction with the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), Christ here represents the purity of the revolution, the notion of morality highlighted in Che’s writing on the “new man”, and the proselytizing impetus of revolution and guerrilla warfare. It recalls another poster by Rostgaard, an ad for

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Santiago Alvarez’s 1967 film ¡Hasta la victoria siempre!, a documentary film compiling many of Che’s speeches (Figure 1.3). The simple poster repeats the world famous Korda-based image of Che in tones of blue and red, recalling the Cuban flag. A larger semblance of Che lies in the lower center, above the title of the film and in front of the names of many Latin American and Caribbean nations. The empowering image of Che transposed itself onto many surfaces, in a repetitious and ubiquitous manner. The photographer Alberto Korda was even present at Fidel’s eulogy to Che to record, in a grid-based storyboard like format, the powerful speech by Fidel in front of his most famous photographic image (Figure 1.4). The image of the revolutionary hero is part of a broader history of visualizing the revolution and imagining its broader impact.

My project focuses on visual and spatial analyses alongside the constructions of power described by Guerra, and expands upon such constructions through close readings of the visual and material worlds of the 1959 Cuban revolution and its aftermath. By looking at visual, cultural and spatial manifestations of revolution as myth-making processes, I will highlight how the visual culture of the Revolution has remained relevant across the globe today – something highlighted by the ubiquity of the Korda-based image of Che. That is, I place the specter of art and architecture at the center of the discourse regarding power and revolution, both within Cuba and globally.

While many histories have been written about the Cuban revolution at large, incisive visual and spatial analyses of the long 1960s in Havana, Cuba are largely lacking
in the literature. Roberto Segre’s 1970 Diez Años de Arquitectura en Cuba Revolucionaria remains the most exhaustive text regarding architecture of 1960s Cuba. While a few scholars have taken up the same topic in short essays and books – most notably Havana-based Eduardo Luis Rodríguez and architect Mario Coyula – there remains no comprehensive study on the relationship between modern architecture, politics and the visual arts during this era. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts 2008 exhibition catalogue Cuba: Art and History from 1868 to Today provides a dynamic glimpse of 1960s Cuban art within the broader context of modernism on the island, while the 2004 exhibition Mirar a los Sesentas (“Looking at the 1960s”), hosted by Havana’s Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, provides a more thematic look at the arts and culture. In his book Art and Revolution in Latin America: 1910-1990, David Craven dedicates a chapter to fine and popular arts after the Revolution, theorizing Cuba’s contribution to contemporary notions of modernity and revolution in Latin America. Looking at poster art, pop art, and other trends into the 1990s, Craven recalls art critic Juan Acha’s observation that “Cuba spawned a whole new period of experimentalism in the arts without precedent in the Americas”.

His detailed analysis allows the reader to make connections between the earlier Mexican Revolution (1910) and its aftermath, as well as the later Nicaraguan revolution; to understand the way the visual arts present political ambitions in the Latin

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David Craven cites Juan Acha’s Las culturas estéticas de América Latina, 161-162, in Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990, 75, 199.
American context. I build upon his observations and that of others, situating Cuban visual and graphic arts within their spatial contexts while also considering the manner in which such images were projected and disseminated towards a larger global audience.

In exploring phenomena relating the visual with the spatial, I also draw upon previous studies that examine the relationship between art and architecture in Cuban modernity. Paul Niell’s recent work on late Spanish colonial Havana highlights the ways architecture, public art and sculpture contribute to debates regarding Cuban identity, presenting modernities configured around racial ideals and the politics of the Bourbon Reforms of the previous century. Work by Alonso Alejandro on art deco and modern art, as well as that of Eduardo Luis Rodríguez more broadly on 20th century architecture, show the ways the plastic arts were invoked in Cuban architecture, from its integration into architecture to the influence of the visual arts on architectural form. In many ways the National Arts Schools of 1961-1965 show the means by which the plastic arts were utilized to rethink the architectonic – to use spatial form in an expressive manner akin to painting.

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* As Niell writes: “After French Bourbon monarchy took the Spanish throne in 1700, royal officials began to implement a series of reform measures... [that] no only involved bureaucratic restructuring, but also called for transformations in the material sphere of Spain and its American colonies utilizing ideas of aesthetic rationalism being generated in France, the family seat of the Bourbon dynasty”. The legacy of these reforms would reach beyond Cuba’s colonial period, as rationalism of form related to visual campaigns expressing national identity, something explored more broadly in Niell’s essays on public art. “Classical Architecture and the Cultural Politics of Cemetery Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century Havana, Cuba”, 60.
The documentary *Unfinished Spaces* highlights the epic narrative of the rise and demise of the National Arts Schools, as an enigmatic example of the arts infusing architecture through form, rhythm, and expression. The film contributes to a Cold War era narrative by retracing the divide placed between the National Arts Schools and the production of Cuban architecture largely, referring to the latter as that of the “Soviet style”. As Cuban architect Belmont Freeman critiques, the directors “felt it necessary to cast shadow on the activities and output of other Cuban architects working in this heady period”. While an anomaly, the National Arts Schools is one of a myriad of examples of plastic integration that leads into the 1970s, and highlights the unusual and evocative ways in which the visual arts impact modern architecture. The many examples highlighted in this dissertation show how the built form and urban environment correspond to developments in art and help shape and express Cuban identity, or cubanidad.

It is noteworthy that Havana became a powerhouse in the global realm of culture following the 1959 revolution, as the state embodied the arts and culture in its broad socialist endeavors and agrarian reforms. In his 1961 speech *Words to the Intellectuals*, Fidel Castro highlighted the need for the artist to put the revolutionary first, while also

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7 *Unfinished Spaces*, Directed by Alysa Nahmias and Benjamin Murray (2011; PBS Direct, 2013), DVD.
outlining the government’s aims to support and broaden the arts. While the terms of artistic freedom molded over the decade – something seen in Castro’s later speeches as well as in punitive state actions over the following decade – the government’s goals of broadening access to arts and cultural institutions and education throughout the island is undeniable. Following Sujatha Fernandes’s model, this project recognizes that the state’s patronage and support of the arts exists beyond the dictates of mere politics, recalling the manner in which images can be both subversive and doctored through state institutions. The imaginary of the revolutionary reaches beyond its ideologization, impacting its diverse audiences in a multitude of manners.

The Cuban revolution came to be understood as a global event, as a filmed and televised Revolution whose transmissions reached a global audience, and as an ongoing symbol of anti-imperialism. In the 1962 edition of his book on the Haitian Revolution, _The Black Jacobins_, Trinidadian writer C. L. R. James updated the text with an appendix addendum titled “From Toussaint L’Ouverture to Fidel Castro”, attaching the legacy of

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9 Regarding the artist: “The revolutionary puts something above even his aim creative spirit. He puts the Revolution above everything else, and the most revolutionary artist will be that one who is prepared to sacrifice even his own artistic vocation for the Revolution”. Later in the speech Fidel discusses the notion of conceiving spaces for artists and the state’s endeavors in supporting various institutions. Trans. by Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC), Accessed August 10, 2014, http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610630.html.

10 Fernandes broaches the topic of doing research on Cuban culture today, and looking at the arts in relation to state patronage, stating: “But the emphasis on state and civil society as bounded and often opposed entities limits their analytical scope in contexts such as Cuba, where governance is not confined to the formal political apparatus and critical activity is often developed within or in collaboration with official institutions and actors”. This does not deter critical readings of works (film, performances, public art, etc.) but rather contributes to understanding its logic, and understanding its potential critique of state forms. _Cuba Represent!: Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Culture_, 6.
Haiti’s turn of the 19th century revolution to that of the then recent Cuban Revolution.\textsuperscript{11} Referring to a long-durée history of the modern West Indies categorized into broad epochs, the Cuban revolution presented a resistance to U.S. imperialism, a new potential at the start of the 1960s. This sentiment is also evident in Jean-Paul Sartre’s series of essays based on his 1960s trip to Cuba, republished as a book in Spanish in 1961 and in English the following year. Personally befriend Che and Fidel, his private tour of the island resulted in an idealized vision in narrative form, as Sarte expressed the promise of revolution for a new society. For major intellectuals like Sartre and James, among so many others, the start of the Cuban Revolution presented a new utopia, over which new political orders could be conceived. This dissertation looks at how such utopic manifestations became actualized in the realm of art and architecture.

The iconic status of the 1959 Cuban Revolution has also made it a subject of historical fodder and conjecture. While there are too many histories to highlight, two books have provided a breadth and depth regarding my understanding of the Cuban revolution. Louis Perez’s 1988 tome \textit{Cuba: Reform and Revolution} looks at modern Cuban history very broadly, exploring the manner in which reform and revolution were central to understanding Cuban modern history back to the colonial era. Alongside Perez’s vast body of work regarding Cuban history, it provides a broader platform to consider the role of reform and revolution across Cuban history, something I attempt in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{The Black Jacobins}, 391.
Another recent and important work on the history of the revolution is Julia Swag’s *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground*. Swag’s profound work based on state archives accounts for the relations between those in guerrilla warfare and the *llanos*, or the Cuban revolution’s urban front. Her book challenges orthodox narratives of the Cuban revolution, be they from Miami or Havana, complicating the idealized mythology of guerrilla takeover with the urban happenings of the 1950s. It reminds the reader of geographic peculiarities and the role of Havana in the revolutionary process.

The example of the image of Che Guevara being draped over the Ministry of the Interior in 1967, prior to reaching its global iconic status, is emblematic of a concern throughout this dissertation regarding the relationship of the visual to the spatial. My dissertation approaches a broad set of questions that broach the relationship between art, architecture and urbanism: What does urban and spatial form tell us about modernism in Cuba, and how do such forms articulate their broader economic, political, and socio-cultural context? How do representations of place and space in Cuban vanguardist art and broader visual culture incorporate or dialogue with such spatial forms? Lastly, what does the relationship between art and architecture tell us about Cuban modernities, and how may this contribute to a “revolutionary” impulse or aesthetic? That is, how can we trace the mythologizing footprint of the revolutionary, and to what means can our understanding and mining of it help us rethink the
revolutionary imaginary more broadly, beyond Cuba, its history, and the increasingly
dogmatic ideologies of the state?

The Revolution Will Be Televised

Throughout its history Havana seemed far removed from the political
revolutions taking birth in the Cuban countryside. As a significant port city, Havana
was defined by conquest and containment, and influenced as much by outside actors as
locals. The Ten Years War began in 1868 with the “Grito de Yara” (“Cry of Yara”), Yara
being a city in the island’s Oriente, or far east. It started the decade-long Ten Years’
War, proclaiming the interests of the Cuban people for sovereignty over the forces of
empire. Cuba’s War for Independence (1895-1898) and the 1959 Revolution followed
suit, beginning out east and attempting to penetrate the distant capital. The 1959 Cuban
Revolution began on July 26th, 1953, when a group of rebels attacked the Moncada
Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. While many of these rebels were later imprisoned by
then president Fulgencio Batista – Fidel Castro included – they were later freed in 1955
and placed in exile. Fidel and his brother Raúl Castro joined ranks with Che Guevara in
Mexico City, where they conspired about revolution. In December 1956 they traveled on
the yacht Granma from Mexico, landing in the Sierra Maestra mountain range in Eastern
Cuba with the intentions of starting an uprising and eventually penetrating the capital
further west.
The humble origins of the Cuban Revolution, starting with a band of 82 guerrilla warfarers hiding out in the mountainous jungle, directly contributes to the revolution’s mythology. Branding themselves as the 26th of July movement and armored in green fatigues and a black and red flag, the movement gained momentum as it used forms of media to expand. By focusing on Havana as a creative center, I explore how the revolution was represented in the mediatic realm, where the history of the revolution was crafted following its triumph. This sometimes belies the historical nuances of the revolution, where Havana played a prominent role. As Julia Sweig notes, the revolution existed on many fronts, particularly with the llanos, or urban underground of Havana, who were strategizing means of political takeover at the height of the Batista regime. Collaborating with other resistance movements, the llanos became a significant force in delegitimizing the Batista regime both through protest and acts of violence, each showcasing the repressive reactions of the militarized state. By February 1958, acts of violence used to desecrate the image of the state became so frequent that insiders referred to it as the “golden age” of the llano.12 The llanos were overshadowed by the guerrillas, as the 26th of July Movement proceeded west from the Sierra Maestra mountain range.

News of the 26th of July Movement as a revolutionary force broke out in international press through a series New York Times articles published briefly after

reporter Herbert Matthews February 1957 investigative trip to the Sierra Maestra. In his article Matthews highlights the combination of secrecy on part of the Revolutionary army regarding their whereabouts alongside censorship from the Batista regime. The first of the three articles was featured on the front page of the *New York Times* with an iconic image of Fidel Castro looking contemplatively towards the viewer with a gun in hand, beneath the shade of the tropics (Figure 1.5). Beneath the photograph is a signature by Fidel Castro Ruiz, notifying his location in the Sierra Maestra and the date, February 17th, 1957. Matthews emphasizes the significance of the interview given that no other writer had yet to see Castro. “This account, among other things,” writes Matthews, “will break the tightest censorship in the history of the Cuban republic”.\(^\text{13}\)

Media began to play a dominant role towards the closing years of Fulgencio Batista’s reign, as it provided a means for the incoming guerrilla army to present itself as a rising force throughout Cuba and internationally, and later as a means to fixate a historical, teleological narrative regarding the Revolution. Attempts by the Batista regime to censor the media at large created a sense of tension across the island, especially with regards to newsprint. Attempts to control the media were implemented at the start of 1957 given growing urban protest and political tensions, with the *New York Times* reporting: “Under this order the police have cut out or blacked out all articles in

foreign publications arriving here that referred to revolutionary or terroristic activities in Cuba.”¹⁴ Among the articles prohibited, unsurprisingly, was the Herbert Matthews article on Fidel Castro, which helped provide the future leader international notoriety.

Censorship of media by the Batista regime had become more stringent after the passing of the Law of Public Order in August 1953, shortly following the failed Moncada barracks attacks and the subsequent media coverage of the event. Photographs of the violent response from the Batista regime created a desire to control the media more effectively, resulting in up to two years of imprisonment to those disseminating “information contrary to…. the stability of the Powers of the State”.¹⁵ While the government attempted to control the media both through censorship and through subsidizing various media outlets, various publications were able to publish material specifically critical of the Batista regime.¹⁶ Journals such as Bohemia and Diario de la Marina became particularly vocal regarding repression during Batista’s second reign, Bohemia famously covering urban insurgency and features on protestors martyred by the Batista regime. As Lillian Guerra notes: “Most critical, however, were the shockingly graphic images of mutilated, brutalized bodies and mass graves with which Bohemia illuminated the myth extent of batistiano terror. The experience of seeing each page after

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¹⁶ Ibid., 94.
page of horrors clearly radicalized many readers and altered their point of view".\textsuperscript{17}

Images of torture and repression of members of the llanos – or urban networks of the 26\textsuperscript{th} of July movement – and other urban insurgency movements helped provide legitimacy of the guerrilla movement in the east, who themselves were using media to craft their own image. The opening spread of photos from \textit{Bohemia’s} inaugural edition following the Revolution highlights such a concern, with photographs recalling destruction at the hands of the Batista regime. Photography became both a means to depict the grotesque, violent realities of Batista-era Cuba and the heroic nature of those struggling against it – it became a legitimizing, communicative means for the revolutionary.

Aware of the restraints of media coverage within the island, the 26\textsuperscript{th} of July Movement led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara reached out to international media to gain legitimacy and define themselves outside of the more known resistance movements located within the capital. In February of 1958 Carlos Franqui, an exile located in Miami, returned to Cuba to take charge of public information, running both the organization’s clandestine \textit{Revolución} newspaper and the famed \textit{Radio Rebelde}, two strongholds of the Revolution following its victory. In April 1958 Universal-International news released the first known video footage of the Revolution, documenting the rebels based in the Sierra Maestra prior to a westward campaign in an attempt to claim six provinces throughout Cuba. In the film rebels are shown marching through the jungle,

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Visions of Power in Cuba}, 42.
communing over meals, and using print and radio technology to carry their front. These scenes became commonplace in Havana following the triumph of the revolution – in newsreels, documentary film and other televisual presentations.

Media remained key for presenting the triumph of the Revolution, with the work of photographers such as Alberto Korda, Roberto Salas and Raúl Corrales to prominence. These photographers documented the new leadership, traveling abroad and across the island to expertise to capture a new revolutionary aesthetic, one that reflected the austerity of guerrilla warfare through black and white photography. In one photograph by Alberto Korda of January 24th, 1959, Fidel Castro stands at the podium of the auditorium of Carlos Villanueva’s Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas (see Chapter 4), standing in military fatigues amidst a packed audience (Figure 1.6). Another image by Roberto Salas shows Fidel lighting a cigar and providing a chiaroscuro-like effect as he crouches near Che Guevara (Figure 1.7). The grisly, largely unedited photographs highlighting the repression of the Batista era in diversified media outlets became replaced with romantic and triumphant images of revolutionary heroism. Perhaps no photograph better captures this than Raúl Corrales’ 1960 photograph Caballería, showing men in horseback carrying Cuban flags and recalling the triumph of the Revolution (Figure 1.8). The image seems timeless, as if it could reckon back to previous independence wars of the 19th century. As discussed in chapters four and five, photographic media and print culture begin to define the Revolution, providing an
aesthetic counter to the official documentation of events such as the 1958 opening of the Habana Hilton. At the same time they utilize a refined aesthetic, both from the tradition of arts photography and commercial photography, which comes to serve a revolutionary means.

Another important medium in 1950s Cuba was the television, which became a regular fixture in middle and upper income homes throughout the island. By 1953 Cuba had five broadcast channels, developing what was the most advanced system throughout Latin America, with many islanders seeing the medium on par with that of the United States. Television also became a medium where producers and regulators attempted to define a notion of cubanidad within the complicated terrain of gender and racial expression. Yeidy Riveros writes: “In a period of corruption, illegal activites, murders, political uncertainty, and hedonism, television became a somewhat regulated space where some members of the Cuban ‘elite’ could stage another (albeit also problematic) vision of themselves and their nation”. Concerns regarding cubanidad within private broadcasts were altered with the new government, which attempted to orient televisual media towards a more revolutionary means. As Lillian Guerra notes: “With over 900,000 radios and 365,000 television sets (an average of one radio per six inhabitants and one TV for every twenty-five), Cubans owned more TVs per capita than

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19 Ibid., 21.
any other country except the United States as well as a comparable number of radios”.\textsuperscript{20} Guerra highlights the importance of media at the start of the Revolution, when televisions where confiscated from “batistianos” and distributed to small country towns for the viewing of various Castro speeches.\textsuperscript{21}

The ability to utilize media towards revolutionary struggle marks the Cuban uprising as unique, arguably the first revolution televised in broadcast. The new government took advantage of the existing infrastructure and expanded upon it. One prominent example involves the appropriation of another significant Batista era landmark, the 1957 Palacio de Deportes by co-architect of the Habana Hilton, Lín Arroyo (Figure 1.9). The blue and white building with semispherical oculi appears like a saucer-shaped ocean vessel hovering above its urban environ. Used for sporting and national events such as the racing events publicized in the March 1958 issue of \textit{LIFE Magazine} (described above), the large auditorium located within the vicinity of the Plaza Cívica (1951-1955) became the locale for the much publicized and televised trials of Batista military and police officers. The tribunals were a media spectacle that emphasized the crimes of the Batista regime and marked the role of television in allowing the public to take place in the trials that led to the execution and imprisonment of hundreds Batista police men and military officers.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 46.
Looking at art and architecture as part of the mediatic realm – as forms of communication and engagement – this dissertation explores broader implications of the visual culture of 1960s Havana. Under constant threat of coups and attacks by U.S.-backed exiles, the frequent images of the revolutionary leaders and militaristic might reveal a culture of paranoia along with heroism, one where the city needed to be protected from foes. Images of bombings by terrorists, of defense tanks lined up along the city’s Malecón sea wall, and of the triumph of the revolution appeared in national media regularly. As Louis Pérez writes: “Making full use of an extensive radio and television system, addressing mass rallies often numbering in the hundreds of thousands of people, Fidel Castro was a ubiquitous presence through the early months of 1959.” Television allowed the fiery, lengthy speeches of Castro to come to life for the Cuban public in a manner that radio did not allow. Further, it brought the scenes of the triumph of the Revolution – the public cheering the leaders on, the bearded Revolutionaries taking over the city’s most privileged spaces – into the homes of an international audience. That is, new visual and audio media impacted the manner in which the revolution itself was understood, as media provided a technology for proclaiming its ideals and initiatives.

Visual culture provides a significant means for representing the revolution in practice. The sharp tones of red and black that signified the July 26th Movement is

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22 *Cuba: Between Reform & Revolution*, 315.
particularly important, as the flag provided a means to immediately recognize the movement as the guerrilla warfare progressed west towards the capital. The image of the barbudo, a bearded revolutionary in olive green camouflage, also came into prominence in the following decade. While creating a new aesthetic and using media as a means to promote the movement, artists and designers working within the Cuban Revolution also shared much of the nationalist iconography of the Batista regime, from the Cuban flag to images of national hero and poet José Martí.

**Refiguring Modernities**

Raúl Martínez’s 1966 painting *15 repeticiones de Martí* depicts 15 bust portraits of national hero Jose Martí, each a slight variation of the other and placed in a three by five portraits grid (Figure 1.10). Recalling the pop art of Andy Warhol, the configuration resembles a filmstrip, contact sheet, or even a grid of television screens, taking the late 19th century poet and Cuban revolutionary to a popular and contemporary realm of visual media. In this painting the rationalist form of the grid meets a tropical sensuality, with the repeating face of Martí emphasizing the way his heroic representation is reconfigured into an expressive regime of control and order. The sullen yet tropical and psychedelic color tones paint a thoughtful semblance of the poet, his mustache dominating the composition as a repeating formal element. The painting seems subversive in its recalling of the mediatic frame, while at the same time exclaiming the
revolutionary ethos that Martínez’s work has come to embody. It also recalls the urban manner of the grid, an ever present ordering mechanism in the architectural modernities of 1960s Havana, framing the various monumental and everyday expressions of revolutionary heroism, many times figured in the form of the male leader.

My exploration of modernities and urban form in Cuba focuses on the intricate relationship between the visual and spatial that can be traced back to early colonial Havana. Various scholars such as Antoni Kapcia, Joseph L. Scarpaci, Roberto Segre, Mario Coyula and Paul Niell have traced the history of Havana’s built environment from the colonial era to the contemporary, echoing Walter Mignolo’s insistence on the direct relationship between coloniality and modernity. In his book *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*, Mignolo draws upon Edouard Glissant’s notion of globalization and creolization to help theorize modernity in the Americas – the relation between cultural practices and hegemonic processes.

Mignolo writes:

Glissant introduced a distinction between “mondialité” (globality) and “mondialisation” (globalization). In my view, globalization is the dimension of global designs while globality is articulated in local histories. Globality, on the other hand, reveals local histories in their complexity: the perspective of the ‘nomad’ or ‘minor designs’ (Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 1996, 361), as well as the emerging perspective of ‘an other thinking’ or the epistemological Creolization, as articulated from the exterior of the universal history of the modern world system (Khatibi, Glissant)."
In general, Mignolo suggests that processes of “creolization” provide an epistemology that accounts for the ways in which globalization is localized. Beyond the realm of knowledge production, “global design” helps produce the built environment, with the meaning of these spaces – their modernity and globality – reflected both in the uses of these spaces and how they are represented by the local populace. In this dissertation I explore how notions of the “global” and “lo cubano” are expressed in Havana’s visual culture through an exploration of representations of the city and exhibitions of vanguardist art. Martínez’s grid paintings of revolutionary heroes recall the global design of the grid and its mediatic implementation in his contemporary era, and the means by which it comes to visually present its local (national) culture.

I draw from various theories that complicate the dichotomous reading of the modern in contrast to that which is traditional, looking at the inherent relationships between the global and the local, the colonial to the modern, and vanguardist engagements with popular culture. By combining theories of architectural and urban modernism alongside theories of cultural production across the Americas, this chapter emphasizes Mary Louise Pratt’s discussion of alternative or “peripheral” modernities, where modernities are “described in relations of contradiction, complementarity, and differentiation, with respect to those of the center”.24 The Cuban Revolution, with its ideals and contradictions, becomes a means for different deployments of modernity,

24 “Modernity and Periphery”, 35.
especially as Cuba breaks its economic and political ties with the U.S. at the height of the Cold War. The processes of globalization in Cuba go beyond the economic, with the use of visual media putting “into play... a deep reorganization among peoples, cultures and countries”.25

In dealing with urban space and visual culture, my thesis is concerned with how projections of modernity – in both a material and spatial sense – are embedded in a broader social and cultural panorama, something made evident in the complicated urban and architectural tapestry of Havana. An exploration of modernities in the plural sense is formulated around a set of key themes broaching the representation of power in 1960s Havana, including concepts such as cubanidad and nationalism, revolution and vanguardia, mass media and propaganda, utopia and appropriation. This dissertation creates a theoretical basis for a broad exploration of modernities in 1960s Cuba, looking also at the historical precedent set during the colonial era and the vision of modernity’s radical transformation in the late Republican Era (1933-58). Specifically, I look at the essential relationship between vanguardia and cubanidad in constructing a myriad of modernities, with both being key proponents of the official discourse from the Republican era (1902-1958) into the 1960s.

Modernity as a concept differs from its sibling terms modernism and modern in that it implies less of a movement (as in the case of modernism) than a sense of being modern – a means to describe a sense of being in the wake of modernization and cosmopolitanism. Here I refer specifically to the work of Arjun Appurrai, who defines modernity as having two key features: media and migration. While Appurrai focuses broadly on the role of migration and media since the dawn of the Enlightenment era, both media and migration are markedly present as early as the 16th century, when the Caribbean served as a modern crossroads between Europe and the Americas. While the invention of the printing press in the mid-15th century contributes to a notion of early modernity within art history, many working on Latin America and the Caribbean have similarly defined modernity’s roots (or routes) at the start of colonial conquest. By the mid-16th century the Americas became a site of massive migration and displacement, as well as a new means of trading information. While objects from the “New World” transformed European conceptions of the larger world, the dissemination of maps and accounts of sites such as Tenochtitlan in modern day Mexico permitted new global imaginaries.

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27 Edward Sullivan highlights the role fine and rare objects imported from the “New World” played in expanding the global imaginary of Europe, and while their possession by a European elite would limit the broader public’s access to fine objects from the New Wold, their presence had larger implications. As Sullivan writes, “It was thus the representation of them in works of art, as well as in other forms of visual transmission such as illustrated travel diaries, that account for the widest dissemination of their appearance”. The Language of Objects in the Art of the Americas, 4.

Scholars Barbara Mundy and Federico Navarrete each provide significant accounts regarding the mapping
Citing the Ibero-American city as a site of conquest and then colonization, Ángel Rama writes, “the cities created by unbridled sixteenth-century conquest aspired to become focal points of ongoing colonialization”. Rama defines the imperial cities of Latin America as having both a material and symbolic life, the latter contributing to an urban imaginary with utopian, rationalist notions of civilizing the populace. The colonial city was comprised of lettrados – notaries, scribes and lawyers who provided privileged textual accounts of the city for the interest of the Spanish crown – that contributed to the colonial city’s formal and physical qualities, recording the means or norms in which the city was to be inhabited using highly symbolic language. This is seen in the formation of the five squares in Havana, each serving a significant administrative or cultural role. While the symbolic nature of such squares is seen in their specifically programmed social and cultural role, they were enlivened by the politics of maritime trade and social dynamics of slavery that helped define colonial era Cuba. The notion of a letrado class remains relevant across Cuban modern history, as the new revolution was be led by an educated, largely white elite, with Fidel receiving his
formal educational training in law at the University of Havana and Che being a medical doctor.

An “ideology of mestizaje” is also pervasive within Cuban modernities at a symbolic level, where selective invocations of cultural and racial hybridity contribute towards a myth of national unity or identity. As Luis Duno-Gottberg explicates: “These identities are articulated symbolically by the letrado sector: writers, poets or organic intellectuals who imagine and prescribe an ideal of lo cubano”. Duno-Gottberg argues that an ideology of mestizaje extends into the Revolutionary era, necessitating an exploration of its antecedents in order to understand how mestizaje and cubanidad formulated at the symbolic, visual level following the 1959 revolution. The employment of mythologizing symbols (as reflective of an “ideology of mestizaje”) is not merely produced by a lettered class, but is experienced, transformed and even reproduced by diverse populations within broader society. This dissertation is focused on semblances of power, looking both at agents (artists, designers, architects, and patrons in the form of state actors) and the symbolic value of visual culture in 1960s Havana, rather than at the ways the visual and spatial are used and interpreted beyond the lettered class. Such an analysis focuses on how visual and spatial formations project the ideals of national modernity at a global scale, rather than how these ideals are redefined by local

29 “Dichas identidades se articulan simbólicamente en el sector letrado: escritores, poetas o intelectuales orgánicos que imaginan y prescriben un ideal de lo cubano”. Translated by author. Solventando las diferencias: La ideología del mestizaje en Cuba, 16.
populations, whom inhabit and recreate spaces and symbols of power. The latter is expertly highlighted in Paul Niell’s research regarding late colonial Havana and the 1828 Templete, a notable architectural monument whose modernist appeal became transformed for varied populations, be they peninsulars (representatives from Spain), white creoles, or local enslaved and free blacks. While racial discrimination was outlawed amid a socialist ethos of equality in the 1960s, it would be foolish not to consider how a diversity of Cubans interacted with Havana’s new, revolutionary visual culture at varied levels, from their participation to their reception of varied works.

In her exploration of the literary and photographic modernism in Latin America, Esther Gabara rejects the dominance of mestizaje in Latin American theories of modernity. Instead she invokes the use of ethos, which implies a communal and embodied understanding of place, and can be used for critiques of race and gender within modernist discourse. Further, Gabara writes: “The ethos of modernism includes both an ethnographic popular, which in Spanish is termed ‘cultural popular,’ and the commercialized mass media that emerged during these decades, or ‘cultura de

30 The modernism of the neoclassical structure is reverberated in the history paintings it contains, dutifully analyzed by Niell, who concludes his article: “El Templete was not simply a case of imperial expression or stylistic rupture. Rather, through memorialization, the monument constructed and reinforced different messages for disparate audiences, becoming a multivalent work of neoclassicism in a heterogeneous colonial city”. Such a memorialization, no longer in classical form, permits in the twentieth century, creating a mythic modernity against a heterogeneous context. “El Templete and Cuban Neoclassicism: A Multivalent Signifier as Site of Memory”, 363.
31 Errant Modernism: The Ethos of Photography in Mexico and Brazil, 8.
Such an ethos remains fervent following the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, where an ethnographic past is constructed while the government uses forms of mass media to draw from the past and provide a teleological narrative of revolutionary progress. Beyond an ethos of modernism evident throughout 20th century Cuba was a “revolutionary” ethos or sensibility that emerges in the 1960s. Modernities begin to conform to the spirit of the new decade, reflecting the way they are located within cubanidad while projecting the utopic ideals and potentialities of the new state. The use of film, photographic and graphic arts becomes particularly key in this era, as they redefine the urban ethos of Havana.

New technologies of communication come to largely influence art and design in 1960s Havana, especially with the broad state support of the graphic arts and the work of Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC). In her essay about the diffusion of the graphic arts in Cuba, Adelaida de Juan writes, “The conception of contemporary design, which was first formulated in the first years of the October Revolution by the Soviet artists Tatlin and El Lisitsky and, at the same time, by the German Bauhaus school, proposed the elimination of the traditional dichotomy between major and minor arts”. For de Juan, technology becomes a means to counter this differentiation, to consider the ways design could fit within a Marxist-Leninist model

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32 Ibid., 123
while still drawing from previous and international models of the vanguardist practice and its connection to folklore.

In modern architecture the tradition of plastic integration, dating back to the 1920s in Cuba, often conflates the vanguard with the popular, and becomes a means to express a sense of place. Following Henri Lefebvre’s claims that architecture “is a form of communication”, my exploration of Cuban architecture takes into account architecture’s symbolic value within the urban mediatic realm. Technological prowess becomes a dominant paradigm, as scientific advances in construction engineering and visual medium came to dominate the projection of a revolution mythology. Technology came to represent national aspirations within a larger global politic, with Cuba’s national art museum hosting a large Soviet technology exhibition in 1961, and later sending participants to work in the Soviet Union’s space program. In her book on Chronophobia, Pamela Lee explores the relation of time and technology in the rapidly changing 1960s and its imprint in the visual arts. In referencing the notion of the systemic and that of recursions, Lee captures the ethos of the 1960s era, one in which technology not only altered notions of time but visual culture more broadly.

34 “The modern world would be governed by communication, by the trend toward legibility, communicability, and, therefore, transparency. Architecture would be no exception. It is a form of communication. It has an architectural message and a code or codes to decipher it. An architecture can be compared to a language and the act of dwelling to speech…” In Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment, 53.

35 Lee specifically focuses on the manner in which systems theory’s “rhetoric informs and certainly facilitates a new understanding of many artistic practices of the 1960s”. While the implementation of systems theory formed differently across the “iron curtain”, the rhetoric of communication (openly referred to as “propaganda” in the context of Cuba) relates to the ideas of systems theory she places within the more
The role of media and technology in affecting notions of cubanidad following the 1959 revolution makes itself apparent in the prominent role of photography (often produced at mass scale, as seen in the example of Che draped over the Ministry of the Interior) and cinema. Raúl Martínez’s painting 15 Repeticiones de Martí directly recalls the contact sheet for Alberto Korda’s famed image of Che (Figure 1.11). Two variations of Che appear toward the lower center, amid a scene of a mass rally recorded in a storyboard fashion. Along with images of Fidel Castro speaking fiercely into the microphone, the portraits create a mythology of revolutionary heroism, presenting a cinematic triumphalism in the ordering of the contact sheet.

Repetition of form and the notion of the grid in the presentation of the contact sheet recall the systemic ordering of the newly socialist Cuban society, where time was permeated by rhythms that had become cinematic in their occupation of space. In the contact sheet with the iconic image of Che are photographs capturing Castro’s enigmatic auditory spunk, as well as images of an audience amid omnipresent Cuban flags. While Cuba was in its golden age of cinema in 1960s, the iconic directness of the black-and-white photograph, particularly that of the revolutionary hero, dominated the aesthetic of capitalist art world of the time. Her discussion of the theme of recursion – defined as “the process of repeatedly applying a set of rules, operations, or conditions to a given thing in order to define or test it” – is particularly apt in the context of 1960s Cuba. Recursion appears as an emblematic element of the repeating portraits of artists like Andy Warhol and Raúl Martínez, an engagement the technological ethos of the era. *Chronophobia: On Time and Art of the 1960s*, 67, 61.
power in the 1960s. The photograph provides a static semblance of power, with a symbolic potency that reached well beyond the theater screen. Like the image of Che draped over the Ministry of the Interior, exploded black and white photographs dressed buildings throughout the city, redefining the urban space of Havana.

As explored in this dissertation, the revolution promoted a triumphal narrative of revolutionary struggle. Photography, as a form of mass media that could be enlarged and placed upon architectural surfaces as well projected within and across space, provided a new aesthetic rendering of urban space, one that captured an idealized image of the protagonists of the 1959 revolution. That the Guerrillero Heróico image of Che came to be considered one of the most famous and reproduced in the 20th century indicates the success of this visual campaign, one that impacted the realm of architecture and the fine arts. Teleological renderings of time came to be subsumed under the rhythmic provocations of the visual, as graphic images evoked the spirit of the people and histories of a place alongside varied figurations of power. They become renderings of a mythological modernity. As Glissant refers to the correlation between history and myth, images of revolution contributed to the mythologization of the

36 The 2008 film Chevolution explores the history of the Guerrillero Heróico photograph, exploring the history and legacy of this iconic image. The photograph was snapped on March 4, 1960 at a eulogy for those killed in the bombing of a French freighter, with a parade along the Malecón resulting in a speech by Fidel on a stage set outside on 23rd Street (La Rampa). While Fidel was speaking, Che appeared within the photographer’s frame from a distance on the platform stage. The mass gathering, the role of public spectacle, was implied in the taking of the photograph. Chevolution, directed by Luis Lopez and Trisha Ziff (2008; Los Angeles, California: Magnolia Home Pictures, 2010), DVD.
revolution, and hence its historization, with images of the leaders and of the political and social project of the revolution overtaking the island’s terrain. A polyrhythmic ordering – or the social implications of the urban grid and the city’s architecture, containing the varied spaces in which images of a heroic modernity was encountered – encapsulated these representations of revolutionary zeal in Cuba’s capital city.

Rebranding Marxism

Marcelo Pogolotti’s 1933 painting Siglo XX (o El Regalo a la querida) recalls the story board nature of the grid in its composition, portraying a variety of scenes reflecting on the drama of the Cuban nation, then experiencing its first major political revolution of the 20th century (Figure 1.12). A series of scenes reflecting the plight of the worker, the corruption of the state, and grotesque violence against citizens surround a central image of a man kneeling before a woman laid out on a chaise. Her bright red dress draws in the viewer, as he appears to be photographing her crotch area. Born in Cuba in 1902, trained in New York City, and part of the first generation of Cuba’s vanguardia in the late 1920s, Pogolotti played a significant role in the Italian Futurist movement. His works reflect both the zeitgeist of industrial age alienation and the political turmoil that came to be, especially after the stock market crash of 1929. In describing his iconic 1933 painting Cuban Landscape the artist proclaimed: “My goal was to paint the human reality in a social landscape. My picture included soldiers of Machado’s repressive army.
supervising the cane-cutters; the unemployed, waiting with arms crossed for a chance to work; the sugar mill; the trains taking the sugar cane to the sugar mill and the sugar to the steamer, on which it would be loaded and transported to the North, where speculators played the sugar market, while on the horizon the huge mouths of the Navy’s cannon pointed at Cuba”.37 Here he shows a direct concern for the oppressed, the proletariat of a brutal sugar economy. Pogolotti’s works of the early 1930s provided the first clearly Marxist manifestations in Cuban painting, in a style combining abstraction with the social realist imaginary then becoming dominant in the U.S., the Soviet Union and Germany.

The history of Marxism in Cuba stretches back to the start of the Republican era, when various political organizations and parties imagined a new Cuban nation counter to the overt political and economic influence of the U.S. This is especially seen in the formation of the Partido Comunista de Cuba in 1925, led by influential thinkers and figures such as Julio Antonio Mella, Blas Roca, and Carlos Baliño – figures who would appear in media and histories of the nation following the 1959 revolution. Baliño had helped found the Partido Revolucionario Cubano with Jose Martí in 1895, whom he became acquainted with during his time in exile in the U.S., and was a major proponent for Marxism in Cuba at the turn of the 20th century. In her analysis of the foundations of

Marxism in the Cuban context, Isabel Monal comments on how Martí became a seminal figure for Cubans engaging with Marxist and anarchist thinking at the start of the 20th century, and how key figures of Cuban communism came from “a tradition that... couples the man of thought with the politician stimulated by the idea of social emancipation”.

For Monal the 1920s marks the “creative” approach to Marxism created within peculiar historical contexts – such as that of the Platt Amendment (1902-1933) imposing U.S. economic and political control on the island, as well as the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the October Revolution of 1917 – that concerned the budding artistic vanguardia, and Pogolotti in particular.

The relationship of the leftist intelligentsia with the literary and artistic vanguardias of the early-to-mid 20th century, as well as with the formation of political parties, organizations and actions, deserves more extensive research. Influential Peruvian thinker José Carlos Mariátegui became one of the earliest proponents of Marxism in Latin America, writing for the need to consider Marxism amid the colonial history of Peru as well as its social divides. He writes, “The proletariat possesses a myth: social revolution... The force of revolutionaries lies not in science, but in faith, passion and will. It is a religious, mystical, and spiritual force”.

Warning of the importance of anti-imperialism akin to the political writings of José Martí, Mariátegui

38 “Cuban Foundational Marxist Thought”, 16.

challenges the scientific impulse of European Marxism and calls for it be placed within the broader cultural contexts of Latin America. His intellectual work contributed to a trend across Latin American literary and artistic vanguards that heralded revolution and invoked popular culture, be it through forms of *mestizaje* or the idealization of indigenous forms. The invocation of popular culture to herald notions of revolution and liberation is not only seen in the artistic manifestations of Cuba’s vanguardia prior to the 1959 revolution (see Chapter 2), but becomes essential to the visual culture of the Cuban revolution in the following decade.

In January 1968, for example, the coffered brutalist ceiling of the 1963 Pabellón Cuba (Cuban Pavilion) was matched with gridded three-dimensional sculptures serving as a platform or apparatus to exhibit a network of photographs, many containing individual portraits. The black-and-white portraits featured faces of a variety of races and ethnicities, attempting to evoke the notion of the “Third World” while providing a new vision of the socialist proletariat (*Figure 1.13*). The notion of the Third World became central to the concurrent Cultural Congress of 1968, an event that gathered prominent intellectuals, leaders and cultural workers in Havana. As discussed in Chapter 5, the notion of the “Third World” took a new meaning in the Cuban context, with the state promoting a vision of Cuba as a model of socialism for fellow underdeveloped nations, at a moment of extensive decolonization globally. Expressions of time in the use of technology made themselves apparent in the exhibition *Del Tercer*
*Mundo*, particularly with its use of film and neon lighting, taking place amidst the Second Cultural Congress of Havana at the start of the volatile year of 1968. As discussed in Chapter 5, the Cultural Congress was not merely a venue of intellectual debate and cultural exchange; such congresses placed Cuba on a significant political and cultural global stage. *Del Tercer Mundo* provided a radically new image of the proletariat from the industrial age capitalist alienation expressed in the early paintings of Pogolotti – it presented a Marxism figured through the diverse faces of the global “Third World”, focused more on a notion of solidarity than that of capitalist alienation. One can argue that the 1960s was a period where the folklore of Cuba’s non-white masses went from a symbolic tool of appropriation in vanguardist expression to a symbolic tool of appropriation within the state’s vast propaganda apparatus, whether for the preservation of the state or to present an image of cultural solidarity via diversity on the global stage. Representations of the masses working and living in solidarity offered a vision complimentary to the photographic portraits of revolutionary leaders, the former providing a mirage of solidarity and the latter serving as patriarchal symbols of power.

In other words, Havana in the 1960s can be seen as a place where Marxism is branded effectively as anti-imperialist, Martian (as related to the philosophy of José Martí), and “Third World”.40 That is, in the visual realm, Marxism becomes actualized

40 Roberto Fernández Retamar writes extensively on Marxism and Cuban modernity, suggesting that “José Martí is one of the first men of the Third World”. *Ensayo de Otro Mundo*, 20.
outside the practice of political activism and vanguardist expression, and represented strategically as a force – a religious force, one could argue – of the state’s power and legitimacy. Further, it resulted in the production of a new center of culture and politics, where Cuba modeled itself as a iconic model for the “Third World” and a deliberate space for the exchange of ideas and culture. In an official representation such as the exhibition *Del Tercer Mundo*, Cuba expressed, in visual, filmic, and spatial form, its desire to rebrand Marxism within the contexts of the “Third World”.

Many of the images produced within Havana have become effective brands, still existing as potent expressions of anti-imperialism and decolonization today.

Cuba’s participation in international conferences and world fairs as well as its hosting of major events mark the manner in which Cuba became an idealized platform to reconsider the role of Marxism in the broader socialist world. Marxism was contested within the Cuban political context since the early 20th century, and was initially dismissed by the Cuban revolution upon its triumph. The 26th of July Movement officially denied links to communism at the start of the Revolution, largely due to Cold War politics and their desire to appease the capitalist West. Castro first announced that Cuba was a socialist nation on May Day, 1961. The roots of Marxism, as a theoretical

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41 In the first speech proclaiming Cuba a socialist nation, Fidel was particularly critical of the United States: “If Mr. Kennedy does not like socialism, well we do not like imperialism! We do not like capitalism! We have as much a right to protest over the existence of an imperialist-capitalist regime 90 miles from our coast as he has to protect over the existence of a socialist regime 90 miles from his coast”. Fidel Castro, “May Day
apparatus influencing Cuban politics, were claimed by various proponents, including the main figures of the Cuban revolution. In a 1960 essay titled “Notes for the Study of the Ideology of the Cuban Revolution,” Che Guevara highlights both the revolution’s unique tie to Marxism and its divergence, claiming: “The Cuban Revolution takes up Marx where he left science to take up his revolutionary rifle”\(^{42}\). He elaborates that this is not done in a revisionist spirit, but attempts to evoke Marxist ideals on the ground – that is, to compensate for theory in the field of action, guerrilla action specifically.

According to Che Guevara, Marxism as a theory informs laws – or political ideas – that form on the ground, by the people fighting for revolution. For Guevara, a Marxist sensibility is expressed in the actions of a people seeking liberation, rather than the suppositions of those theorizing from above. This location of history in between theory (particularly Marx and Lenin) and praxis (action on the ground) shows the way in which an ideology of the revolutionary develops a mythology regarding the revolutionary present. This mythology idealizes the action of the people – expressed through actual revolution and participation in the initiatives that followed the 1959 revolution, such as literacy campaigns and construction projects – as fulfilling Marxist-Leninist theories regarding the advancement of society. In a proudly Marxist guise, the figure of the

\(^{42}\) “Notas para el Estudio de la Ideología de la Revolución Cubana”, reproduced in Pensamiento y Política Cultural Cubanos, 15.
revolutionary is infused with a mythology of the worker and the *campesino*, a notion of Marxism developed within certain local, combative contexts. It is not the image of the proletariat, however, that dominates the visual culture of this decade, but that of the politician saint, of leaders like Che himself, who come to embody these Marxist ideals at the visual and symbolic level. That is, their photographs appear superimposed and enlarged, as ubiquitous backdrops at sites for communal labor, throughout the city, and at mass gathering, as exemplified in Che’s 1967 eulogy by Fidel.

In essence, this dissertation looks at how a notion of place is characterized in the production of power at the visual and spatial level. Analyzing the peculiarities of visual culture in 1960s Havana will allow us to better understand the potency of images that have come to represent a revolutionary and leftist politics globally. The role of the Cuban revolution cannot be understood, however, without a broader engagement of postcolonial theory and a look at independence movements taking place around the world. Havana not only figured itself as a center for cultural and intellectual exchanged among the “Third World” or Tricontinental Asia-Africa-Latin America alliance, but Cuba lent military assistance and strategy to various revolutionary movements, most notably in Angola. Further, the legacy of Cuba’s commitment to a Third World politics and solidarity is apparent in its literacy campaigns across Latin America as well as its medical prowess globally. Perhaps this presence of Cuba in the broader world, both literally (in combat, in medical assistance, etc.) and as a symbol of
anti-imperialism, permits its visual imaginary a certain familiarity, an association akin to a global brand.

Cuba’s position as a budding socialist nation within the Americas broadened its exchange with the broader world, especially given the contexts of the Cold War. The 1962 Algerian Revolution came to fruition as key texts by Frantz Fanon were being translated and published by the Casa de las Américas in Havana. Cuba began providing the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) military and civilian assistance in late 1961, its first major venture in Africa. Cuba also participated in the Non-Aligned Movement, becoming a member at their inaugural meeting in Belgrade in 1961. Yugoslavia provides a fascinating counterpoint to Cuba, given its embrace of abstraction and its economies of leisure along the coast. While Tito dreamed of an alliance that would defy the binary of power essential to the Cold War, Cuba envisioned itself as a center of the Third World. With the hosting of the 1961 Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade, the Yugoslav capital city itself became a stage; As Vladimir Kulic writes: “Placing itself at the fulcrum of the so-called First, Second, and Third Worlds, the country created its own global network of cultural and economic exchange, effectively serving as an important conduit of modernization between the developed and the

developing worlds and a cultural mediator between the rival ideologies”. Cuba’s engagement with the broader world, partially defined by its antagonism with the U.S., likewise contributed to the creation of a new cultural center, a conduit of modernization within the “Third World”. By 1972, however, Cuba became an official member of the Soviet Union’s Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), one of only three non-European countries to be associated within this economic alliance, along with Vietnam and Mongolia. Neither First World nor Third World, Havana appears as an apparition of a Second World urbanity – that is, it exists prominently and defiantly between the “First” and “Third” worlds, creating expansive global networks that mark Havana as a capital of culture while creating economic dependencies that recall former imperialist relations.

Cuba’s placement in the broader world of the 1960s – from the Cuban Missile Crisis to the Vietnam War and China’s Cultural Revolution – also created the conditions in which a relatively small island could redefine the broader political ethos of the era. Havana, in contradictory ways, was figured symbolically as a site of revolutionary takeover and as an urban showcase for a largely pro-agrarian revolution. Exhibition sites, new architecture, public displays of art and propaganda, mass gatherings, new movies, cultural congresses – Havana became a curated site, a city whose history of

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44 “National, supranational, international: New Belgrade and the symbolic construction of a socialist capital”, 52.
commodity exchange became redefined by newly created cultural and political capital. The mythic potency of its revolution is clearly figured in its leaders as much as in its embrace of technology, the transmission of its revolutionary rhythms across mediatic realms.

In short, a multiplicity of modernities are invoked within the revolutionary project beginning in 1959. While a utopic, teleological modernity is promoted in official discourse by Cuban leaders, the way in which modernities are both articulated and experiences are variegated. While (re)presentations of modernity could project a ‘revolutionary’ ethos (or ethos defined by a historical or conceptual reference to the revolution), the Cuban revolution redefined the historical remnants of previous modernities as fitting within the historical and conceptual guise of ‘lo revolucionario’. By looking at urban visual culture throughout Havana’s history my dissertation explores the contours of modernity in Cuba, embedding the dominant, teleological narrative of the Revolution within broader discussions of modernities from Cuba and globally.

**Mapping the Revolution**

The 1968 cover of the popular magazine *Cuba* featured the verdant landscape of *El Oriente*, or the eastern end of Cuba including the Sierra Maestra, figured as a reclining woman (**Figure 1.14**). The woman appears reclining upright looking towards the sun, associating the landscape with a sense of fertility fitting for the birthplace of the
revolution. This image also recalls the colonial record of prefiguring the language of landscape through gendered terms, while recalling the notion of Cuba’s eastern provinces as the birthplace of revolution. The map, as a representational device, attempts to describe space within a two dimensional image – it contains a mythologizing purpose in its function as a guidepost. Maps have functioned throughout Cuba’s colonial and modern history as both symbolic and descriptive measures to represent the terrain and its development.

This dissertation draws from the analogy of mapping in its attempt to draw out major themes regarding the Cuban revolution. As mapping suggests a conflation between visual and spatial forms of analyses, maps not only serve as visual examples throughout the history of revolutionary Cuba, but work as an analogy for thinking about the scholarly process of research on the broader built environment. The power of cartography following the colonial era remained strong, as seen following the 1959 Revolution – the new government abandoned previous city plans, but nonetheless used comparable visual and spatial formulations for their new projections of utopia. As Michel de Certeau suggests, the map “collates on the same plane heterogeneous places,” operating as “a totalizing stage on which elements of diverse origin are brought together to form the tableau of a ‘state’ of geographic knowledge…”45 Mapping becomes a means

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45 *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 121.
of control and power, one that remained relevant across the decade and is of central concern to this dissertation.

David Turnbell suggests that maps present us with two types of representation: iconic representation and symbolic representation. While the iconic visualizes aspects of the terrain, the symbolic utilizes various conventions within a culture (signs or symbols such as letters or other graphical elements) to express ideas regarding a given terrain. But Turnbell suggests the maps reach beyond mere representation, holding a symbolic purpose and function: “All maps also have a latent symbolic function, for example, legitimating and disseminating the state’s view of reality”. The notion of figuring a place through a representational means, the legacy of cartography within empire and the colonial project, remains relevant to the nation state. That is, in building a mythology of the Cuban revolution, mapping serves as an analogy for the varied visual campaigns and endeavors to remake the physical and social space of the nation. The architectural and urban plan, in many ways, can hence be seen as akin to the map.

In his text regarding architecture and utopia, Manfredo Tafuri emphasizes the ideological contours of architecture and urban planning in the capitalist “West”. Tafuri writes: “The decline of the social utopia sanctioned ideology’s surrender to the politics of things brought about by the laws of profit. Architectural, artistic, and urban ideology

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46 Maps are Territories: Science is an Atlas, 3.
47 Ibid., 44.
was left with the *utopia of form* as a way of recovering the human totality through an ideal synthesis, as a way of embracing disorder through order*. Providing a genealogy from urban mythology of the 19th century to the practices of the vanguard in the early 20th century, Tafuri suggests a third phase of architectural ideology between both world wars – that of the *plan*. For Tafuri, the ideology of the plan supercedes dominant political ideologies.

This dissertation can be seen at the outset as a master project, one that attempts to narrate the role of art and architecture across a period of time impacted by dramatic political change. The four following chapters are organized thematically and in a somewhat chronological manner – a narrative mapping of the Cuban Revolution’s visual and spatial exclamations. Exploring concepts such as revolution and the revolutionary, appropriation, utopia, and transcontinentalism and globality, I trace the impact of the 1960s and its visual culture as illustrative of a revolutionary mythology. Such a project, for example, presents the grand narratives of the revolution, be they technological treatises or elaborate histories relayed in state media, within a broader history of modernities in Cuba. Through close analysis of the material world and by placing Cuban art, architecture and visual culture in broader historical and global contexts, I complicate such grand narratives by revealing the underpinnings of revolutionary modernities.

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The second chapter places the revolutionary ethos of Cuba’s artistic vanguardia in dialogue with the island’s colonial legacy. I discuss representations of spatial control and order from the colonial era, exploring configurations such as the urban plaza and the plantation, as well as artistic expressions attempting to counter or evoke their telos. This formal interrogation of coloniality is employed through the analysis of art, architecture and visual culture across Cuban history, questioning the role of revolution and modernity emenating from the colonial era. Such an interrogation is then incorporated into a reading of 20th century modernities, with Cuban vanguardist art and popular visual culture showing the imprint of the colonial past. With advances in telecommunications and more studied invocations of afro-Cuban culture, modernities were transformed at the height of Fulgencio Batista’s regime (1952-1958). Looking at phenomena ranging from the still running Tropicana cabaret to exhibitions by the student union of University of Havana’s School of Architecture, I explore the multiplicitous manners in which cubanidad and tropicality are invoked visually and spatially. I argue that a notion of the revolutionary – its mythological impulse – is rooted in the coloniality of space and the expressive forces of nationalist sentiment.

The third chapter explores the theme of appropriation, discussing the manner in which space was occupied during the first years of the Cuban Revolution as well as the way vanguardist principles from the previous era were adopted in a newly revolutionary context. I open with the case study of the Hotel Habana Libre, formerly
the Habana Hilton Hotel. Looking beyond its revolutionary takeover and expropriation, I explore its history and its employment of design to understand the manner in which it became symbolic of cubanidad, and the various means in which it was appropriated.

Opening with the topic of spatial appropriation, I expand to a discussion regarding the appropriation of the arts. This is seen in the vanguardist impulse of the 1950s with the plastic integration of architecture, a means of nationalist architecture appropriated by a new generation. The revolution also reoriented the urban politics of the city, with many spaces reinhabited for different purposes. I close with the example of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, a 1954 modernist museum whose collections were dispersed and whose mission was redefined following the Revolution, given the creation of new museums throughout the city and the island.

The fourth chapter looks broadly at the theme of utopia in art, architecture and visual culture, looking at new experimental architectures and trends in the graphic arts. It provides the opportunity to look at Havana in an age of transformation, centering its focus around the city’s hosting of the World Congress of Architecture in 1963. The congress gave the Cuban government the opportunity to present their architectural ambitions to an international audience, as well as the island’s unique heritage. Opening with a preview of the rapidly constructed Pabellón Cuba’s inaugural exhibition *History of Architecture in Cuba*, I explore the way new architectures are reconfigured through formal experiments and new technologies. Cuba is portrayed as a laboratory for
experimental architecture in this era, while also drawing from narratives of the modern past. This extends to my discussion of the ciudad universitaria, or university city (or campus), in 1960s Cuba, with a focus on the Ciudad Universitaria José Antonio Echeverria (CUJAE) and the National Arts Schools. These two major university campus projects on the outskirts of Havana became models for polemical approaches to utopia, with CUJAE providing a grand narrative promoting the use of technology and prefabricated construction and the National Arts Schools challenging conventions architectural form to reference cubanidad in esoteric, imaginative manner. I consider the grand narratives of these two projects by looking at the broad sway of 1960s architectures, where a mediation between technology and tradition was ever present. I close the chapter by looking at the graphic impulse of the decade, understanding how the graphic impacted both architectural production and urban life. While writers such as Alejo Carpentier were looking towards the past to capture a notion of tradition within the city, I rebrand Havana as la ciudad gráfica, or the graphic city, to capture the manner in which the graphic and the technological come to redefine the presentation of urban space in the newly socialist city.

My fifth chapter explores major exhibitions and cultural congresses in the mid-late 1960s, looking at the global outreach of Cuba’s revolutionary modernities and its impact on art practices throughout the decade. Cultural congresses in 1966 and 1968 established Havana’s role in conceiving a transcontinental Africa-Asia-Latin American
alliance, as Cuba proclaimed itself as a cultural and intellectual center of the “Third World”. Havana’s participation in the Paris-based Salon de Mai exhibition in 1967 illustrates how Havana served as a symbolic center within Third World politics, with Wifredo Lam bringing a cohort of international artists to Havana for the exhibition and art happenings in 1967. Together these artists attempted to herald the fine arts as a revolutionary practice, bringing the exhibition back to Paris at the height of the May 1968 protests. Further, the Cuban participants displayed their concern with the graphic arts and media, as explored in the chapter’s extensive discussion of pop art and poster art. By looking at a visual arts produced within the conceptual frameworks of Marxist-Leninism and Third World solidarity, this chapter explores the propagandistic and subversive contours of fine and popular art in 1960s Cuba. The chapter falls in line with the broader argument of the dissertation – that cubanidad had become redefined by the utopic aspirations and decolonizing ethos of the Cuban revolution, solidifying a powerful mythology as Cuba adapted to great Soviet economic and political influence.

The analogy of mapping felt personally relevant given the geographic dexterity necessary in the research of this dissertation project. Having traveled to the island for month-long research trips since the summer of 2008, my seven-month residency in Havana in 2011 and 2012 included many hardships in accessing information. The Biblioteca Nacional José Martí in Havana was closed for renovation across the length of residency, while attempts to access archives at the Ministry of Construction proved
largely fruitless. My project required a greater scope of sources however, as well as the creative gestures of the cartography to narratively map out the mythological terrain of Cuba’s capital city in a moment of notable political change. Sources in archives, libraries and museums in locales as near as Miami and as far as Paris and Rio de Janeiro allowed me to plot data points across my broad narrative, as well as to recognize the contradictory and mythologizing nature of a deconstructivist project of this sort. The map as an analogy also perhaps serves a personal, utopic desire to provide a coherent, in depth account of the spatial and visual culture of the Cuban revolution, despite varied hardships in my investigations.

Havana is an ideal example of a city that recreates itself despite a scarcity of resources – that recycles the aesthetics of the past and revalorizes them within a communist framework. Havana also became a stage for exploring the role of art and architecture in a changing world, providing a dynamic model for thinking about the roles of art and architecture in today’s globalizing world. In charting the mission of revolutionary architecture Eliana Cárdenas notes: “There is an interest in finding an architecture representative of the [revolutionary] moment that opened pathways for experimentation and produced diverse forms, extending the past repertoire” (23).49

Cuba continues to architecturally redefine itself today – through its latest projects, its

49 “El interés por buscar una arquitectura representativa del momento abre caminos a la experimentación y se producen formales diversas, que amplían el repertorio anterior.” Personally translated from En la búsqueda de una arquitectura nacional, 23.
latest architectural renovations, and its crumbling infrastructure. Always building from
its treasured past, the urban imaginary of Cuba seems simultaneously nostalgic, idealist,
and tenuous. My dissertation draws inspiration from the utopic aspirations of 1960s
Cuba, focusing on a period of artistic and architectural creativity, direction, and
experimentation that is significant in understanding the role of art and architecture
within a global context.

The image of Che draped over the Ministry of the Interior building during his
eulogy speech by Fidel Castro is perhaps most emblematic of the way Cuban modernity
has been globalized. It presents a heroic façade to a struggle against imperialism and for
Third World sovereignty. It shows the ability of architecture to communicate ideals at a
massive scale. What it does not account for is the rhythm of the space; the masses
chanting, holding up signs, as well as the ability of the image to be manipulated and
reused over the next decades, outside of the privileged public space of the Plaza de la
Revolución. Then again, a myriad of other portrayals of Che, many using the same
Korda image, present a rhythmic ethos. In his 1967 painting *Che*, young artist Manuel
Mendive depicts Che on horseback, the revolutionary leader in a quaint profile portrait
recalling the folk or “naïve” arts of the Caribbean (*Figure 1.1*). Here Che stands amid a
verdant landscape, his dominion and revolutionary zeal made relatable to the viewer in
scale and style.

My dissertation closes with premonitions on Cuban postmodernity – in
understanding how this era of revolutionary modernity molds the following decade, as the utopic opening of revolution is overtaken by a period of artistic and cultural repression. It does so through the guise of the plantation – the politics of space reaching back to the colonial era – and its discordant expressions. It suggests that the legacy of the revolution, like its politicized narratives, is much more complicated. Perhaps it also asks us to reconsider such values, thinking of the role of decoloniality, utopia, and resistance today, in the face of power be it through capital or the state.
Revolutionary Ambitions: Visualizing Reform and Revolt in Havana, Cuba

“Within the Revolution, everything. Against the Revolution, nothing.”
– Fidel Castro, *Palabras a los intelectuales*, 1961.¹

“Other dangerous phantoms have appeared throughout the world, since Karl Marx began to create a contemporary revolutionary mythology.”
– Wifredo Lam, 1967.²

In March 1955, Cuban artist Wifredo Lam was invited by the student union of the School of Architecture at the Universidad de la Habana to participate in a solo exhibition coordinated by student curators. Titled *Exposición Lam*, the exhibition attempted to rethink Lam’s paintings through the spatiality of the exhibition space (Figure 2.1). As a symbol of the island’s modernity, a purveyor of black culture in the island, and a figure thought to embody the struggle for liberation amid repression, Lam’s presence proved especially powerful during the height of protests against dictator Fulgencio Batista. The students attempted to reflect the ethos of Lam’s work in their

² “D’autres fantômes dangereux sont apparus dans le monde depuis que Karl Marx a commencé à créer la mythologie révolutionnaire contemporaine”. Correspondence from 1967, SDO Wifredo Lam archives, Paris, France.
curation, using unconventional means to hang and display the paintings. The curators aimed to defy the logic of the white cube gallery space by spatially evoking the dynamic aesthetic of Wifredo Lam. Sharp tones of black and red infused the paintings, as anthropomorphic figures, often portraying Afro-Cuban deities, laid claim to gallery space. In an era of repression Lam’s work came to represent a revolutionary temporality – a call for liberation through the evocation of orichas, or Afro-Cuban Santería deities.

Having gained stature as Cuba’s premier avant-garde artist internationally, Lam’s return to Cuba in 1955 was given extensive press. The artist’s association with avant-garde movements abroad as well as his invocation of Afro-Cuban spirituality in abstract and figural forms gave his work a potency for local audiences. While Lam partially steered away from involving himself directly in politics, the Castro regime later collaborated with the artist in the 1960s, recognizing him as an international figure whose works bestow a revolutionary flair (see Chapter 5). The Exposición Lam exhibition presents a unique collaboration between art and architecture, where the interior space was radically transformed in accordance to the aesthetic of Lam’s paintings. The curators sought to revolutionize the space, so to speak. This chapter explores the manifestation and construction of a revolutionary aesthetic or ethos prior to the 1959 Cuban Revolution, exploring how it is defined within visual and spatial realms. That is, it posits that a notion of the revolutionary was significant throughout Cuba’s history, be
it in the impact of revolutions in neighboring countries (i.e. the U.S. and Haiti) or in the nationalist discourse attached to the struggle for sovereignty and self-determination.

In his 1923 book *Towards a New Architecture* French architect Le Corbusier emphatically states: “It is a question of building which is at the root of social unrest today: architecture or revolution.” Le Corbusier’s radical claim that architecture and urban planning had direct political ramifications is matched by his embrace of technology. Beyond presenting architecture’s ability to create order, its spirit would need to embrace that of the machine age. As Helen Mattson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein note: “Architecture or revolution – and, Corbusier underlines in the final sentence of the book, revolution can be avoided, that is to say, the real overturning of class and property relations, and the solution he provides is an architecture that should be capable once more of unifying society and making everyone identify with a given totality”.

Architecture provides state actors a means of reform to maintain societal order. A dialectic between architecture (as reform) and revolution is challenged by the architecture student curators of *Exposición Lam*, who attempt to relay Lam’s aesthetic and spiritual references into the architecture of the traditional gallery space.

In this chapter, I argue that urban form – particularly the grid – and the sugar plantation came to symbolize a totalizing notion of place, presenting architectonic ideals

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3 *Towards a New Architecture*, 8.
into the 20th century and forming iconic spatialities that are reformist in their technological and conceptual ordering. They present architectures of reform, showing how the Caribbean island was transformed in conquest, from its rural setting to its urban centers. While architects, engineers, planners and the state created architectures of (social) control, inhabitants redefined these spaces through their actions. Tropes of nationalism – identified as cubanidad – become commonplace among thinkers, writers, and vanguardist artists in challenging Cuba’s political and social order. This chapter explores the relationship between architectures of reform and visions of revolution in the arts and visual culture across Cuban history, arguing that a revolutionary ethos was always incorporated into the project of social reform at the political, physical and cultural level.

The relationship between reform and revolution remains relevant following the Cuban Revolution, as the new government implemented new laws and promoted development with the purpose of maintaining social order. This is seen in the construction of new architectures and governmental mediations regarding artistic expression. In his famous June 30, 1961 speech “Words to Intellectuals,” Fidel Castro outlined the role of art and culture in expressing a “revolutionary” sentiment. In the speech he makes his famous demand that all forms of expression must fit “within” the
revolution, and that nothing may exist outside.\textsuperscript{5} The terms “revolution” and “revolutionary” came to represent the new government’s stake in reforming the aesthetics of revolution. Responding to concerns regarding the freedom of expression, Fidel argued for a “revolutionary” mission in art and literature, and for elites and intellectuals to engage with the people and heighten their artistic aptitude.

As Hector Amaya elaborates, “Though culture that was politicized was thereafter allowed to exist (‘within the Revolution’), revolutionary politicized culture was seen as the only necessary culture.”\textsuperscript{6} This is reiterated in Che Guevara’s famed 1965 essay “Socialism and man in Cuba,” where the revolutionary leader outlines the role of vanguardia in thinking about the new order of a socialist society. Written as a letter to Carlos Quijano, the editor of the weekly journal Marcha of Montevideo, Uruguay, Guevara discusses the birth of a new man and woman out of the Cuban revolution. Guevara writes: “A school of artistic experimentation is invented, which is said to be the definition of freedom; but this ‘experimentation’ has its limits, imperceptible until there is a clash, that is, until the real problems of individual alienation arise. Meaningless anguish or vulgar amusement thus become convenient safety valves for human anxiety. The idea of using art as a weapon of protest is

\textsuperscript{6} Screening Cuba: Film Criticism as Political Performance during the Cold War, 33.
For Che, the vanguardia moves from an artistic and intellectual movement to a political one, where the primary goal is education in order to incorporate the masses into the “vanguard.” In its revolt against tradition in the context of art and literature, the vanguard becomes a model and catalyst for revolution, for change that extends to the political level.

This means that the trajectory of vanguardist visual arts in 1960s Cuba was now to be oriented towards the masses, allowing an embrace of abstraction and experimentation while also limiting the subject matter through censorship. This is seen as early as November 1961, with the cancellation of the publication *Lunes de Revolución*, an artistic and literary supplement edited by Carlos Franqui and deemed as taboo given its publication of diverse literary perspectives. New approaches to the arts, especially with regards to the integration of photography and graphic media within architectural and urban spaces, became central to the new regime. The 1960s was a period of experimentation in both the mass production of art as well as the individual creation of unique works of painting and sculpture – a coexistence that allowed both to influence one another. While my dissertation looks at this phenomenon broadly, the specter of revolution well preceded the iconic 1959 revolution, as did experimentations in art reflecting the relationship between the visual and the spatial contexts art inhabited after

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7 *Che Guevara Reader: Writings on Politics & Revolution*, 222.
the revolution. More briefly, vanguardist art and its revolutionary ethos stretches across Cuba’s political epochs, evading a definitive political message while being situated in a nationalist context, defined by state sponsorship and censorship. Looking at the manner in which the terms revolución and revolucionario become central to the discourse of nationalism, this chapter maps out the historical trajectory of a revolutionary aesthetic, from late colonial era reforms to well past Cuba’s first successful revolution in 1933.

Central to my discussion of revolution and the revolutionary is the relationship between art and architecture. The 1955 Exposición Lam illustrates the manner in which vanguardist practice in painting was deemed as revolutionary, not only in its surrealist expression of Afro-Cuban religiosity but in the spatial gestures of the figures within each painting’s composition. The paintings provided visual and spatial references that were used by the student architects to redefine the gallery space. The critics and curators of the exhibition elevated Lam’s use of black and red tones and dynamic compositions as revolutionary and reflective of the sentiments outside the gallery, where the university campus had become a key locale for resistance and protests against the Batista regime. Art critic José Álvarez Baragaño wrote an article about Lam for university’s architectural journal Espacio, whose issue was a corollary for the exhibition. Having recently returned from exile in Paris due to Batista’s reign, Baragaño refers to Lam’s work as using a
plastic, spiritual and conceptual means to become “revolutionary, plastic, and
mythical.”

In this chapter I explore the role that forms of power – that is, formulations of
political power and social coercion in the visual and spatial realm – play in relation to
expressions of resistance, liberation and revolution. The integration of art and
architecture creates spaces where the reformist tendencies of architecture incorporate
and are transformed by the expressive elements of the visual arts. Opening with an
exploration of revolution and reform in Cuba’s late colonial era, beginning at the turn of
the 19th century, I discuss how representations of architecture and urban planning
present Cuba’s modernity to local and global audiences. The spatial politics of the
distant plantation and the ever-present urban grid remain prevelant in the reformist
tendencies of the modern built environment of Havana into the 1960s, where local
architects and foreign urban planners reproduced a means for social and political
control. While working under the patronage of the state and private entrepenuers, they
also incorporated the work of vanguardist artists, reenvisioning new architectures as a
locus for revolutionary expressions.

By the Republican era (1902-1958) both the revolutionary and the reformist
imbue modernities with a nationalist fervor. In the next section I bring up the politics of

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9 “La verdad de Lam se nutre en el hecho de que su obra expresa todos los elementos: una continuidad en
las renovaciones de la pintura como medio, una conciencia clara de la trascendencia del hombre, como
voluntad o ideal y el valor para exponer su continente fuera de todo prejuicio: lo que hace que la pintura de
Lam sea revolucionaria, plástica y mítica.” Espacio 13/14 (Jan.-April 1955), 39.
cubanidad and tropicality, discussing how nationalist expression was integral to the vanguardist project. I argue that ideological underpinnings of cubanidad function across Cuban culture, including mass media and popular culture. Many artists and writers attempted to rethink nationalist tropes outside of the realm of the state or commercial ventures, while at the same time working on collaborative projects that placed their work within such ventures. While the spirit of the artistic vanguardia is often portrayed by its protagonists as revolutionary, the presence of such art within the spaces of commercial enterprise and state power indicates the ability for such expressions to be coopted, or at very least institutionalized. At the same time, artists and architects were aiming to redefine such institutional spaces, placing the revolutionary ethos of Cuban modernities within reformative spaces of power.

The final sections provide a detailed analysis of the Exposición Lam, followed by a discussion of the plastic integration of architecture in the late Republican era. Lam’s works in the 1955 exhibition contain formal compositions that rethink the space of the canvas in relation to Afro-Cuban spirituality, imbuing the surface with abstract and often anthropomorphic figures that stretch dynamically across the canvas. Lam’s figures appear to defy the logic of a flat rectangular canvas, reimagining the primitive figure in European modern art as an active, liberatory force. The invocation of Afro-Cuban spirituality presents a reordering of physical environs, something made visible in Lam’s murals in Cuba. The vanguardist, revolutionary fervor of Lam’s work is defined,
in the context of Cuba’s vanguardia and its critics, as one that defies a Euro-centric ordering of the world, as one of formal and spiritual revolution.

Spatial and visual forms became a catalyst for new artistic and architectural works in the 1950s. Urban murals and the plastic integration of architecture provide public images that present cubanidad in a manner akin to Lam – as exhibiting a revolutionary, nationalist tenor. Nonetheless, urban planning projects such as the Plaza Cívica (1951-1955) and the never realized Plan Piloto of Havana (1955-1958) show the prevalence of Le Corbusier’s statement “architecture or revolution”. Both projects sought to rationalize the city, making it more amenable to cars and reworking the plaza-based, uneven grid of Havana’s colonial era plan. At the same time, the use of architectural and spatial form rendered the projects with a notion of cubanidad, drawing from vanguardist practices in art. This co-opting of vanguardist practice by the state predicates the revolutionary aims of the 26th of July Movement, where the invocation of revolution or the revolutionary came to indicate an act of compliance as much as an act of liberation.

**Architecture or Revolution**

Eduardo Laplante’s large painting *Ingenio Güinia de Soto* (1852) presents a vast, ordered sugar plantation that transforms an idyllic rural landscape (Figure 2.2). Viewed from a bird’s eye perspective and comprised of various buildings set in a rectilinear
format, the painting presents an image of order and control. The campus of the sugar mill lies in the center of the canvas on seemingly flat ground – a terrain modified within its hilly and voluptuous setting. Workers line up towards the center, presenting an order as rigid as the placement of buildings on the flat ground. The spatiality of the plantation implants itself upon the landscape like a well-rigged machine. Born in France, Laplante resettled in Havana in 1848, depicting colonial life after Cuba had secured its position as the sugar kingdom of the Americas. He became most known for his images of plantations and city life in Havana, virtuously presenting Cuban modernity at the onset of the industrial age.

The painting is one of a few history-sized canvases replicating prints from Laplante’s various lithograph series. The painting *Ingenio Güinía de Soto* is a spectacular expansion of a lithograph from a series commissioned for the 1857 book titled *Los Ingenios: Collecion de Vistas de los Principales Ingenios de Azucar de la Isla de Cuba* by Justo G. Contero – a detailed survey of various sugar mill plantations in Cuba. Laplante’s depictions ranged from broad bird’s eye views of the sugar mills to interior shots of the factory, displaying labor processes pertinent to the sugar industry. The interior prints emphasize a machine-like order, wherein the machinery is drafted with an intricate precision. If human subjects are placed in the print, their behavior seems to conform to the space of the plantation and its economic purpose. Cuban writer Antonio Benítez-
Rojo has described the book with its accompanying text and images as “a kind of poetic panoply or myth that I can take as a monument to power”.\(^{10}\)

The rise of Cuba as the premier sugar exporter in the world by the mid-19\(^{th}\) century emerged out of the ashes of the Haitian Revolution at the turn of the 19\(^{th}\) century. In her book *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*, Ada Ferrer writes: “The Cuban slave system that emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century, then, was one that had internalized the Haitian Revolution and the liberation it represented: as a model, as warning, and sometimes as concrete possibility”.\(^{11}\) Ferrer’s exploration of Cuba and the rise of slavery in the age of the world’s most significant slave revolution next door in the island of Hispaniola suggests Havana’s impermeability in an age of colonial dominion. Growing demand for sugar lead to economic reforms, including the opening of Cuba to world trade by the Spanish crown in 1818.\(^{12}\) The rise of the sugar plantation in 19\(^{th}\) century Cuba presented both advancements in new technology and the need to control the social and physical terrain of sugar’s arduous economic enterprise. The architecture of the plantation, fantastically presented in the works of Laplante, display a heightened sense of order, with social interactions absorbed by the machine-like rigor of the plantation landscape. Accompanying Laplante’s lithographs in the *Los Ingenios* book were plans and sections providing a more

\(^{10}\) *The Repeating Island*, 113.

\(^{11}\) *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*, 12.

mechanical imaging of the sugar plantations, something especially evident in images boasting new technologies of sugar fabrication. In one example designed by engineer Daniel Ducrey and drafted by Laplante, a section and plan present a structure used for the continued boiling and crystallization of sugar (Figure 2.3). Whereas the newer technology of vacuum pans moderate sugar’s boiling temperature to the right of the diagram, it is placed with an apparatus utilizing the more traditional method of open multiple pans, coordinated economically in what was known as the “Jamaica train” process. This showcase of crystallization technologies indicates that innovations traveled between colonies and across the metropoles, showing the manner in which “sugar plantations in the Greater Caribbean were models and laboratories for modernity where vital engineering developments took place”. Itinerate engineers, inventors, and artists like Laplante helped revolutionize the plantation as a symbol of modernity, as a place of invention and oppressive social ordering in the face of expanding globalization.

The formation of the sugar economy transformed Cuba’s port cities, flooding them with immense wealth, especially among the merchant class. By 1837 train service connected Havana to the sugar plantations of Bejucal and later Güines, making Cuba the first Spanish-speaking territory in the world with rail service. Eduardo Laplante’s

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13 Alan Dye, Cuban Sugar in the Age of Mass Production, 89
14 José Guadalupe Ortega, “Machines, modernity, and sugar: the Greater Caribbean in a global context, 1812-1850,” 2.
15 It is often noted that Cuba had rail service before Spain, despite being a colony of Spain. See Oscar Zanetti and Alejandro García, Sugar & Railroads: A Cuban History, 1837-1959, 33-35.
1858 lithograph Havana: General Vista Taken From the Port’s Entrance portrays the active port of Havana from a privileged bird’s eye perspective (Figure 2.4). Multiple ships sail in and out of the Bay of Havana, the tower of Morro Castle purveying over the action and the urban grid extending back towards the horizon. The composition of the urbanscape is reminiscent of Laplante’s plantation images such as Ingenio Güinía de Soto, in that the urban infrastructure provides a rational mode implanted upon the landscape. It is an image heralding economic enterprise. Absent from our reading of Laplante’s lithograph is the violence of the transatlantic slave trade and the urban dynamics of a congested yet expanding city. Urban form itself becomes a mirage of Cuba’s modernity, a symbol of economic prowess amid colonial dominion. Urban reforms throughout the late colonial era and into the revolutionary era provide the dominant class a means to transform the city, to build upon this mirage. The legacy of plantation spatiality remained in the future architecture of Cuba, into the 1960s, as the growth of the sugar industry had direct implications on the development of Havana as a center of global trade.16

Defining the plantation as one of the most principal instruments for studying the Caribbean region, Antonio Benítez-Rojo elaborates: “[T]his powerful machine has

16 This spatiality is arguably seen in large estates built throughout the 20th century in suburban Havana, where homes attempted to mimic the grandeur of the colonial hacienda (plantation). This also begins to impact monumental civic projects, such as the Pabellón Cuba of 1963, discussed extensively in Chapter 4 (see Eduardo Luis Rodríguez, “Tropical Minimalism”, Pabellón 4D: 4Dimensions 4 Decades, ed. Lisa Schmidt-Colinet, 50-57).
attempted systematically to shape, to suit to its own convenience, the political, economic, social and cultural spheres to of the country that nourishes it until that country is changed into a sugar island”. For Benítez-Rojo the plantation is both the economic engine of a rising nation and the spatial confines in which popular culture comes into fruition. Indeed, by the time Cuba became a nation, its sugar and tobacco industries largely defined the island. Fernando Ortiz draws upon the production of sugar and tobacco, making the two commodities ideal socio-cultural and racial analogies for Cuba in his book *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. Sugar is specifically seen as a commodity whose mass production serves markets abroad. It requires arduous, inhumane work along with new technologies to form the sugar cane into white crystals. The sugar mill came to present a violent alchemy machine. Plantation spatiality became a predominant feature of coloniality throughout the Caribbean region and elsewhere in the Americas, a specter of modernity through which the economy of slavery expanded while empires reaped great wealth. And as Chapter 6 highlights, the sugar economy remained prevalent into 1960s and 1970s Cuba, both as an analogy for technological prowess and order, and as Cuba’s primary economic export to the Soviet Union.

In *Cuban Counterpoint* Fernando Ortiz theorizes the sugar mill as contributing towards the *super central* or “modern central”, an organizational mechanism that stands

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17 *The Repeating Island*, 72.
counter to the vegas where tobacco is grown. Ortiz writes regarding the “modern central”:

It is a complete social organism, as live and complex as a city or municipality, or a baronial keep with its surrounding fief of vassals, tenants, and serf. The latifundium is only the territorial base, the visible expression of this. The central is vertebrated by an economic and legal structure that combines masses of land, masses of machinery, masses of men, and masses of money, all in proportion to the integral scope of huge organism for sugar production.

Today the sugar latifundium is so constituted that it is not necessary for the tracts of land or farms that constitute it to be contiguous. It is generally made up of a nuclear center around the mill yard, a sort of town, and outlying lands, adjacent or distant, linked by railroads of the same general control, all forming a complete empire with subject colonies covered with canefields and forests, with houses and villages.18

Here the central refers to the spatial organization of the sugar latifundium, which represents the imposition of modernity given international market forces. His projection of the spatial organization of the plantation as both baronial and urban helps realize the manner in which the plantation is both a marker of modern capitalism and rooted in a history of class struggle. Concerned with the era in which he was writing (1940), Ortiz further regards the plantation as harkening to a recent colonial history and embedded within the political and socio-economic structure of Republican era Cuba. The built environment of the plantation came to represent the violent crossroads of modernity and coloniality outside the urban core of the port cities.

18 Cuban Counterpoint, 52.
As Michel-Rolph Trouillot highlights in his writing on creolization, the plantation is one of other noteworthy contexts in which Caribbean culture is produced, the earliest being the notion of the colonial frontier. The grid is a key feature of this frontier, in that it presents a rational, civic ideal in the formation of colonial cities. In their discussion of the relationship between visuality and alphabetic literacy in colonial Latin America, Thomas Cummins and Joan Rappaport note: “The grid was itself understood as a reducción, a model for creating order in a world in which antisocial and wild chaos lurked in the countryside (Rama).” The significance of the urban grid extends into the 20th century. In his influential book *Delirious New York* architect Rem Koolhaas heralds the grid’s “indifference to topology, to what exists, it claims superiority of mental construction over reality.” Both the creation of order and indifference to topography are implied by the spatiality of the plantation, where the buildings of the plantation align themselves to grid-like rectilinear coordinates. The grid as a conceptual apparatus of order and regulation is essential to understanding modernities in Cuba.

In his book *The Lettered City*, Ángel Rama suggests that city’s are constructed as symbolic representations before they become material entities. He writes: “Before

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becoming a material reality of houses, streets, and plazas, which could be constructed only gradually over decades or centuries, Latin American cities sprang forth in signs and plans, already complete, in the documents that laid their statutory foundations and in the charts and plans that established their ideal designs”. Urban reforms from the 19th century into the Republican era likewise draw inspiration from the utopic model of Western empire, privileging an ordered, modern city over economic and socio-cultural realities on the ground. As Rama discusses in his final chapter, political revolution takes place amid the legacy of the lettered city. He looks closely at the question of nationalism as central to cultural production in the 20th century, with texts by a lettered elite recalling the symbolic potency of the planned city. Many examples abound, such as the embrace of folklore and popular tradition, seen in the embrace of Afro-Cuban traditions by white intellectuals in early-mid 20th century Cuba. Such traditions are idealized as symbolic presentations within the urban terrain, and draw directly from the legacy of the colonial city and its implied order.

While its history dates back to antiquity, the grid plan was employed and informed by the square plaza emblematic of Spanish colonial cities. The Spanish crown published The Law of the Indies in 1573, providing formal guidelines for the project of colonization. The law outlined the creation of villas and prominent frontier cities, as

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22 The Lettered City, 8.
23 Ibid., 100.
they concerned dealing with native indigenous populations, with regards to their siting (the ideal geography for founding a city), and with regards to agriculture. The document particularly emphasizes the placement of prominent squares, serving cultural and symbolic functions within the city. Conceived of as the Spanish crown’s primary port in the Caribbean upon becoming the capital of the island in 1607, Havana expanded upon its original Plaza Mayor, today known as Plaza de Armas. As a circa 1575 map of the city makes apparent, the main square was adjacent to the ominous four-pointed star shaped fortification Castillo de la Real Fuerza (1558-77) (Figure 2.5). Not yet defined by a formal grid (rather an informal or semi-regulated one), and still featuring bohíos – round indigenous thatched abodes – at its outskirts, the nascent city was organized around the square and its adjacent fort.

Established to protect the city from raiding pirates, the city’s fortifications have a symbiotic relationship with the city’s urban form. By the close of the 16th century two more fortifications were built – Castillo de Punta (1582) and the Castillo de Morro (1589),

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24 As the document highlights: “The main plaza is to be the starting point for the town; if the town is situated on the sea coast, it should be placed at the landing place of the port, but inland it should be at the center of the town. The plaza should be square or rectangular, in which case it should have at least one and a half its width for length inasmuch as this shape is best for fiestas in which horses are used and for any other fiestas that should be held.” Axel I. Mundigo and Dora P. Crouch, “The City Planning Ordinances of the Laws of the Indies Revisited. Part I: Their Philosophy and Implications”, 254.

25 The establishment of the Plaza Nueva (today Plaza Vieja) in 1584 would result in the city’s original plaza being renamed the Plaza de Armas, given its proximity to the fort. Joaquin Wiess, La Arquitectural Colonial Cubana, Vol. 1, 27. Also see Paul Niell, “Bajo su Sombra: The Narration and Reception of Colonial Urban Space in Early Nineteenth Century Havana, Cuba,” 30-34.
both designed by engineer Batista Antonelli.\textsuperscript{26} The Castillo de la Real Fuerza, adjacent to the Castillo de Punta, is located slightly more inland and features a moat providing protection. As Figure 2.5 reveals, its design contains a particularly direct geometry, as four pointed edges extend sharply from the corners of the square shaped plan, resembling a ninja star. The severity of its pointed edges contrast the simplicity of its floor plan, itself composed of a 3x3 grid. In his 1671 engraving \textit{Havana, Cuba} Gabriel Bodenehr depicts the bay of Havana as if entering from a ship (\textbf{Figure 2.6}). While the foreground displays an array of ships chaotically hovering around the mouth of Havana’s harbor, the city makes up the background. Between the city and the sea vessels are the prominent fortifications, serving as a sort of gateway into the city. Bodenehr’s engraving highlights the visuality of the city’s fortifications as powerful points of containment and controlled engagement – as markers of Spanish dominion amidst ever growing economic trade.

As the city expanded over the next century, other plazas were built to incorporate various symbolic functions and societal roles.\textsuperscript{27} As Roberto Segre notes, this gave the early colonial city a polycentric organization that remained prominent

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\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{27} “Placing La [Castillo de la Real] Fuerza fortress on the Plaza de Armas disrupted the usual pattern of locating important buildings of the church (iglesia) and government (cabildo) on a single town square... [T]his gave rise to the dispersal of city functions to other towns squares and characterized Havana’s polycentric nature. Plaza de Armas held major military institutions, Plaza de la Catedral was home to the church, and the commercial activities concentrated around Plaza Vieja, while Plaza de San Francisco handled mainly foreign trade.” \textit{Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis}, 22.
\end{flushleft}
throughout the city’s history. Havana became most defined by the creation of city walls around its perimeter. Built between 1674 and 1740 to protect the interests of the Spanish crown, the walls enveloped the city grid as it began to expand beyond its borders. The city wall became a spatial form that mediated interactions in Havana, especially as the city expanded beyond its built walls. And like its fortifications, the wall became a means to contain the city from uncertain outside elements. A notion of containment or spatial control is central to the ideology of Spanish colonization, of architectures of reform attempting to ward off attacks from foreign competitors while preventing revolution from elsewhere in the territory.

Drawing from Michel Foucault’s suggestion that “space is fundamental in any exercise of power,” the imposition of the urban grid and fortifications were symbolic of the Spanish crown’s political power. While space facilitates and is fundamental to the exercise of power, it is not merely produced by hegemonic forces and ideology. As Henri Lefebvre writes: “But ideologies do not produce space: rather, they are in space, and of it. It is the forces of production that produce social space. In the process a global social practice is brought into being… [that] derive[s] not only from ideology but also from the symbolic properties of space, properties inherent to that space’s practical

28 For example, Segre’s discussion about imperialism in Spanish Caribbean architecture makes apparent the mechanisms in which U.S. empire expanded upon this polycentricism, creating a city of eclectic urban and architectural forms in the context of Havana and elsewhere. See “Preludio a la modernidad: el contexto caribeño,” 96-98.
occupation”. While forces of production in relation to political power (in this case containing a colonialist ideology regarding development) produce space, its the symbolic properties of space and the use of space that capture a given space’s ideological contours. Such contours are explored in the investigation of early nineteenth century Havana by David Brown, who discusses the relationship between those living within the city walls (intramuros) and outside the city walls (extramuros). Brown explains how populations of African descended Cubans in Havana’s extramuros, free and enslaved, revalorized intramuros Havana during carnival annually. Employing symbols of royalty amid African religious traditions, their rituals displayed “established and ongoing alternative structures of authority that publicly assert themselves during the carnival moment of ‘almost unlimited liberty’.” Artist Federico Mialhe’s mid-19th century lithograph Three Kings Day Festival, Havana Cuba (c. 1850) documents the jocund air of the city’s carnivalesque inversions, with the many vibrant, dancing figures in the center of the composition framed by the city’s colonial edifices (Figure 2.7). Analyzing representations of space alongside their use allows us to dismantle the symbolic meanings held by spatial and visual forms of power. That is, it allows us to think of the repercussions of symbolic space for a broad range of society, and to consider how

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31 David Brown, Santeria Enthroned: Art, Ritual and Innovation in Afro-Cuban Art, 43.
human subjects may appropriate spaces of power and their meaning, be it an act of resistance or revolution, or when induced by carnivalesque fervor.

The grid plan and its rationalizing program expanded as Havana grew beyond its walls, conforming to both topography and historical context. Major urban transformations modernize the city, perfecting the grid plan and incorporating 19th and 20th century neoclassical ideals to the layout of the city, including the creation of broad boulevards. Profound changes in colonial era Havana include the eleven-month British occupation in 1762-3, the neoclassical reforms of Governor Miguel Tacón, and the destruction of its city walls in the mid-19th century. With the rise of the sugar industry following the Haitian revolution and struggles between Havana’s creole elite and Bourbon authorities, Havana’s modernity became defined as much by its architecture of control and containment as its economic and political transformations. For example, the city of Havana experienced a notable construction boom during the reign of Governor Miguel Tacón (1834-38), inspired by information received from Spanish

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32 Following the British invasion and occupation, Spanish officials signed a treaty trading Florida and returning Havana to the Spanish crown. The event resulted in the expansion of Havana’s fortifications to protect Spain’s colonial jewel, converting Havana into the most heavily fortified city in the Americas.
33 Nonetheless the global designs of modernity, while seemingly unidirectional (from metropole to colony), became transformed by local context. For example, in his excellent study on colonial urban space in Havana, Paul Niell analyzes the history of El Templete, an 1828 neoclassical monument dedicated to the founding of Havana built near a Ceiba tree in the Plaza de Armas. Exploring the reception of the monument by varied populations – from Peninsulars (Spaniards in Cuba) and Creoles (whites born in Cuba) to free and enslaved Blacks – Niell writes, “El Templete generated a compelling statement of local pride, identity and myth within and somewhat without the imperial mythologies also sustained by the monument”. “El Templete and Cuban Neoclassicism: A Multivalent Signifier as Site of Memory”, 354.
diplomats regarding Washington DC. One prominent change was the creation of boulevards extending across the expanding city. As José María de la Torre’s 1849 map Picturesque Plan of Havana makes apparent, the city’s semi-regulated grid had moved well beyond the former walls, making up a larger area than the contained city (Figure 2.8). With a desire to express Spanish dominion, Tacón era autocratic reforms are made evident in new thoroughfares and stately neoclassical architecture that took claim of a city that continued to grow beyond the confines of its walls. As Carlos Venegas Fornias notes, the new reforms “were noted for their tendency to value three axes or main directions of movement and activity within Havana, providing a vertebrae for her urban body”. Venegas Fornias elaborates that the removal of the wall and the architectural style allowed the crown to lay a broader claim (or at least visual and spatial dominion) over the city, something that directly contributed to the wall’s removal within the two following decades.

Moving away from a Spanish colonial vernacular, architecture during the reign of Tacón was notably neoclassical. The Vitruvian model of the organized, well-sited city was enhanced by architectural style, as Greco-Roman references provided a sense of prominence and modernity. A more universal model of architecture provided a means to express the relevance of the crown, rather than designs derivative of earlier Spanish

35 “Más que como realizaciones aisladas, los logros de las obras emprendidas se destacaron por su tendencia a valorizar tres ejes o direcciones fundamentales de circulación y actividad dentro de La Habana, que vertearon su cuerpo urbanizado.” Dos Etapas de Colonización y Expansión Urbana, 23.
architecture. Further, the desire for mansion-lined boulevards and prominent civic spaces spoke to international trends influencing both the Creole elite and Spanish administrators.

Perhaps the most prominent imposition of the grid plan upon colonial era Havana’s landscape is the construction of the Necrópolis Cristóbal Colón, a city cemetery planned on the outskirts of the city. Today enveloped by the Vedado area of Havana, the symmetrical grid of the square shaped plan sits at an axis slightly diagonal to that of Vedado’s planned grid, near proper geographic coordinates. The plan converges at a chapel in the center that once housed the remains of Christopher Columbus. Constructed between 1871 and 1877, the necropolis “incorporated the papal tradition of five crosses into a plan of a standard ancient Roman city, thus turning the cemetery into a veritable ‘city of the dead’”. Its construction coincided with the Ten Years’ War (1868-1878), a bloody struggle for independence. While the cemetery was built to deal with the shortage of spaces within the former, inadequate Cementerio Espada, it also permitted Spain the opportunity to express imperial dominion. Built at an impressive scale, the grid plan of the Necrópolis leads towards its vital center, with the remains of Christopher Columbus once serving as a relic of Spanish colonialism.

The Ten Years’ War became the first major, notable attempt at revolution in Cuba, a concretization of the tensions between recently immigrated peninsulars from

Spain and Cuba’s creole elite. Further, the war highlighted geographic conflict, as many planters at the eastern end of the island expressed frustration with the explosion of the sugar economy further west. The war began when planter and lawyer Carlos Manuel de Céspedes freed his slaves and called for the rebellion against Spanish authorities, waging a battle from Cuba’s Eastern provinces that lasted 10 years. The struggle for independence, mounted on ideals of the Enlightenment, was consistently waged from Cuba’s Eastern provinces, with Havana left largely unscathed following both the Ten Years’ War and the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898). Havana, defined by an ever-expanding, uneven grid and great wealth built from the sugar empire, remained the political and economic center in which those in power defended their interests.

While the imprint of the grid plan upon Havana’s urbanscape drew from an imperial and universal models, local actors played a major role in the design of the city, transforming universal tropes of rationality into a specifically Cuban, eclectic, and often baroque urban order. The Necrópolis Cristóbal Colón and its regulated grid is an example of a form of architectural creolization that takes place within the master plan of the cemetery. Deploying different styles of architecture in the creation of tombs, cemetery plots employed the trend of eclecticism in Cuban architecture that became dominant by Republican era Havana. The cemetery came to reflect Cuban eccentricity as much as its architectures were embedded within a controlling or rational framework. Urban transformations into Havana’s late 19th century reflected heterogenous
architectural styles unbecoming of Tacón’s neoclassical styling or the logic of the grid. A closer look at architectural variation and the uses of space in the city reveals a complexity not implicit in the grand urban plans of the city, much like the manner in which Laplante’s prints memorializing the rise of the sugar factory fail to make explicit the social tensions – the potential calls to revolution and revolt – rising out of the violent injustice of slavery.

In this section I have highlighted dominant material and urban spatial forms that symbolize modernity in Cuba, most notably the grid and its outer-urban corollary, the plantation. As suggested by Paul Niell, such expressions not only form within complicated contexts of a heterogeneous city, but they help contribute to notions of nationalism fervent in Cuba’s late colonial period onwards. He implies a direct relationship between nationalism and coloniality, where references to the colonial provide a teleological arc towards the progressive modernization that continues to define Havana into the 20th century. Such a narrative, however, does not take into account the varied realities of structures of power such as the grid and the plantation – the rhythms within, or the way humanity may express its ambitions outside formal machinations.
Tropicality + Vanguardia

“Look at my monsters and the gestures they make,” Wifredo Lam comments regarding the hybrid, amorphous creatures barely emerging from the midnight blue, tropical forests of his 1942 gouache-on-paper masterpiece La Jungla, or “The Jungle” (Figure 2.9). Sausage lips, angular shapes, testicular chins, hand-like feet, limbs and bodies meshing into sugar cane-stalks; these creatures provoke the viewer because of the fear their corporeal disfiguration evokes. Further, they appear stuck in their vibrant environment, like colorful concoctions indistinguishable from their landscape, their reality. Painted during a five-year sojourn back to his native Cuba in the 1940’s, La Jungla is today recognized as Wifredo Lam’s great pictorial achievement and, according to critic Alain Jouffroy, “the first revolutionary plastic declaration of the Third World”. La Jungla well represents Lam’s syncretic imagery, an imagery that adapts European and American modernism – particularly Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism – with motifs of the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería, with which Lam became familiar as a child.

Nearly a century after Laplante depicts Cuba’s various plantations Wifredo Lam provides us a painting that presents an entirely different, even counter, spatiality. Implanted within the canvas is a metaphysical, corporeal world of abundance, modern and defiant; the jungle appears to be the antithesis of the ingenio. In the ingenio, people

37 Max-Pol Fouchet, Wifredo Lam, 198.
38 Lam, 34. Cited in Sims, Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 187.
appear to naturally conform to the order of their predisposed environment, whereas in
the *The Jungle* figures are defiantly trapped, expressing a resistance to order and control.

Often compared to his friend Pablo Picasso’s infamous 1907 painting *Les Demoiselles
d’Avignon*, Lam depicts five anthropomorphic figures to express a critique of modernity
much like the five prostitutes of Picasso’s painting.\(^3\) Though embedded within the
jungle full of sugar cane stalk, however, their “Africanity” or supposed primitivism
reaches beyond the notion of that which is debased or a representation of the dark past –
it becomes what Lam describes as “the reality of acceptance and protest”, defiant figures
whose primitivism is visually reflected in their complex spirituality, represented in
obscure, often indecipherable manners to the “western” viewer.

During an interview with his colleague Max Fol-Pouchet, Lam expresses the
concern of his work at large:

> Poetry in Cuba then was either political and committed, like that
> of Nicolás Guillén and a few others, or else written for tourists.
> The latter I rejected, for it had nothing to do with an exploited
> people, with a society that crushed and humiliated its slaves. No,

\(^3\) The connection between *The Jungle* by Wifredo Lam and Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* has been
commented on by various scholars. Not only was Lam a personal friend of Picasso but the paintings share a
similar scale, composition, and subject matter. According to Anna C. Chave, the five figures in *Les
Demoiselle d’Avignon* “could be identified with and blamed for not only the encroaching commodification,
the growing coldness or superficiality of social relations, but also the very ‘decline of love’ itself” (Pindel,
265). Patricia Leighton notes that by placing African masks on two of the figures, “Picasso identifies an
exploited group external to Western society with one of the most exploited groups within it, analogizing the
ironically more visible periphery with the corrupt center of French culture” (Pindel, 253). This association
with an “exploited [external] group,” or the “primitive,” depends on a notion of the other or primitive as
base and simple. In the case of Picasso’s prostitutes, the African imagery also suggests revulsion, a critique
of society for an assumed white, heterosexual male reader, as Chave argues (Pindel, 262). In Kymberly
Pinder (ed.), *Race-ing Art History: critical readings in race and art history*, 265, 253, 262.
I decided that my painting would never be the equivalent of pseudo-Cuban music for nightclubs. I refused to paint cha-cha-cha. I wanted with all my heart to paint the drama of my country, but by thoroughly expressing the black spirit, the beauty of the plastic art of the blacks. In this way I could act as a Trojan horse that would spew forth hallucinating figures with the power to surprise, to disturb the dreams of the exploiters.40

Trained in Cuba and Spain, Lam was recognized as Cuba’s most prominent modern artist by the time of his exilic return from France in 1941. The Cuba Lam returned to was transformed by World War II and the increasing presence of the U.S. military, tourism, and the mafia, as well as political chaos since the 1933 revolution against president turned dictator Gerardo Machado. Drawing from his heritage and training, Lam attempted to express Afro-Cuban modernity in order to counter dominant imaginations of Cuba as a hedonistic paradise.

Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián argues “that The Jungle embodies place in suggestively modern, diasporic, and global ways”.41 While identifying the jungle as a tropical place with pre-colonial and primitivist connotations within Cuba, the jungle garners a more universal symbology as it is referenced in the work of intellectual and artistic vanguards abroad and within the island. As Hernández Adrián elaborates: “[I]n the context of a somewhat celebratory atmosphere among newly relocated avant-gardists, The Jungle not only conjured visions of primitive places, of distinct tropical

40 Cited in John Yau, “Please Wait by the Coatroom,” 133. Original quotation from Max-Fol Pouchet, Wifredo Lam, 188-189.
savagery, but it also satisfied Surrealist desires for enigmatic, eroticized spaces of tropical depth”.\textsuperscript{42} Central to Lam’s work is not only an expression of a defiant Afro-Cuban modernity, but one of an identifiable place that counters the modernity of the plantation and the city: one that expresses the darker side of modernity. \textit{The Jungle} presents a subaltern form of knowledge, as a painting that emphasizes the voices of those often absent in the dominant discourses of modernity, depicting these subjects as a mysterious and powerful spiritual and physical force.\textsuperscript{43}

The subaltern or alternative modernity in Lam’s work nonetheless relies on colonial tropes, as suggested in the luscious tropical setting of the jungle. Krista Thompson theorizes \textit{tropicalization} or \textit{tropicality} as “the complex visual systems through which the islands were imaged for tourist consumption and the social and political implications of these representations on actual physical space on the islands and their inhabitants”.\textsuperscript{44} Looking at art, architecture and visual culture in the British Caribbean – particularly Jamaica and the Bahamas, Thompson traces the intricate relationship

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 354.

\textsuperscript{43} Walter Mignolo draws from Gayatri Spivak’s notion of the subaltern to reflect on the role of subaltern knowledge in relation to global designs of modernity, writing: “I conceive subaltern knowledges in tandem with Occidentalism as the overarching imaginary of the modern/colonial world system: Occidentalism is the visible face in the building of the modern world, whereas subaltern knowledges are its darker side, the colonial side of modernity.” When placing Lam’s \textit{La Jungla} in dialogue with idealist visualizations of the plantation (Laplante), one can see Lam’s desire to present the “darker” side of modernity, giving voice to its oppressed subject. \textit{Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Thinking, and Border Thinking}, 20.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque}, 5.
between tourist economies and the politics of representation. She explores how colonial era and tourism-based economies impact architectural and artistic production, as well as popular culture. Havana’s booming public sector as well as the real estate boom was connected to financial ties with the U.S. and the growing allure of Cuba as a destination for vice and relaxation. Nonetheless its sugar economy remained dominant into the 20th century – that is, Havana’s tropicality was not only employed with the visual culture of a tourist market, but also presented in the visual culture of its tropical exports, such as advertising for cigars and sugar.

In the previous section I explored how the spatial dictates of the Spanish crown and transatlantic economies are reflected in the built environment of colonial era Cuba, with an emphasis on how the grid and the plantation came to characterize the island. Universal models of reform continue to impact Havana in the 20th century, following Cuba’s independence in 1901. However, a major shift begins to take place among the vanguard (or avant-garde) and lettered class, as invocations of Havana and Cuba’s tropicality provide fodder for expressing modernity by incorporating a diversity of forms counter to that which is rational or Eurocentric in orientation. New modernities were expressed, complicating the narratives of universal design. Lam’s The Jungle is an expression of these divergent modernities, made evident in his critique of the cha-cha-cha.

45 It is important to note that the contexts of Bahamas and Jamaica are largely different from that of Havana – a vibrant urban metropolis. Nonetheless, Thompson’s interrogation of historic photographs and postcards through a theory of tropicality provide a means to think about the development of modernism in the Caribbean, one largely attached to colonial and neocolonial economic relations with Western powers.
cha, as he attempts to invert or decolonize expressions of tropicality geared to the touristic voyeur rather than the Cuban citizen. Lam invokes tropicality in a manner reminiscent of Cuba’s two-generation artistic vanguardia – that is, in the representation of figurations within space, however abstracted, in a style that echoes the modern subject’s identity and place. With the vanguardist movement beginning in 1920s Havana, artists began to explore notions of Cuban identity while resisting the academic conservatism of Cuba’s bourgeoisie, envisioning new worlds within plastic, visual mediums. Many artworks present figurations ranging from portrayals of individuals to urbanscapes referencing ornament and decorative elements of Cuba’s vernacular architectures, to representations of cultural or performative practices of the popular classes. Artworks by the first generation of vanguardia painters in Havana portray an explicit cubanidad, both in the representation of figure(s) and of place.

The famous ad *Visit Cuba*, by illustrator and editor Conrado Massaguer (c. 1950), has become an iconic representation for the island with its simple portrayal of a *rumbera* – or Cuban cabaret dancer (*Figure 2.10*). The woman floats at the center of the image, her arms with exaggerated red and white striped sleeves while holding up two maracas. She appears jovial and liberated, her shirt open to its waste. Her cubanidad is presented in the straw hat she wears, a reference to the Cuban campesino, as well as the African influenced forms of dance she characterizes. While Lam’s figures in *The Jungle* express a defiant modernity critical of popular modes of tropicality, Massaguer’s *Visit Cuba* ad
sings the “cha-cha-cha” Lam lamented above. That is, they both evoke a notion of the tropics and cubanidad through the placement of figures within space, though they abide by entirely different logics.

Tropicality and cubanidad become predominant in the artworks of the first generation of the Cuban vanguardia. The vanguardia started as an alliance of artists in Havana rejecting the traditional tastes of the Cuban bourgeoisie of the 1920s, with many artists returning from residencies in Paris and rethinking artistic strategies. A seminal moment in the formation of the vanguardia was the 1927 First Exhibition of New Art, organized in collaboration with the newly started periodical Revista de Avance. The exhibition featured several foundational modern Cuban painters, including Rafael Blanco, Antonio Gattorno, Víctor Manuel García, Marcelo Poggolotti, as well as American painter Alice Neel (then the wife of participating artist Carlos Enríquez). Founding member of the vanguardia Eduardo Abela contributed a drawing of a runaway slave defiantly breaking his shackles for a feature article on the exhibition for the May 15, 1927 issue of Revista de Avance (Figure 2.11). As the drawing makes explicit, the vanguardist group aimed to free themselves from the academic and traditional shackles of Cuba’s artistic past, utilizing the popular figure of the cimarrón, or runaway slave, as a metaphor. With many participants being members of the newly formed Minorista group – a collective of artists and intellectuals with a leftist, anti-imperialist orientation – the aspirations of the artistic vanguardia was tied with the complicated
political terrain in which cubanidad is evoked.

As Juan Martínez has highlighted, the vanguardia sought to define lo cubano, or that which is Cuban (a term interchangeable with cubanidad, or “cuban-ness”), often by utilizing cultural identities specific to Cuba, such as el campesino or the guajiro (terms used to refer to folks from the countryside), blacks and the emancipated slave, as well as the mulatta.\(^{46}\) This becomes evident in Víctor Manuel García’s 1929 painting Gitana Tropical, or “Tropical Gypsy” (Figure 2.12). Painted during his sojourn in Paris, the rather small oil painting is popularly claimed in Cuba to be a sort of Mona Lisa of the Caribbean. Drawing influence from Paul Gauguin into modernist painters of the 1910s and 20s, García specifically applies the notion of the gypsy figure into a Cuban context.

Likewise, Eduardo Abela’s iconic 1928 painting Triumph of the Rumba embodies cubanidad through the figural representation of the rumbera (Figure 2.13). Unlike the Visit Cuba ad, where the central figure is inviting and amid a simple background, Triumph of the Rumba depicts a mulata dancer in an intoxicating mist. Behind her is an amorphous mass of figures, many dressed in traditional Cuban garb; the figures provide an ethereal, Marc Chagall-like ambiance as they form a massive swirl. A sense of chaos is made explicit in the central figures framing. Here the rumba becomes a means to interrogate the island’s contested identity, while also celebrating its Dyonisian flare. That is, vanguardist artists deployed tropicality and cubanidad strategically, using it as

\(^{46}\) Cuban Art & National Identity: The Vanguardia Painters 1927-1950, 53-54, 81-82
a means to both critique Cuban society and form a modern identity, albeit often through a racialized other.

A notion of cubanidad emerges from the nascent nation within the vanguardist and intellectual elite, attempting to express a nationalist identity amid dramatic political changes that defined the Republican era. This elite promotes cultural expressions and manifestations that range from the popular (such as a religious ceremony) to the avant-garde (such as the abstract paintings of Los Once artists of the 1950s). In his exploration of race and cultural expression in Republican era Cuba, Luis Duno Gottberg writes that the use of a racialized identity provides “a strategy that presupposes the expression of the subaltern through a redemptive impulse or the sensibility of the lettered class”.47 That is, in the treatment of Cuba’s racial heterogeneity artists and writers attempt to create a notion of a unified culture, placing cubanidad within an ideology of mestizaje.

While an ideology of mestizaje is relevant across Latin America, discourses of cubanidad emerge from Cuba’s complicated and peculiar postcolonial history. While Cuba gained independence from Spain following the Spanish-American War, the U.S. occupied Cuba until 1901. Forced into signing the Platt Amendment, Cuba was in a tenuous position with the U.S., which reserved its right to intervene in Cuban affairs

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47 “Se conforma así una estrategia que presupone la expresión de sectores subalterno gracias al impulso redentor o a la sensibilidad de letrado, Este proceso de representación se susten en dos aspectos fundamentales… En primer lugar, el cuestamiento de la importancia de las identidades raciales dentro de la creación poética; en segundo lugar, la consagración de una identidad nacional mestizo”. Solventando las diferencias: la ideología de mestizaje en Cuba, 93.
while also setting a lease for a military base in Guantanamo. By the start of Gerardo Machado’s presidency in 1925 U.S. economic interests dominated the island, while prohibition in the U.S. made Havana a key locale for hedonistic tourism. While the bourgoiesie became patrons of academic style painting and more traditional trends in art (such as impressionism, which became popular in the early 20th century), Cuba became imaged for outside consumption. Like vanguardist artists who drew from racial and social stereotypes to evoke cubanidad, ads and postcards offered kitschy, picturesque portrayals of Havana and its inhabitants. Cubanidad and tropicality became central to expressing a modern Cuba, fissures and all.

The 1920s also marked a significant building boom. Most prominent is the Capitolio by Cuban architect and engineer José M. Bens Arrarte, a 1927 edifice for the Cuban Congress modeled after the Capitol in Washington, D.C (Figure 2.14). Located adjacent to the Parque Central, the ominous domed structure was built to have a larger dome and be taller than its U.S. counterpart, and was heralded as an architectural feat within the island.⁴⁸ Its neoclassical façade and bilateral symmetry recall the global designs of previous eras in Cuba, while its ornate, eclectic interior recall the Cuban

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⁴⁸ The journal El Arquitecto featured a special issue on the Capitolio in May 1929. Featuring many images heralding the interior design, sculptures, neoclassical elements, and structure of the building, the articles made explicit the importance of the building in the context of 1920s Cuba. In one image sections of prominent buildings – St. Peter’s in Rome, the Pantheon in Paris, the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., and St. Paul’s Cathedral in London – are overlayed with that of the Capitolio to display its prominence and gradeur. While its dome appears smaller than the domes of St. Peter’s and St. Paul’s, its scale is impressive as its dome is notably larger than the Pantheon and the U.S. Capitol, the building in which the Capitolio’s design was based. El Arquitecto 4, no. 38 (May 1929), 418.
Baroque. Most prominent is the *Statue of the Republic* inside the cupola of the main hall. Plated in gold and about 15 meters tall, it became the second largest covered sculpture in the world and a symbol for Cuban nationalism. Designed by Italian sculptor Angelo Zanelli, it presents an image of resolve and strength within the embellished interior.

French landscape architect Jean-Claude Nicolás Forestier designed the garden around the building, with four royal palms serving to frame the garden. The garden represented his greater efforts with his garden city plan for Vedado and his broader *Director Plan of Havana*, which connected the disparate grids of polycentric Havana through broad, tree-lined boulevards (Figure 2.15). Arturo Almondez describes Forestier’s plans as providing “creole Haussmans”, where global designs are adapted to the landscape and culture of their setting.49

Other prominent buildings helped display the great wealth amassed in Cuba’s economy, including the Presidential Palace (1920), the Presidio Modelo panopticon prison campus in the Isla de la Juventud (1927), the Bacardi Building (1930), the Colegio de Belén (1925), the Hotel Nacional (1930), the Hotel Sevilla-Biltmore (1923), and the continued expansion of the University of Havana’s newly relocated campus (discussed in Chapter 3). Ranging in style from neo-Baroque to Art Deco, each building was lavishly ornamented and prominently sited. Havana’s ascendancy was countered by growing inequality and the expanding of slums in city outskirts, as well as the threat of

political upheaval and revolution. This becomes evident in Carleton Beale’s 1934 book *Crime of Cuba*, a muck-raking exposé featuring photographs by U.S. photographer Walker Evans. In his photograph *Parque Central* Evans features a worker resting on metal chairs in the prominent park (Figure 2.16). His striking images of poverty and contradiction in Havana ran counter to popular depictions of Cuba as a touristic getaway, highlighting an inequality that beleaguered the city from its colonial era.

A 1933 revolution against dictator Gerardo Machado contributed to the end of the Platt Amendment (1934) and was followed by a politically tumultuous decade, leading to the passing of the 1940 Constitution. Also forming in the 1930s was a new generation of vanguardia artists, whose influences broadened beyond the Cuban academy and European modes of modernism. As Maria Llúïsa Borràs writes: “The second generation, whose leading painters were Mario Carreño, René Portocarrero, Mariano Rodríguez, Cundo Bermúdez, Roberto Diago, Luis Martínez Pedro, and Felipe Orlando, hardly entered the doors of San Alejandro [Academy of Art], traveled for the most part to Mexico City rather than Paris in their formative years, and developed a more emblematic representation of national identity”.

The Mexican muralist movement had a particular impact on the new generation as a means to express national identity. Artist Mariano Rodríguez shows a clear influence of muralism after returning from Mexico, having studied under Diego Rivera and Manuel Rodríguez Lazano. His

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50 Llúïsa Borràs et. al. (eds.), *Cuba Siglo XX: Modernidad y Sincretismo*, 368.
1944 painting *Guajiros*, for example, shows countryside Cubans within a muted, sullen setting. While not presenting the ideal or triumphant imagery of Diego Rivera, the painting uses figural forms to express a notion of cubanidad.

Literary journals and magazines played a huge role in the development of the vanguardia in both art and literature. They presented ideas for discussing national identity while adopting international models of expression. As Francine Masiello has suggested, *Revista de Avance* incorporated discussions of Afro-Cubanismo – a movement of black arts and poetry in Cuba – to questions of the nation state.\(^{51}\) The need for cubanidad to supercede racial divisions while celebrating diversity became prevalent among the artistic and literary elite, as made clear in Fernando Ortiz’s 1939 essay “La Cubanidad y los Negros”.\(^{52}\) Journals also became a way to present and discuss other artistic vanguards. In her investigation of connections between Cuban and Mexican art, Olga María Rodríguez Bolufé traces the manner in which a post-revolutionary Mexico becomes a model for thinking of Cuban nationalism. Citing the broad coverage of Mexico in Cuban media, Rodríguez Bolufé argues that Mexico’s imprint on Cuban art is

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\(^{51}\) Masiello writes: “Avance’s editors attempted to merge the racialist and nationalist positions. Accordingly, they consolidated antiimperialist concerns with a discussion of Afro-Cubans in sociological representation and in art. Sketches of and by Cubans of African descent, poems praising blackness, and celebrations of African heritage found their way into the pages of Avance”. “Rethinking Neocolonial Esthetics: Literature, Politics, and Intellectual Community in Cuba’s Revista de Avance”, 24.

\(^{52}\) In this essay, based on a lecture made at the University of Havana in 1939, Ortiz famously states: “Cuba es un ajiaco,” referring to the famous stew made throughout the island. His treatise on culture and nationalism attempts to defy racism while discussing the importance of diverse cultural lineages and traditions for the civil state. “La Cubanidad y los Negros,” 4.
undeniable. Cuba’s shared colonial legacy with its neighbor Mexico, and the continued dominance of a lettered class in both countries, allows Mexican tropes of nationalism to be directly relatable to Cuban identity politics, as seen in their shared embrace of an ideology of mestizaje.\textsuperscript{53} In the 1926 cover of Social by Conrado Massaguer, the founder and graphic designer of the popular magazine, Massaguer depicts a Mexican female sporting a large traditional sombrero (\textbf{Figure 2.17}). The graphic image refers to an article heralding Diego Rivera’s work, which likewise employs mestizaje to express a radical, nationalist modernity. Mexican muralism presented a new frontier in the presentation of nationalism through public art, of rethinking the relationship of art and architecture in modernity as an expression of nationalism.\textsuperscript{54}

\textit{Exposición Lam}

Organized by the Asociación de Estudiantes de Arquitectura y Planificación (or Student Association of Architecture & Planning) and located in the pavilion space of the

\textsuperscript{53} José Vasconcelos 1925 treatise \textit{La Raza Cósmica} opens with his thesis that when distinct races mix a “new” type of man is created. His opening section, “El Mestizaje,” discusses popular racial theories of the time to debunk a notion of superiority in favor of the “cosmic race”. While the influence of Vasconcelos classic text was widespread, notions of mestizaje developed in peculiar cultural contexts, as reflected in Ortiz’s writing on \textit{ajiaco} (see previous footnote). \textit{La Raza Cósmica}, xv, 30, 35. (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 2001)

\textsuperscript{54} “El generoso empeño se asume con sentido de deber ciudadano. En el proyecto palpita también una profunda inspiración de las relevaciones del muralismo mexicano. Integrar el arte a los muros de los edificios públicos significaba colocarlo en una nueva dimensión, y desde allí revelar una historia que había tenido carácter de epopeya, para con ella, establecer un nuevo nivel comunicativo que en tales condiciones semánticas sería capaz de expresar sus valores ideológicos no a partir del mero dato histórico sino en el complejo integrativo de significados creados a partir de la nueva situación comunicativa en el ámbito de sus relaciones contextuales,” Yolando Wood, \textit{Proyectos de Artistas Cubanos en los Años 30}, 79 ; cited in Rodríguez Bolafé, \textit{Relaciones artísticas entre Cuba y México} (1920-1950), 328.
Social Sciences building, the coordinators of the 1955 *Exposición Lam* invited the artist to collaborate with the students regarding its conception. Taking place during a brief two-week period between March and the beginning of April, the exhibition was co-sponsored by the deans of the Schools of Social Science and Architecture, expressing the shared discontent of students, faculty and administration regarding Cuba’s current political affairs. In the exhibition itself, the students attempted to use the formal ethos of Lam’s work in the design of the exhibition space. Coordinated and curated by Enrique Fuentes, Rafael Mirabal and Sócrates Cobas, the exhibition redefined the pavilion space in a variety of manners: through the placement of furniture, the use of a curved wooden panel and thick cloth to bifurcate the room vertically and horizontally, and the placement of the works.

Lam’s participation in the exhibition was largely recognized in the press as an expression of solidarity with the students at the University of Havana, where notable protests had begun in 1953 and continued over the next few years, causing the university to be shut down in 1956. Given waves of censorship in the press and the scale and brevity of the exhibition, little visual documentation of this Lam exhibition exists outside of the catalogue and the Student Association of Architecture & Planning’s journal – *Espacio*. While the more mainstream journal *Arquitectura Cuba* began to look more towards utopic, modernist architectural and planning models of Latin America and elsewhere during the 1950s, *Espacio* provided more leftist, critical perspectives
regarding the relationship of architecture and the state during the 1950s. This is seen in the writing of editor and architecture faculty member Pedro Martínez Inclán, especially in his critiques of various projects by the Ministerio de Obras Publicas (MOP) in Espacio.

Espacio also provided a voice for students within the university association, who had not yet affiliated with the more established ranks of the Colegio Nacional de Arquitectos, Cuba’s primary organization for professional architects and the publishers of Arquitectura. Other exhibition projects featured in Espacio include Romanian-Cuban constructivist artist Sandu Darie and geometric abstract painter Luis Martínez Pedro, allowing students to become actively involved in rethinking the relationship between vanguardist art and architecture – that of the visual and the spatial – through curatorial practice. The curatorial space became a means to experiment with and reconsider the relationship of art and architecture. To understand how the spatial program of the exhibition relates to the work of Lam, it is necessary to analyze Lam’s works in this 1955 exhibition. Understanding how Lam conceives space within the canvas directly will help inform our understanding of their display, be it in a gallery or on an edifice. The collaboration in Exposición Lam shows how vanguardist elements in plastic arts come to reconfigure the white cube of the gallery.

Three published images of Exposición Lam were published in the January-April 1955 edition of Espacio, displaying the manner in which the space was rethought by the architect curators. Two of the images have the floor and ceiling cropped out so that
objects of art, furnishing, and gallery walls seem to float on the magazine page, recalling Mies van der Rohe’s architectural collages. These images serve as a guide to analyze this influential exhibition in greater depth. The picture located on the lower half of the right page of the spread features two paintings that embody Lam’s pictorial vocabulary (Figure 2.18). To the right is Lam’s 1955 painting Peut-Être, which features dynamic lines and geometric forms to draw visual interest in a multitude of directions. The right side of the canvas features a ring of white shield-like rhomboid forms surrounding a central, darker rhomboid. Lowery Stokes Sims provides various interpretations of the rhomboid forms frequently seen in Lam’s work, drawing on Robert Farris Thompson’s reading of the forms as having Abakua (or Congolese) roots, where the forms are read as points of entry and exit between realms of existence. The diamond-like shields have also been interpreted as symbols of patrimony, displaying the means with which Lam utilizes abstract form to provide a visual vocabulary that oscillates between a modern, socio-political realm and that of the spiritual world of the African diaspora.

To the left and partially obstructed by one of the partitions is Lam’s painting Inseparable of the same year, with two-bird-like figures providing a ying-yang composition. The bird to the right recalls Pablo Picasso’s famous lithograph of a dove completed for the 1949 International Peace Congress in Paris. However this bird has an air of defiance, its sharp wings thrusting it from the left of the canvas to the right, in a

dynamic tango with the seemingly diabolical bird to the left, embedded with faces that arguably invoke Santería spirits.

Sims elaborates that in “several paintings done in 1953-1955 these birds come to symbolize more emphatic, male embodiment of ‘Cuban nationhood and pride’” – something often associated in Cuban art with the figure of the cock, or gallo. Lam’s use of birds in this context – of diametrically opposed birds inseparable in their struggle and inherent unity, in their black and white contrast – provides a formal expression regarding the Republican era Cuba, a period defined by political instability and sharp divides throughout the island. Lam’s collaboration extended beyond the exhibition space, and the artist contributed a host of drawings and illustrations created specifically for the feature article in the edition preceding, or rather anticipating, the exhibition. The cover of the November to December issue features abstracted figurative forms like the ones describe previously (Figure 2.19). Atop a stark, simple black background emerges a winged horse-like figure, and above it a one-eyed winged diamond, recalling both the rhomboid forms depicted in many of Lam’s paintings as well two sharp triangles providing a vertical axis countering the horizontal axis of the horse-like figure below. The colors of the paintings are recalled in the design of the exhibition, with the stark

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black, white and red often seen in Lam’s paintings of the fifties complementing other works using more muddy hues of tan and brown.

Beyond providing dynamic compositions that draw the viewers’ eyes across the canvas, Lam’s anthropomorphic creatures present a zeitgeist for the era, as seen in the writing on Lam within the journal as well as the excerpts of text translated for the exhibition’s pamphlet-like catalogue. In the essay by José Alvarez Baragaño in Espacio, Lam is identified as an artist who draws upon the spiritual in modern art in an act of defiance. Identifying Lam as a painter who, like his European counterparts, unlocks a fourth dimension, the authors focus on how his use of “dissonant magic” and the occult redefines modernity, making a sense of violence and defiance apparent through the act of painting. For Baragaño, it is the triumph of the irrational that allows Lam’s work to so effectively relay its contemporary reality, both in the Cuban context and universally.

While the curators drew from such a reading of Lam’s work, it was the new direction of his most recent works that attempted to redefine notions of the spiritual within a formalist framework. Lam’s use of perpendicular axes and dynamic diagonals thrust his figures across the canvas, creating a sense of urgency and defiance. The three student curators draw from these compositions in their design of the exhibition space. Another image – located prominently as the sole image on the opening page – shows how the deliberate placement of furniture contributed to the composition (Figure 2.20). The placement of a wooden bench with reading material adjacent to a Harry Bertoia
diamond lounge chair imbue the space with a sense of contemporaneity as well as being a site of contemplation. The room is most defined by curved, dynamic partitions – horizontal and vertical – that mimic to the compositions of Lam’s most recent work. On the left protrudes a clear wall panel featuring drawings on both sides, likely the study drawings for Lam’s 1948 painting *Belial, Empereur des Mouches*. The painting broadens the scope of Lam’s depiction of the spiritual, with its depiction of “la charade chine” or the number based Chinese Cuban lottery popular on the island. It shows the transculturation of the spiritual – the blending of distant traditions that contributes to Cuba’s revolutionary ethos.

Other paintings, such as his totemic paintings of the mid-1950s, utilize the notion of the totemic in surrealism while representing the deities and spiritual forces of the African diaspora of Cuba within the tall canvas. In their display in the exhibition, the totems did not rest against the wall, but were placed a short distance forward in alliance with the room’s light fixtures, as if they were free standing sculptures. Another painting which protrudes from the wall and breaks the static rhythm of the typical gallery space is Lam’s 1955 painting *Quand je ne dors pas, je rêve*, or *When I am not Asleep, I dream*, which features a recumbent figure resting on a bed as a bat-like creature or shadow cowers above. By having the painting emerge from the wall this dream-like nightmare seems to float within the gallery space, haunting the viewer.
The painting that dominates the gallery space is undoubtedly the massive 1949 painting *Grande Composition*, referred to in the exhibition’s catalogue as *Proyecto Mural* (Figure 2.21). I would argue that the reference of the work as a mural was no mere coincidence. It refers to the gallery space’s architectonic makeover, infusing the populist potential of the mural into the confines of a gallery space. The title *Proyecto Mural* might also refer to the fact that the mural appears projected from the wall, seen in its placement slightly in front of the wall. The exhibition’s placement of art works beyond the surface of the wall helps reenvision the traditional gallery space, to infuse it with the spatial energy and compositional flow of Lam’s paintings. The mural-like *Grande Composition* is a precursor to the direction of Lam’s work in the 1950s. The tan paper mounted on canvas seeps through the oil paint, as figures traverse the canvas in various directions. Unlike the *The Jungle*, where the figures are embedded in the sugar cane stalk forest, the characters of *Grande Composition* stand freely as their corporeality is defined by the unpainted surface or hues of blue and grey amidst a dark painted background. Like ghosts, these are the hallucinating figures Lam cites as disturbing our dreams, of questioning an inherently corrupt order.

The figures in *Grande Composition* resemble those of his mural for the Esso Standard Oil Company in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana (Figure 2.22). Featured on the first floor on a wall with a doorway, the figures wrap around the doorway and redefine the wall. Hues of brown, black and white dominate the scene, as arrows,
Triangles and other geometric shapes provide a sense of urgency. A compelling photograph of the mural was included in the *Espacio* journal with the illustrative feature on Lam – it depicts the artist looking into a mirrored wall reflecting both himself and the mural, with tropical foliage in between (Figure 2.23). The reflection in the broad mirror allows Lam’s figures to activate the room on multiple surfaces, bringing the dynamism of his painting to the building’s refined, rectilinear and corporate modernism.

The building for the Esso Standard Oil Company was among the first in Havana to incorporate the plastic arts at a significant scale, featuring the work of many painters alongside the elevator corridor on each floor. Including murals by Amelia Peláez, Carlos Enríquez, José Rigol, Carmelo González, Enrique Moret, and René Portocarrero, the building represented a broad swarth of the artistic vanguardia. Abigail McEwen has suggested that the commission of the seven artists indicates the manner in which the vanguardia and muralism is embraced by the state and corporate interests in a time when part of the vanguard is moving in different directions than the more established or “conservative” artists above. She writes, nonetheless: “In the work of Lam in particular, muralism first began to shed its moralizing political ethos and social realism, and his widely acclaimed contribution to the Esso building set a new standard for the integration of avant-garde aesthetics and monumental public spaces in Cuba. His fresco mural suggested a powerful, alternative expression of modernity to that of the nationalist vision evolved by the Mexican muralists and emulated by Cuba’s academy,
and it would be an important precedent for public projects”. \textsuperscript{57} I would argue here that the power of Lam’s work not only comes out of his complex figurations, but its spatial dynamics – its use of diagonal axes to counter its Cartesian coordinates. Much like architects using new technologies of prefabrication, Lam is attempting to think beyond the grid, to create expressive forms that become subsumed by the proponents of cubanidad.

Lam returned to Havana shortly after the Exposición Lam to complete a mural for the Seguro Médico building by architect Antonio Quintana, located on La Rampa in a central part of Vedado (Figure 2.24). Commissioned in 1955 for the lobby in the building’s five-story base, the 23-story highrise was not completed until three years later. Nonetheless, there is a telling formal relationship between the form of the highrise with that of the mural. The monochromatic mural is located in the building’s primary lobby facing the boulevard La Rampa. Immediately visible in the silhouette-like mosaic are Lam’s soaring birds and shields, images of a metaphysical defiance. The simplicity of the mural contrasts the façade of the Seguro Médico, which is a play on the architectural form of the grid. With its tower sitting on a podium, a grid is implied throughout the buildings surfaces, while the variation of its skins create a dynamic complexity that seems to supercede the buildings dominant grid forms (albeit through other grid-based

forms). Most notable are the bright colored balconies rising up the center of the building in a slightly irregular pattern, given the building a rhythmic sense of defiance that recalls the earlier works of Lam. In a mural in the building’s second lobby – for the part of the building housing offices rather than residences – is a mural by Mariano Rodríguez that like Lam uses abstracted forms, albeit with a greater range of colors. Titled Boomerang, the composition recalls his Gallo paintings of cocks, a bird that comes to represent Cuban rural living. The mural is more abstract than figural, but captures a spatial dynamism akin to the murals of Lam.

It is important to note here that Lam, along with a host of Cuban artists including Amelia Peláez and René Portocarrero, collaborated together with clinical therapist Dr. Juan Miguel Rodríguez de la Cruz between the years of 1951 and 1952. The doctor invited artists of Cuba’s Vanguardia to his suburban home to experiment with ceramic arts. Previously trained by a Czechoslovakian ceramicist specialist, he supported new techniques of creation of art in Cuba.58 His space and its kiln provided a means to create personal ceramic objects as well as the materials for large-scale murals. The impact of ceramic art became evident among many of the artist participants – it could even be argued that the evolution of Lam’s work, greater influenced by Abstract Expressionism in the 1960s, was also influenced by his training in ceramics and mural commissions, as

the tactility of space became more pertinent in the construction of murals. Lam’s works themselves began to explore how forms in movement redefine the two-dimensional space of the canvas, and have an atmospheric nature despite their flat backgrounds.

*Exposición Lam* presents a fascinating and largely unstudied counterpoint in the development of vanguardist art and architecture in Cuba. It not only shows the way art was incorporated into architecture, it displays the manner in which vanguardist art and its formal explorations informed the realm of architecture. It was Lam’s own local expressions within “universal” artistic practices that served as an inspiration for the architect curators and in architecture in general, where a revolutionary ethos would collided with reformist tendencies. The curators attempted to reinterpret curatorial practices by rethinking the coordinates of the grid, utilizing the spatial dynamism of Lam’s two-dimensional surfaces in their placement of objects within the gallery space. They wanted to adopt the revolutionary ethos of Lam’s symbolic world of figures, who traverse the confined space of the canvas while seemingly defying it. Buildings became symbolic markers capturing the ethos of modernity, concrete and ceramic communicators of the vanguard.

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59 Many of the works in *Exposición Lam* traveled to Caracas shortly thereafter for a solo exhibition at the Museo de Bellas Artes, reconfiguring the neo-classical courtyard of the uber-modernist capital city of Venezuela. Receiving much fanfare, the exhibition prompted a return where he would complete a ceramic tile mural for the botanical gardens (titled *Mural*). “Exposición, Lam : Mayo 8 al 22, 1955,” Caracas, Venezuela: Museo de Bellas Artes, exhibition pamphlet, Museum of Modern Art Library, New York City.
Building Cubanidad

In 1958 city plans were set to transform the historic core of Havana, including a demolition of historic buildings in Habana Vieja for more car-friendly thoroughfares, the creation of an artificial island off the Malecón, and the placement of a massive presidential palace across the bay (Figure 2.25). Supported by former dictator Fulgencio Batista and created by a team led by Josep Lluís Sert, then dean of Harvard’s Graduate School of Design, the new city plan – or the Plan Piloto – attempted to take the modernist urban planning evident in Havana’s outer suburbs into its colonial core. They attempted to entirely redefine the city as an organized, modernist utopia, as seen through the imposition of a more refined, dominant grid. This hyper or utopic modernity had a precedent stretching back into the city’s founding, presenting an adaption of historic urban space rather than a complete erasure. This is made evident in that the new grid-based plan of Sert transposed nicely upon the original squares of the 16th century Spanish colonial city.

The most striking features of the 1955-1958 Plan Piloto of Havana are the artificial island emanating from the Malecón and the gargantuan Palacio de las Palmas presidential palace across the bay, both creating new urban centers within the largely
polycentric city of Havana (Figure 2.2). Located nearby the new tunnel connecting Old Havana to the fortifications east of the bay, the relocation of the presidential palace was indicative of real estate development forecasted for this largely uninhabited part of the city. The most notable aspect of the new palace is its grid-based conformation. The palace takes the form of an exact square, while its surrounding gardens with pools defined by rectilinear coordinates. Alongside the more irregular fortifications and a privileged topography, the new palace expresses control and power in its direct formalism.

The palace was to be defined iconographically by the Royal Palm, Cuba’s national tree. The Palacio de las Palmas was to comprise of a grid of columns abstractly resembling the national tree, fluting upwards to the grid shaped ceiling (Figure 2.27). The palace’s form and program is somewhat reminiscent of the contemporary design of the Bacardi office in Santiago de Cuba by Mies van der Rohe, also never built. At the same time its figural columns, its employment of patios, and its tropical setting recall their cubanidad. In his cogent analysis of Sert’s work in Cuba, Timothy Hyde writes: “The tension between modernist tenets of abstraction and the symbolic potency of figuration produced a representational equivocation comparable to the ambiguity of the

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60 “The city defies most of the conventional schemata that classify cities by their shape or skylines. Urban geographers and literary scholars (Cabrera Infante 1991, 300-301), for instance, are intrigued by its polycentric structure”. Coyula, Scarpaci and Segre, Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis, 1.
61 The revolution would cut short the plans for the building of the Bacardi headquarters, though its design can be seen in future Mies van der Rohe buildings such as the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, Germany.
political implications.”  This tension remains in 1960s Cuba, where debates about ethics and ideology insert themselves into the island’s new architectures, which linger between new technologies of pre-fabrication and attempts to invoke, figurally and spatially, cubanidad.

Though the Plan Piloto was eventually rejected by the incoming 1959 Revolution, its modernist and utopic ethos remained prevalent throughout the following decade. Drawing from international models, such projects illuminate a nationalist fervor that attempted to present Cuba as an example of modernity to the world at large. While urban plans such as that of Sert reflect the movement towards a rationalized, grid-based urban layout, it also incorporated the tropical flair of the city and its social dynamics. Such plans are dually vanguardist, in a universalist sense, and nationalist, culturally reflecting cubanidad. Modernities transformed over the 20th century, incorporating non-geometric based forms symbolic of nationalist expressions within a contained, grid-like and rationally organized spatial framework.

“Place-images” in art and popular culture by local and foreign artists and designers often exhibited an exoticized notion of Cuba, producing cultural stereotypes that became embedded within Cuban society – a society notably divided by race and class.  In this section, I explore the ways in which place, at a nationalist and regional

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62 Constitutional Modernism, 256.
63 Drawing from Rob Shields discussion of place-images, Krista Thompson writes: “Place images or destination images can become viewed as representative of the essential character of a place, despite the
level, is expressed in the art and visual culture of Republican era Havana (1902-58). Visual representations of cubanidad and tropicality draw from modernist tropes of abstraction in the visual arts, which comes to influence spatial form in Cuban architecture. That is, architects attempting to draw from the revolutionary ethos of the artistic vanguardia utilize abstract spatial form to create connotations of place. Also drawing from a variety of international models, architects utilize gestural and curved forms alongside a colonial spatiality. Architects also began to work more collaboratively with other designers and artists, rethinking the way architecture could represent culture as an art in and of itself while also providing a meaningful framework for objects of art.

Modest mural projects were commissioned as early as the 1930s, bringing a figural, nationalist modernism into architectural spaces. Domingo Ravenet’s 1945 two frescoes for the Biblioteca Central of the Universidad de la Habana, for example, depict Prometheus in two oblong semicircles. In one fresco an unclothed Prometheus is laying shackled as an eagle feasts at his midsection and a female figure – possibly the republic – reaches towards him and embraces his head. In the corresponding fresco the body of Prometheus extends as if flying, from a scene of a galaxy to the left to the fire at the right. Ravenet shows a clear influence of the muralist movement, as he uses symbolic specificities of, and changes in, local geopolitical environments (Shields 1991 47).” Thompson specifically discusses the manner in which photographs depicting the British Caribbean are disseminated and become part of national and regional identity. *An Eye for the Tropics, 5*
figures to present a notably political statement. With the carnivorous eagle representing
the U.S., Ravenent is commenting on the beleaguered state of Cuba, which he counters
with the fresco where Prometheus seeks truth in his grasp for the fire. Another 1945
mural by Ravenet titled El Tabaco at the Ministerio de Agricultura more extensively
shows the Mexican muralist movement in its depiction of tobacco workers. By the 1950s
the plastic integration of architecture will become more overt, as discussed in the
following chapter. The examples of Ravanet as well as various murals from 1937 at the
Instituto Tecnológico Hermanos Gómez serve as early precursors for a trend that allows
vanguardist practices in art and architecture to inform one another.

Architects themselves were drawing upon literary and artistic expressions of
modernity and identity, attempting to evoke a notion of cubanidad both through
material and spatial form. In his analysis of modern architecture beginning in the 1930s,
Eduardo Luis Rodríguez suggests: “Two trends existed – one, radical and exclusive, that
required emptying modern architecture’s body of any reference to local tradition or
national identity; the other, open and inclusive, that advocated adjusting the modern
postulations to specific conditions – which divided Cuban architects in a theoretical
debate that gradually increased while concurrently becoming clearer”.64 Here
Rodríguez suggests a polemical relationship between international modernism and
projections of cubanidad, or more specifically the idea of tradition in architecture.

Architects were subject to climactic and cultural considerations, and often applied notions of tradition to modernist architectures. For example, Manuel Copado’s award-winning 1944 Solimar Building shows the way Cuban architects were working with rounded, undulating forms that seemed rhythmic and sensual (Figure 2.28). While the streamline aesthetic and use of materials exhibit the buildings international influence, its curved forms and the manner in which it transforms its compact urban environment give the building a Cuban personality.

Various architects debated the manner in which to express cubanidad, attempting to go beyond the colonial vernacular and the dictates of new building models and technologies. Perhaps most evocative of expressing a Cuban spatiality was architect Eugenio Batista, an architect who began exploring connections between colonial architecture and spatiality in Cuba. A strict Jesuit Catholic with a fascination with the liturgy and medieval culture, Batista posited a cubanidad counter to the figural representations of vanguardist artists and popular visual culture. His 1939 Casa de Eutimio Falla Bonet, for example, exhibits a spatiality that is both modern and traditional (Figure 2.29). Ceramic tiles on the ceiling and its color recall the colonial, while its simple, rational layout recall the modern. The influence from the spatiality of the hacienda is made explicit in the way he tiers various interior and exterior spaces, creating a house that is horizontal and calming in orientation. It exhibits a tranquil, ascetic setting for a suburban home. Here cubanidad conforms to tradition in a modern sense,
one that is neither radical nor critical or considerate of a “subaltern” other, but instructive in how physical forms of space may evoke cubanidad.

While Eugenio Batista had a clear influence over his peers, his approach appears subdued when considering two trends that were popular in the 1950s: the use of exaggerated curved and round forms, and the advent of technologies of prefabrication in architecture. An icon of Cuban modern architecture and example of such trends is Max Borges’ Club Tropicana, a 1951 addition to the outdoor space of the Caberet Tropicana, where performances still take place today (Figure 2.30). Featuring what are called crystal arches, the facility used parabolic concrete arches and glass walls to create a space designed for the luxuriance of the tropics. Having worked with Spanish engineer Felix Candela in Mexico in experimenting with parabolic arches, Borges returned to Cuba to apply the curved forms to the islands tropical landscape. As Rosa Lowinger notes, “parabolic concrete arches and glass walls was the perfect complement for this garden setting, the perfect marriage of form and function – the credo of contemporary modernism. It was also a completely Cuban adaption of the style, a space designed for the luxuriance of the tropics”.65 The arches were most useful in creating a massive, cavernous interior space broken up with light, where the exterior penetrates the interior. Imaged for tourists seeking to experience the rumba-inflected cabaret, the curved arches came to present the tropicality of this building – irregular and sensual, amid tropical

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65 Tropicana Nights: The Life and Times of the Legendary Cuban Nightclub, 105.
Perhaps the most prominent of architects by the 1950s, Mario Romañach presented a balance between the approaches of Borges and Batista. In his *Casa de Félix Carvajal* (1955) Romañach uses texture, pattern and spatial form to express a modernity that refers to its tropical, regional setting. Diagonally oriented ceilings counter the rectilinear coordinated of the façade. References to the tropical setting are subtle, such as the large windows with wooden shutters (to work with the breeze) and combination of textural surfaces inside and outside, providing a modern take on the overpowering visuality of the Cuban baroque and eclecticism. Seen more effectively in his apartment blocks, Romañach’s work conforms to a standard grid while subtly transforming it, using local materials and inventive spaces to do so. Here Romañach reflects a trend happening with the artistic vanguardia in the 1950s – rather than fully preoccupied with expressing Cuban identity, a new generation begins to experiment more profusely with abstraction and identify with universal approaches to cultural expression.

In his 1954 building *Casa Abad-Villegas*, the young Cuban architect Ricardo Porro alluringly presents the tension between the universal and traditional (*Figure 2.31*). The house façade comprises of a circular and diagonal composition, with a giant vulva shaped fountain at its front. The vulva alludes to sexuality and sensuality, a perverse and radical statement in domestic architecture. Its atypical form is met with façade recalling vitrales (colonial stained glass windows). Like Lam’s painting *The Jungle*, Porro
portrays a defiant prostitute in architectural form; a gendered architecture drawing upon the polemics of late Republican-era Havana through corporeal figuration and abstract geometric form. As discussed in Chapter 4, the work of Porro incorporates innovative inorganic form, attempting to express cubanidad through architecture that references the past while exhibiting a revolutionary flair.

While formal gestures differ in modern art and architecture, the 1950s becomes a period where artists and architects begin to redefine their practice through collaboration and mutual influence. Architectural models and technologies from abroad continued to be applied, while local considerations came to transform them. The expressions of the vanguardist artists particularly held sway among professional architects, as in the case with Exposición Lam, allowing collaborations that extend beyond the plastic integration of architecture into the role of interior and urban design. The influence of vanguardist artists in the realm of design is especially seen in the case of the Habana Hilton, as discussed in the following chapter. In the fine arts, figural and abstract form came to challenge academic conservatism, and become a means to present a cubanidad.

Further, artists became invested in the urban milieu in which they practiced, incorporated the architectonic into their work, as seen in the case of Peláez and Portocarrero.

Broadly, a revolution of forms in the spatial realm is parallel in scope to that in the visual realm – in both realms, gestural non-organic forms come to present a thematic
revolution related to national identity, while geometric and regulated form invoke the telos of technological innovation. In this context, cubanidad became a catch-all phrase for describing a cultural relevance in works of art and architecture. Whether this relevance was through a defiance of external impositions, where forms of domination are countered by the gestural and spiritual ethos of a people and their nation, or through a national pride in the achievements of modernity in the guise of technological and political reform. At the same time, forms of technological innovation, such as the grid and the plantation, incorporate such gestural expressions. The dialectic of rational form and technology versus expressive and nonrational form (or the universal versus the traditional), whether in the production of space or the work of artists, becomes synthesized in the mythology of revolution that comes to afore in the 1960s. With everything needing to fit within the revolution, the integration of art and architecture provided a cubanidad whose unconventional and rectilinear forms would all fit under the umbrella of the “revolutionary”.

In this chapter I have placed the notion of revolution – or being revolutionary – in the center of my analysis of art and urban material culture. While such a narrative complicates the broader visual culture of 1960s Cuba, it does not take into account what became the dominant images of revolution following 1959 – that of guerrilla warfare and heroism, as made evident in the photographs discussed in Chapter 1. While both vanguardist practice and new technologies of construction contribute to a notion of the
revolutionary, the dominant image of revolution underwent a radical change. Such a change does not deny the heritage of past formulations of reform and of the revolutionary, but rather presents a transculturation, where the revolution is attached to images of guerrilla warfare and a new set of founding fathers. Revolutionary expression is appropriated, redefined by the revolutionary takeover of 1959.
On the eve of January 1, 1959, dictator Fulgencio Batista fled Cuba, marking the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, an event met with rejoicing in the streets of Havana. The following day six hundred rebels entered the skyscraper Habana Hilton Hotel, taking the grand ballroom and expansive lobby as their headquarters. Over the next few days, the Revolution coercively claimed the Hilton hotel as their home base and headquarters, re-appropriating and converting the posh hotel into a symbol of revolutionary takeover. The young hotel, completed nine months prior in March 1958, represented a marker of both U.S. imperialism and the excesses of Batista’s eight year reign over Cuba. This modernist landmark became one of the initial spaces of appropriation and revision. Over the next few years, Cuba’s new government inherited the aesthetics of the past decade, revalorizing vanguardist art and architecture and repurposing both architectural spaces as well as private and public collections of art and visual culture throughout the city of Havana.

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The tallest hotel in Latin America upon its completion, the blue and white building recalled the nearby ocean, providing the sleek modern behemoth a sense of tropical leisure (Figure 3.1). The Habana Hilton was designed by U.S. architect Welton Becket and Associates in collaboration with Cuban married couple and architects Lin Arroyo and Gabriela Menéndez, and vividly illustrates the hybridity of 1950s modern architecture in Cuba, but also its reliance on U.S. economic influence. Towering 25 stories, the hotel dominates its environs. It is located five short blocks from Havana’s acclaimed waterfront, El Malecón, and appears as a symbolic and indexical urban marker, overlooking the Universidad de la Habana, older Havana, and modernist Vedado. The Habana Hilton sits at the Northeast corner of Calle 23, or La Rampa, and Calle L, on elevated ground in an area that had become a cultural nexus of the rapidly developing 1950s Havana neighborhood of Vedado. Further, the use of blue ceramic mosaics throughout the exterior reflects its environment near the ocean: it is a tropical aesthetic applied to modernist, corporate architecture.

The Habana Hilton provides an example for how the leaders of the 1959 Revolution cannibalized the former aesthetics of the Republican era – that is, how the Revolution drew from the former vanguardias of the past two decades, as well as utopic approaches to urban design, to mark new spaces of dominance and cultural legitimacy. Its appropriation also signals the changing use of the space, as it was formerly envisioned as luxury resort for mostly North American tourists. In this chapter I argue
that the act of physical appropriation is parallel to a symbolic or conceptual appropriation by artists, writers and architects. In a Caribbean context, appropriation does not merely encompass the practice of incorporating visual strategies from abroad or within one’s varied cultural make-up. It is part of a modern project that, in the context of Cuba, contributes to the branding of a “Revolutionary” aesthetic.

Historian Nicola Miller analyzes the teleological narrative that contributes to a “Revolutionary modernity,” highlighting that “the government did not so much try to found a wholly new culture as seek to connect the radical elements of Cuba’s existing cultural traditions to the revolutionary project of decolonization.” Miller argues that Cuba was able to trace nationalist and vanguardist aspects of the past to contribute to a Revolutionary project that emphasized cultural production and fervently supported the arts. However, this is also true of aspects of the past not representative of vanguardist or radical elements, but rather to popular and reformist elements tied to the culture of tourism and economic exploitation from prior decades – what artist Wifredo Lam refers to as the “cha cha cha”.

The Habana Hilton’s invocation of international modernism, tropicality, and cubanidad illustrate the importance of appropriation in forming a revolutionary aesthetic. First, the construction, promotion and opening of this glamorous and sleek

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modern edifice stand in stark contrast to the war developing out East. In Chapter 1, I looked at the developing Revolution and its representation in international media as well as its reception in Havana. While they may seem to clash, the visual culture of luxury hotels and that of guerrilla warfare come to invoke the revolutionary through the process of appropriation, where the luxury site comes to symbolize former inequalities and the spoils of the victors. Below is a detailed history of the expropriation of the hotel, accounting for the way in which the Hilton and its aesthetic came to define revolutionary modernities. This is likewise witnessed in examples such as the Museum of the Revolution, in the lavish neo-Baroque Presidential Palace, and the newly created Palacio de Deportes, which hosted the televised execution trials of Batista supporters. The symbolism and aesthetic implications of these appropriations parallel that of the Hilton, while their new uses reveal the various manners in which space becomes fundamental to the revolutionary project.

Appropriation extends beyond the use of buildings and the adopting of aesthetics, providing a means to fulfill the cultural, social and political ambitions of the Revolution government. This is apparent in the realm of the arts and museology, as art and archeological artifacts become appropriated by the state. Along with a close reading of the Habana Hilton, this chapter provides a detailed analysis of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, a 1954 building by architect Alfonso Rodríguez Pichardo. The Cuban Revolution redefined the role of art and architecture, and Cuban culture in general, through the
creation of a myriad of new museums and the appropriation of former museums. The Palacio de Bellas Artes exemplifies the changing role of the arts, architecture and museums on the nationalist front, from the Batista era into the Castro era.

Revolutionizing the city – its visual aesthetic in relationship to its urban spaces – translates into a new purposiveness. Cuban officials recognized the terrain of Havana, formerly dependent on the vices of tourism and real estate speculation. Examples of appropriation and revision show how this heritage informs new, seemingly radical architectures, urban design, and exhibition projects, as discussed in the following chapters.

By looking at urban space and architecture in relation to the arts and cultural policy, I argue that the government’s deliberate inversion of spaces and adoption of nationalist iconography contributes to its modernizing project. That is, the government inverted spaces that spoke against a revolutionary ethos, appropriating them as symbols of political conversion and claiming them as being within the Revolution. Several examples below highlight such appropriation, such as the Habana Hilton – which within a short two years was renamed the “Habana Libre,” or “Free Havana.”

Appropriation and the Revolutionary City

In his 1934 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production,” Walter Benjamin writes on the appropriation of architecture:
Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception—or rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building. On the tactile side there is no counterpart to contemplation on the optical side. Tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit. As regards to architecture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception. The latter, too, occurs much less through rapt attention than by noticing the object in incidental fashion.\(^4\)

Benjamin assigns a mode of appropriation for architecture, as it presents a form of production that survives and is altered over long periods of time. Foregrounding the importance of tactility, or the way in which a building incorporates subjects, he considers the contexts and habits with which people approach and inhabit a building as essential to the process of appropriation. The infusion of plastic arts into the 1950s architecture of Havana becomes redefined by the use of the edifice by subjects— that is, according to Benjamin, its tactile appropriation following the revolution would create habits that impact its optical perception and appropriation. More specifically, the tactile appropriation of Havana’s urban terrain in 1959 informs the subsequent adoption of the past visual culture into a revolutionary aesthetic. When the guerrilla army entered the hotel in January 1959, the aesthetic of tropical luxury was juxtaposed to that of takeover, permitting space where vanguardist art and popular design became essential to the Cuban Revolution. Benjamin’s dialectic between the optical and the tactical is critical for the revolutionary takeover of Havana, where the repurposing of architectural sites by

\(^4\) *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, 240.
human subjects reveals how the visual culture of the Republican era becomes appropriated by, and fundamental to, a revolutionary aesthetic and mythology.⁵

Appropriation is a major theme discussed within art history, often signaling acts of individual creation or cultural production as well as the use or tactility of space. In his essay for the second edition of Critical Terms for Art History, Robert S. Nelson accounts for the meaning of appropriation in the context of art history, claiming that appropriation “cuts away the privileged autonomy of the art object or at least permits the construction of that autonomy to be studied… allow[ing] the art object’s social utility in the past or the present to be reaffirmed openly, not covertly.”⁶ Nelson suggests a divide between how appropriation is understood today in an era of mass reproduction. He writes: “Today, with the many techniques of mass reproduction available, it is the object that is brought to its audiences; in the past, the opposite prevailed. Then the goal was to establish one’s identity and possession in places where people gathered, such as crossroads, city squares, and prominent buildings, or at sites to which people traveled, especially places of pilgrimage…”⁷ As seen in the context of Cuba, both forms of appropriation – that of the art object’s social utility and symbolic

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⁵ In her essay on Yugoslavia and the Northeastern Adriatic, historian Sabina Mihelj focuses on how imperial legacies are appropriated within the context of the Early Cold War. Mihelj argues that we need to explore the appropriation of imperial myths within two contexts – one being nationalist, the other communist. She also highlights the complicated development of anti-imperialism within the Cold War context, something which Cuba plays a central role during the 1960s (see chapter 4). “Imperial Myths between Nationalism and Communism: Appropriations of Imperial Legacies in the North-eastern Adriatic during Early Cold War”, 650.

⁶ Critical Terms for Art History, 172.

⁷ Ibid., 169.
value though its visual representation in mass media, and that of an appropriation of significant spaces and the means through which people experience them somatically – are related, as they inform the art and architectural practices of a city overtaken, or appropriated by, a revolutionary mythology.

Appropriation is not only fundamental to the act of revolution and its mythologization, but is a process inherent to political change across historical epochs. In their essay “The Cultural Processes of ‘Appropriation’”, Véronique Plesch and Kathleen Ashley unpack the term by providing a broad review of its use in a variety of disciplines. Examples such as those of Islamic art in the time of the Ottoman Empire and the adoption of Roman iconography in the Early Christian era suggests that appropriation plays a role in times of significant political and cultural change. By reviewing various theories from Postcolonial and Caribbean studies, such as those of creolization, hybridity and transculturation discussed in the prior chapter, Plesch and Ashley highlight the inherent role appropriation plays within the context of cultural production at large. The authors propose a commonality across fields and specializations in “that appropriation is aimed at creating and/or consolidating identity,” and they argue that “…in order to produce a new identity, what must be articulated is a set of parameters which defines the entity by giving it a specific location in time and space. Our focus on processes of appropriation has suggested the importance of the diachronic dimension, since acts of appropriation unfold through
time, allowing for multiple mutations and transformations.”

Further, the creation of a new identity – in our case that of the “revolutionary” in a Cuban context – goes beyond the act of individual creation and articulation, to that of forming a collective consciousness.

Henri Lefebvre suggests that the “diversion and reappropriation are of great importance for they teach us much about the production of new spaces”. In his book *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre distinguishes appropriated space, which he identifies as being counter to the concept of property, from the notion of dominated space, or a “space transformed – or mediated – by technology, by practice”. The former is characterized by a transformation of space by human subjects, while the latter is characterized as a closed space, a sterilized place of dominion. The dichotomy between appropriated and dominated space recalls a peculiar tension in the politicization of urban space in 1960s Havana. The processes of appropriation – both the use of space by new and former city inhabitants following the gradual exile of a largely white elite, and the inverting of propertied relations in the creation of a socialist state – was also met by the need to control and redefine the city, to modulate its spatial processes in a time of Cold War insecurities. Lefebvre suggests that the creation of dominated space does not

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9 *The Production of Space*, 167.
10 Ibid., 164.
deplete the manner in which a space is appropriated, or the symbolic and cultural value or use of that space. The takeover of the 1950s Plaza Cívica and its rebranding as the Plaza de la Revolución, an example discussed below, is hence both an appropriation (in its reformed symbolic fervor as a monumental site of Cuban nationalism and republicanism), as well as a dominated space (where mass gatherings and mediated political spectacle reorients the space as an idealized urban platform where the state meets the people). New forms of political power relied on appropriation – both tactile and optical – to “revolutionize” the reformed city, so to speak.

In the context of the Cuban revolution, the act of appropriation – the literal taking of the city and country from much of the propertied class – became an important part of the revolutionary mythology: that of redeeming the past. As Roberto Segre emphatically writes: “The Revolution sought to visibly express the creative capacity implicit in the people in action and the rights they have fought for, a time to distribute among everyone in the community the riches that had until recently been in the hands of a few. That is, in the appropriation of spaces, of natural environments, of the fine service proprieties of the bourgeoisie, and to lift in them the expressive symbols of the new society”.12 Here the appropriation of space, which in many accounts led to the

12 “El carácter ideal de los contenidos fija un marco de acción arquitectónica, una libertad que permite la neta diferenciación formal de last res obras realizadas en La Habana. La Revolución desea manifestar visiblemente la capacidad creadora implícita en el pueblo en acción y los derechos a que se hace merecedor, una vez distribuidos entre todos los miembros de la comunidad las requezas detentadas hasta aquel momento en manos de unos pocos. O sea, apropiarse de los espacios, de los ambientes naturales, de los
domination of space, became an important factor in the production of revolutionary modernities.

Appropriation in the context of Cuba requires a closer study of cultural production in the island, where artists, architects, and intellectuals were appropriating the visuality of Cuba’s past epochs as well as its diverse cultural heritages in order to express the island nation’s modernity. Appropriation also occurs at a mass, collective level, where a variety of subjects utilize given physical and mediated spaces to redefine them – for example, the transferring of African religious traditions into the violent space of the 19th century plantation, or the stereotypical expressions of Africanity evident in broadcast television rumba performances in 1950s Cuba. That is, transculturations and other hybrid cultural expressions involve appropriation, and could later be appropriated to serve a different means.

servicios cualificados privativos de la burguesía y en ellos levantar los símbolos expresivos de la nueva sociedad. La simple copia de la arquitectura pasada implicaría un freno, un retroceso, una limitación a una libertad creadora sin trabas; una reducción esquemática del proceso arquitectónico, ya cumplida en otros países socialistas que no puede volver a repetirse.” *Diez Años de Arquitectura en Cuba Revolucionaria*, 8.

13 Examples of televised rumba performances created debates in Cuban media regarding morality in Cuban television, given the perceived sexual nature of some of the performances. See Yeidy Rivero, “Broadcasting Modernity: Cuban Television, 1950-1953,” 12.

14 This is, to a large extent, still happening today. In her book *Cuba Represent!: Cuban Art, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures*, Sujatha Fernandes explores the way Afro-Cuban cultural practices come to serve both touristic and nationalistic means. In her Introduction she writes: “For instance, Afro-Cuban themes previously marginalized in cultural discourse, have become more visible as a result of the global market’s appetite for everything it sees as ‘different.’ Afro-Cuban culture is being packaged for sale to tourists and commodified for global audiences. The resurrection of stereotypical images of the crumbling majesty of Havana has aroused nostalgia in metropolitan consumers.” Fernandes articulates the way
As mentioned, there are two primary types of appropriation immediately following the Cuban Revolution: one that draws from leftist and intellectual trends of the past to promote innovative vanguardist initiatives, and another that inverts symbols of power while utilizing them to accommodate a reading of the Revolution as vanguardist and antithetical to traditional representations of class-based power. Both trends are entangled within the Revolution’s developing ideology over the decade, as the means to represent the Revolution and promote the arts became hotly contested among officials and artists. Both types of appropriation are essential to the Revolutionary aesthetic that developed in Havana across the 1960s.

**Towerimg Tropicality**

Originally slated for completion in 1956, the Habana Hilton was a unique venture and planned to be the most prominent hotel within Latin America and the Caribbean. Like most international Hilton hotels of the era, it was owned by national proprietors but operated and managed by Hilton International Incorporated, which received one-third of the profits. Further, the Hilton required the cooperation of the state, worker unions, and varied private interests, as Cuban laws and regulations

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appropriation of cultural traditions as well as past appropriations are informed by their broader social, economic and political contexts. 11.

15 Interview with Rudy Casparius, 8 September 2011. Also see *When Castro Seized the Hilton*, Directed by Bjarte Thoresen (2009; Frameline Film & TV 2009), DVD.
governed the construction of the hotel. Among them was the expectation to have a Cuban architecture firm as a partner. As Annabel Wharton notes, the “Hilton International Corporation, the embodiment of American entrepreneurial spirit, depended on state sponsorship”. But given that the Cuban state was involved with both legal and extralegal U.S. interests, including corporations and the American Mafia, the construction and opening of the hotel was fraught with complications. The hotel came into being within a charged political milieu, and experienced inflating budgets, various delays, and, given the incoming Revolution, a rushed and controversial opening.

The 1950s was a time of growing U.S. influence in Havana, as U.S. private interests pursued a strong relationship with Fulgencio Batista following the success of his 1952 coup d’etat. The rise of the Batista dictatorship contributed to growing resistance and protest on the island, including the earliest major Revolutionary event of prominence, the failed 1953 attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. The event led to the arrest of many future Revolutionary leaders, including Fidel Castro, and marked the beginning of an insurgency movement that became the dominant force of resistance against the Batista dictatorship. The contract for the Habana Hilton hotel was signed only a few months after the Moncada Barracks attack, with the New York Times reporting in November 1953:

16 Interview with Daniel Bejerano, June 30, 2009.
The occasion was the signing of a contract under which the Hilton Hotels International will operate the Havana Hilton hotel to be constructed by the powerful Hotel and Restaurant Workers Federation, which has 25,000 members. The ceremony took place at the Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank of Cuba, which will finance 50 per cent of the construction...

Eusebio Mujal, secretary general of the Confederation of Cuban Workers, declared the signing “marks the beginning of a new international pattern of cooperation between labor and capital”.

The Habana Hilton was a unique venture for its times given its ownership by a workers’ union’s pension fund – the Gastronomical and Catering Workers Union of Havana (Caja del Retiro de los Trabajadores Gastronómicos). The fact of foreign investors working in direct collaboration with service workers’ unions complicates a narrative of hyper development and economic exploitation promoted by the new Revolutionary government after 1959. Indeed, such an arrangement between a U.S.-based corporation and a local workers’ union was highly atypical in this era. While the land,

19 First, the Istanbul Hilton of 1954 is another example of a hotel funded by a pension fund. Secondly, I write “largely” here because, as will be discussed, the original contract with the workers’ union became complicated by the various investors and banks used to fund the project. Debates exist regarding to what extent the workers’ union controlled the hotel operations given dependence on loans to cover inflating costs, as well as various Mafia-based vendors attempting to control operations within the hotel, particularly the casino. Interestingly, the archives regarding the Habana Hilton at the Conrad Hilton archives in Houston does not include documentation regarding the funding of the hotel prior to the grand opening. Nonetheless, former assistant manager and Dean Emeritus of the Conrad Hilton School of Hospitality Management Rudy Casparius has confirmed the unorthodox nature of the business venture that was the Havana Hilton. A longtime Hilton employee familiar with the hotel industry, Casparius emphasized that he knew of no other hotels that had such an arrangement with a workers’ union, and that their collaboration with the union made unique problems throughout the construction and opening process, into the Revolutionary era and expropriation of the hotel. Interview with Rudy Casparius, 8 September 2011.
20 During his first elect term between 1942 and 1946, former army general Fulgencio Batista ran as an anti-fascist, pro-union candidate. While many scholars comment on the second reign of Batista being defined by growing U.S. economic interests, it is important to note ties to labor within the Batista regime, which would allow such a collaboration among such parties.
building, furnishing and equipment were funded by the Gastronomical and Catering
Workers, Hilton International was responsible for operations – from training sessions in
the U.S. for the Cuban nationals working at the hotel to operations and payroll. The
Habana Hilton was more than a model of mutually beneficial capitalism; it was a model
of international cooperation and solidarity at the height of the Cold War, in a place
where the politics of U.S. imperialism and national sovereignty was increasingly
fraught.

Batista’s reign saw the development of various government agencies intended to
legitimize economic investment by foreign investors, particularly the U.S. Mafia. The
Banco de Desarrollo Económico y Social (BANDES), a bank founded in 1955, funded the
$14 million Hotel Riviera (1957) and held the mortgage for the Havana Hilton, investing
over $13 million in the new hotel.21 Enrique Cirules has written extensively on the mob’s
relation to the hotel industry during the 1950s, suggesting that ties between the state, the
mafia and U.S. interests created an “empire of Havana”. He writes specifically about the
creation of “state-run or quasi state-run banking and financial institutions” created for
the legitimacy of tourist enterprises largely controlled by the Mafia.22 Unlike major hotel

22 In his discussion of the formation of the Banco de Desarrollo Económico y Social or Bank for Economic
and Social Development [BANDES], Cirules elaborates: “Batista’s return to power at the controls of the
Cuban state meant a great reordering of affairs, subordinated to the interests of the American Mob… A
group of state-run or quasi state-run banking and financial institutions was created for [the empire of
Havana]. In coordination with the international financial center (of more than 50 banks and 200 branches),
U.S. Mafia groups and select persons with close ties to the special agencies of the United States, these new
institutions might undertake the most fabulous business affairs. The whole enterprise, moreover, could
projects of the 1950s, such as the Hotel Capri and Hotel Riviera, which were explicitly tied to specific mobsters working within Havana (such as Meyer Lansky and Santo Trafficante, Jr.), the Hilton was operated through ostensibly legitimate entities – a service workers’ union and a prominent, prestigious U.S. hotelier. Nonetheless, as suggested by Cirules and writer T.J. English, the Havana Hilton developed within economic and legal regulations that incorporated the interests of the Mafia at large.

One such law is the Ley Hotelera 2074, or Hotel Law 2074, passed by Batista in 1955 to help subsidize the creation of hotels and nightclubs in Havana, largely through tax exemptions and government financing via bonds through BANDES. The new law contributed to Havana’s 1956-1958 building boom, particularly as Havana competed with Las Vegas in the international casino market. The Habana Hilton became another

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23 T.J. English discusses the manner in which the Hotel Law 2074 created incentives for developers, with little concern for illicit operations or corruption. He writes, “In fact, through Hotel Law 2074 they were encouraged to invest, as long as they were willing to pay the official license fee of twenty-five thousand pesos. The real fee, of course, also included a kickback to Batista amounting to somewhere around two hundred and fifty thousand pesos – equivalent to $1.6 million today. There was also an under-the-table monthly operating fee of two thousand pesos, plus a profit percentage paid directly to Batista or a member of his family.” Havana Nocturne: How the mob owned Cuba and lost it to the revolution, 132. See also Peter Moruzzi, Havana Before Castro: When Cuba was a Tropical Playground, 176.

24 Las Vegas passed a law in April 1958 prohibiting casino vendors from also working as vendors in Cuba, in an attempt to squash competition with Havana. Batista was aware of Havana’s strong competition with Vegas and was invested in helping Havana become the casino capital of the world. Robert Lacey, Little Man: Meyer Lansky and the Gangster Life, 256-257.
pawn among Havana’s tourist haunts, which with a few exceptions (such as the Club Tropicana) were largely controlled by foreign entities.²⁵

A feature article appearing in the March 10, 1958 issue of LIFE magazine explored tensions in Cuba surrounding Fulgencio Batista’s relationship with the mob. A year after a botched attempt to assassinate Batista in March 1957, violence and insurgency grew on the island began to garner international attention.²⁶ The 26th of July’s kidnapping of Argentine car racer Juan Fangio from the Hotel Lincoln on February 23, 1958 was a turning point for the international press. Distrust in the Batista regime, along with growing concerns regarding the dominance of the Mafia, caused insurgency movements to focus on sites of tourism as well as the public space, creating a spectacle that national and international media could not ignore.

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²⁵ As casino historian Robert Lacey notes: “Thirteen different syndicates, almost all of them separate from the gamblers already established in Havana, had applied to sublease the new Hilton Hotel’s casino which, it was calculated, should produce about $3 million profit per year. Hilton wanted $1 million annual rental, paid in advance, and Roberto ‘Chiri’ Mendoza was the candidate that the company favored. Mendoza had Batista’s personal blessing, and he was also the candidate favored by the Cuban Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, which was the owner of the new hotel. The union was financing the project as a source of employment for its current workers and as an investment for their pension fund, leasing out the management and international marketing to Hilton.” Little Man: Meyer Lansky and the gangster life, 263.

²⁶ Julia Sweig has written extensively on the events leading to the Revolution, detailing the manner in which the 1957 assassination was carried out by the Student Revolutionary Directorate and the Organización Auténtica. Both insurgency movements invited the 26th of July Movement to join the assassination attempt in solidarity – however, as discussed later in the chapter, the 26th of July Movement was largely interested in an upcoming interview with Herbert Matthews of the New York Times, and even expressed resistance towards fully associating with movements within the city of Havana. By the following year the 26th of July Movement became the prominent force of insurgency within the city of Havana, with its llanos – or urban underground collective – dominating the violent resistance within Havana and elsewhere. By February 1958 acts of violence in order to hamper the image of the state became so frequent that insiders referred to it as the “golden age” of the llano. Inside the Cuban Revolution, 18, 105.
The Hilton came to symbolize concerns about Cuban sovereignty for the Batista regime. While mafiosos such as Albert Anastasia were noted for attempting to meddle in the affairs of the new hotel’s casino, the U.S. government, Hilton corporation, and Cuban government attempted to keep this venture within legitimate, island-based circuits. Hilton officials went so far as to hire former FBI chief George McSwain to screen applicants for the hotel’s casino concession. The syndicate that ran the casino was headed by Roberto Mendoza and Republican State Senator Kenneth F. Johnson of Nevada – who likely had interests in the casino business at large, given Nevada’s competition with Cuba. The Habana Hilton became an important public structure, much like the new government and cultural buildings developed by MOP (Ministerio de Obras Públicas) around the new Plaza Cívica and elsewhere in the city. Unlike the other high-rise hotels, the most prominent hotel in Cuba was a symbol of the state as well as a marker of private enterprise throughout the tourism-focused island.

In her analysis of the Hilton enterprise and its ties to Cold War politics, Annabel Wharton tracks the construction of a modernity that is American, imperialist, and

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27 T.J. English has elaborated on the interests of Albert Anastasia in controlling the Hilton Hotel casino, writing on a famed meeting two days prior to Anastasia’s assassination in New York: “The discussion at the restaurant was about taking control of the casino concession at the Hilton. The price for the concession – to be paid to the Hilton Company – was $1 million, plus another $2 million under the table to Batista to close the deal ($2 million at that time was equivalent to $25 million today).” (227). As costs had risen, Anastasia had become one of at least 15 investors in the hotel, but nonetheless had little power, especially in comparison to the Hilton corporation and the worker’s union. U.S. District Attorney Frank S. Hogan would later question the Hilton regarding Anastasia’s murder, as the New York Times highlights. Havana Nocturne, 227.

spatially commoditized. Wharton comments: “That icon – the Hilton Hotel – was effective because it embodied the spatial paradigms dominant inside America.”

The political, economic and spatial imperatives of the Hilton empire are likewise embedded in the Havana Hilton project. Nonetheless, architecture within colonial and postcolonial contexts is never merely an expression of the power of empire – rather, as in the examples of the Habana Hilton and the Caribe Hilton, the spaces within which people interact become sites of negotiation. As Nezzar Al Sayyad notes, architecture within colonial and postcolonial contexts presents a hybridity that is not merely a synthesis but rather “a space where elements encounter and transform each other”.

The Habana Hilton was a site of negotiation in both its design and function as the city’s most prominent hotel. In terms of function, the hotel was a place where many dignitaries, business people, and covert agents encountered one another. Its function as a space of negotiation helped determine its appropriation, where the hotel became a primary venue for government hosted conventions and events. Likewise, its designs were the result of a negotiation between actors (architects, investors, the state) that helped determine its architectural hybridity, where the ethos of the International Style became infused with a cubanidad. As mentioned in the previous chapter, such a hybridity is evident throughout modern architecture in Cuba. The Habana Hilton

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29 Building the Cold War, 159.
illustrates how the hybridity incorporates ideologies of cubanidad and tropicality, providing a mixture of corporate modernism with ethnic kitsch and colonial refinement through its spatial form, invocation of plastic and decorative arts, and furnishing.

As early as 1954 designs of hotel were advertised in international architectural periodical, most notably *Architectural Record*, which included a preliminary model of the Habana Hilton alongside other recent Hilton ventures. The model depicted is similar to the final design – the central elevator core is visible as a flat vertical surface from the exterior, which is otherwise comprised of horizontal bands of balconies (Figure 3.2). The long and tall rectangular high-rise sits upon a base that extends to the street level, utilizing the space of the second and third floor rooftops as sites of tropical leisure. A mural provides a dominant horizontal axis marking the entrance and giving the repetitive, rectilinear forms a sense of tropical sway. A photograph (c. 1954) of architects Lin Arroyo and Welton Becket standing with Batista as they gaze over the hotel model that appears in the October 1954 issue of *Architectural Record* (Figure 3.3). With each of the men wearing white suits, the planning of the hotel is depicted as a collaboration between public and private sectors. This collaboration is manifested in the design of the hotel, from its high rise form to its interior furnishings.

The authorship of both lead architect Becket and his Cuban collaborators is negotiated in the form and decorative elements of the hotel. The most prominent

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marker of Lin Arroyo’s input is the small dome on its two-story lobby ceiling, with many glass oculi bringing in sunlight from outside. The ceiling itself mimics the Palacio de Deportes designed in the same era by Arroyo, discussed in Chapter 1. The rectilinear forms, on the other hand, display Welton Becket’s signature, whose corporate architecture provides a grid that reflects upon what Reinhold Martin refers to as “the organizational complex”. Cuban architects were incorporating North American ideas of architecture into their work, while also exploring organic forms that spoke to Cuba’s tropical setting, as discussed in the previous chapter. The imprint of Lin Arroyo and Gabriela Menéndez, henceforth, can partly be seen in the rounded and curved forms that contrast the building’s otherwise strict rectilinearity. Along with the dome, one can see rounded forms at the hurricane bar facing the pool. These expressive forms complemented the furniture and plastic arts embedded throughout the hotel, invoking a Cuban aesthetic or cubanidad also seen in other commercial ventures, such as the Hotel Havana Riviera (which also opened in 1958) and the Club Tropicana (1951).

The Habana Hilton bears a striking resemblance to its Caribbean predecessor the 1949 Caribe Hilton of San Juan, Puerto Rico (Figure 3.4). The Caribe Hilton had a much

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32 He writes: “In certain exemplary office buildings of the 1950s, earlier modernist experiments with spatial flexibility through modular assembly were exhaustively reworked and redeployed. The universal space associated with the steel frame and the planning grid was assimilated into a finely modulated field. This modularity, and the flexibility that it implied, became the very image – and the instrument – of the organizational complex”. Here Martin implies that the relationship between technology and human life becomes reflected in the designs of modern architecture, which take the organizational structures of the corporation and attempt to implant them with notions of humanity on a grandiose, modulated scale. The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space, 5.
larger architectural impact on the international hotel industry, and was likewise a collaboration between an island-based and U.S. architecture firms. At the edge of Viejo San Juan, overlooking the bay towards the more Americanized Condado neighborhood, the Caribe Hilton features a grid of balconies and expanses of glass that make its interior space transparent. Referring to the innovative use of a grid of balconies, Wharton comments that the Caribe Hilton “was the first major Modern hotel constructed with this external sign of the repetitive luxury of the hotel’s interior space”.33 This presentation of commoditized, luxury space became heightened with the Habana Hilton, both literally and figuratively. As the section plan exhibits, the functionality of the Hilton’s space becomes transparent, and the layouts from the 3rd to the 22nd floor literally repeat, with the exception of the 20th floor (Figure 3.5). The broad façade is broken symmetrically by a vertical axis that visually appears to be a skeletal foundation that supports the massive grid. Like identical capsules sometimes reversibly placed against one another, space is rationalized and made visible as a commodity.

Such a commoditization of space – that is, the use of private, modulated space by a temporary inhabitant – is contrasted with the semi-public spaces throughout the hotel, from its dining and entertainment venues to its lobby and pool. This spatial contrast between private and public is exhibited in the floor plan of the 1st floor (Figure 3.6). Central to the hotel’s entrance is a roundabout that leads to a spiraling ramp for cars to

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33 Building the Cold War, 188.
park in the basement below. While taxis dropped hotel clientele in front of the lobby though a U-shaped entry providing a perimeter around the descending spiral ramp, those with rental cars could park below and enter the hotel from the elevator corridor. The lobby of the Havana Hilton floated above the garage, providing a recessed two-story glass façade at the Southwest entrance facing Calle L. The lobby provided a sense of openness, extending towards the Northwest to Calle 23 (La Rampa), as well as Southwest to Calle 25. The interior of the lobby itself recalls a colonial courtyard, both through its spatial forms (aggrandized square shaped lobby with second story look over) and its decoration.

While the Habana Hilton provided three entry points that emphasized its openness and the semi-public nature of the space, the exterior of the entrance was dominated by the massive mural by Cuban artist Amelia Peláez (Figure 3.7). Perhaps the most striking feature of the Habana Hilton, the beautiful blue and white tiled mosaic provides a horizontal axis visually countering the building’s dramatic verticality, as well as an axis perpendicular to the grand boulevard of La Rampa, or Calle 23. The mural also breaks the modernistic, hard edge forms of the building, providing a banner of fluid abstract shapes. The mural seems to read across rhythmically, with the loose drawing style and organic forms providing a welcoming entrance from the street. Further, the mural provides decorative elements that draw influence from Cuban modern art and the Moorish mosaics of Cuba’s 19th and early 20th century creole architecture.
First and foremost, the mural recalls *vitrales*, or the colorful stained glass windows of colonial Havana, with the black lines recalling the ironwork of Cuban balconies as well as the lines that divide the colored window panes of *vitrales*. The playful forms and the clear reference to colonial architecture seems to contrast the buildings controlled rectilinearity, serving as a sign indicative of the modernist building’s urban and cultural milieu. Much as art redefines architecture, Peláez’s work contains clear references to the vernacular architecture of Cuba. For example, the Hilton mural recalls the fluid geometric lines, organic forms, and stained glass like quality of Peláez’s 1943 oil painting *Fish* (Figure 3.8). Framed by a corniced ceiling above, the still life presents an architectural motif, where the lines comprising the form of the still life blend in and become part of the domestic setting. Its vivid forms and colors give it a musical, rhythmic feel, making the traditional and flatly painted still life pop outside of its framing devices, as though the gallery wall were the architectural facades or rich domestic interiors of urban Havana. Like Peláez’s mural for the Habana Hilton, the building’s modernity is tied to a tropicality that is vibrant, sensual and contemplative.

This tropicality is reflected in the other murals of the hotel. The mural by Cuban artist René Portocarrero featured various harlequin-like figures stretching the length of the wall in vignettes of different background colors (Figure 3.9). Whether Amelia Peláez and the other artists completed their ceramic murals in the same manner cannot be verified, but the various artists had previously worked on ceramics in the suburb of San
Antonio de los Baños earlier in the decade, as discussed with regards to Wifredo Lam’s 1950s murals in the previous chapter. The use of ceramics became another dominant element in the hotel beyond the plastic arts. This is most evident on the front façade adjacent to the elevator shaft, where a band of blue ceramic tiles originally broke up the grid of balconies to provide the high rise a dramatic vertical sway.

The accents of blue throughout the hotel were featured in another mural removed shortly after the Revolution – the mural by Cuban artist and eventual expatriate Cundo Bermúdez (Figure 3.10). Much smaller than Peláez’s mammoth front entrance mural, Bermúdez’s blue and white mural features fish seemingly dancing along the long, horizontal surface that emphasized the slope of La Rampa against the strict rectilinearity of the building. It stood below the kitschy Restaurante Polinesio – a orientalist take on the South Pacific that has remained largely intact since its opening in 1958 – and stretched towards the northwest facing entrance of Trader Vic’s restaurant, where one can still get a hamburger and milkshake today. Bermúdez’s mural brought the aesthetic of the grand entrance to the prominent La Rampa boulevard, emphasizing the public nature of the private hotel within its broader urban setting. That is, the plastic arts defined the architecture and its relation to urban space. The trapezoidal form of the Bermúdez mural emphasizes the shape of the terrain in relation to the building, as it provides a diagonal axis corresponding to the slant of La Rampa’s prominent incline. Muralism in 1950s Cuban architecture went beyond a decorative function, presenting
symbolic signs that visually appropriate a given building’s relationship to its urban context and cultural milieu.

The furniture and landscaping of the building likewise reflect this visual appropriation. The Gastronomical and Catering Workers Union were responsible for financing the furnishing of the hotel, and drew largely from local resources, from Cuban designers to the imported modern furnishing of Knoll, a prominent international modern design store with a location in the Miramar area of Havana.34 U.S. based interior designer James McQuaid coordinated the decoration of the hotel, using art and furnishing to convey the “old and new” Havana.35 Much as the mural art in the hotel reflected both a sense of cubanidad, the furniture in both the hotel’s public space and private rooms reflected the tropicality of Cuban modernity. In his overview of Havana before Castro, Peter Moruzzi writes about the design of the Hilton: “Under Welton Becket’s Total Design approach, every aspect of the project – from engineering and architecture to custom furnishings and site-specific artwork – was a product of specialists within the firm”.36 As a photograph of the Caribe suite shows, furniture and décor created a symbiosis between a sleek modern aesthetic and a tropical sense of place (Figure 3.11). The carpet at the center of the floor features a design by Cuban artist

34 Interview with Ramon Osuna (January 6th, 2013) ; Interview with Rudy Caspari (September 7th, 2011) 
36 Moruzzi, Havana Before Castro, 205.
Servando Cabrera Moreno that recalls the painting of Amelia Peláez. In short, Cuban vanguardist art permeated the overall design aesthetic of the hotel.

Photographs and accounts of the hotel’s furnishing reveal the provenance of the hotel’s interior design elements, making explicit the manner in which tropicality is embedded in the hotel’s decoration. In February 1959 the magazine *Progressive Architecture* featured standard double rooms from the Hilton for a feature story on hotel design.\(^{37}\) The room appears much more austere in design, featuring less decoration from original artists than the swanky Caribe suite (Figure 3.12). The fixtures nonetheless recall the simplicity of 1950s modern design with its Cuban eccentricities. Included is a custom made sliding partition made of mahogany and particle board, recalling the colonial era designs and similar partitions in the public space of the museum.

*Progressive Architecture* features a listing of the furnishing and fixtures, discussing their origins. Furniture included custom-made objects from the area, a variety of furniture companies from New York, as well as items from Havana’s own Knoll International outlet. Especially notable is the spacious balcony, a feature reduced in the 1990s so the proper rooms could have greater square footage for the purpose of a higher star rating.

The lobby is an open, almost plaza like space. The central staircase went up to the second floor lobby, which provided a rectangular balcony that overlooked the first floor in a manner that mimicked the Spanish Colonial courtyard on a modern scale

(Figure 3.13). This colonial spatiality was emphasized by the use of grid-based dark mahogany dividers throughout the first floor, their design again harkening to colonial times. The scale of the lobby is itself impressive, serving as an intersection connecting the hotel guest both to the entrance at Calle L and the prominent Calle 23, or La Rampa. Further, interior landscaping mimicking a contained notion of the Caribbean jungle juxtaposes the modern aesthetic of orange 1950s mod couches, providing a space that is both spectacularly colonial, modern and tropical, immersed in the aesthetic rhetoric of Caribbean tourism and cubanidad.

Such an aesthetic experience continues in the building’s second level, where a hurricane themed bar connects the hotel’s street side casino with the fabulous outdoor pool, as made evident in its floor plan (Figure 3.14). At the entrance of the Antilles Bar, also referred to as the Hurricane Bar, was a wall made up of bamboo, resembling sugar cane stalk (see Figure 3.9). The wall functioned as a divider between the second floor lobby and the bar and adjacent hotel pool, expressing a sense of primitive kitsch wholly different from the Polynesian wonders of the Restaurante Polinesio on the ground level along Calle 23. The image of sugar cane was repeated in a generic mural on the top floor Sugar Bar, which also featured specially designed chairs with a metal cut sugar cane motif. The round bar at the center – or the eye of the hurricane – split the interior from the exterior through large glass panels and large columns, creating a sense that the interior itself was an open exterior patio. This was further emphasized by the use of
wicker chairs and bar stools in the interior space of the bar. Similarly, round lounge chaises and patio tables with umbrellas and chairs surrounded the perimeter of the irregularly shaped pool, with cabanas serving as a perimeter against the city. The design of both the first and second floor lobbies created a sense of spatial opulence and openness, referring to the modernity of a bygone colonial era in a modern highrise.

At large, the interior design and integration of the plastic arts in architecture contributes to notions of hybridity that takes place within the elite, exclusive space. Ranging from avant-garde to kitsch, from colonial and primitivist to hyper-modern, the visual and decorative arts within the hotel expressed a contemporary modernism that is attached to cubanidad. Such design choices relate to the architecture of the Habana Hilton at large, which negotiated the corporate modernism of Welton Becket to the more organic architecture of Lin Arroyo and Gabriela Menéndez. Further, it presents the politics of hotel design in general, as seen in several examples in which Hilton hotels attempted to express a familiar, North American modernity while assimilating to their given foreign context. The Hilton hotel was of particular importance in the context of the Cold War and the incipient revolution; for its grand opening, officials endeavored to put forth an image of stability amid spectacle. The skyscraper hotel presented a revolutionary mirage of reform amid impending political revolution.

The Habana Hilton opened with a celebratory gala, featuring guests such as Conrad Hilton himself, first lady Martha Fernández Miranda de Batista, and Ernest
Hemingway. With the construction of the hotel behind schedule, Conrad Hilton put the hotel in the red in order to open the facilities in time for various Hilton executives, Cuban government officials, and the various spectators of the tourism industry, many of whom were flown in on charter jets just for the event at hand. The U.S. government became invested in the hotel’s opening as the event itself was symbolic of the legitimacy of the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and its benevolent relationship with U.S. enterprise. Moreover, there was fear of a potential communist takeover. In a letter, hotel manager Robert J. Caverly comments on complications regarding whether the hotel opening should move forward given construction delays and an inflated budget, writing: “I made an appointment to review the matter with the State Department and suggested that we might consider postponing or cancelling the formal opening ceremonies. The official state department response was that postponing or canceling the much publicized opening of a prominently identified American enterprise would be a reflection on the Batista regime which the U.S. government recognized and sponsored.” Worries about an insurgency and political unrest caused a hurried opening with increased security, as the Hilton became a business venture embedded in U.S. diplomatic concerns.

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38 Rodney Carlisle and Dominic Monetta, Brandy, Our Man in Acapulco, 359.
40 Thomas Paterson, Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution, 128.
At the same time, U.S. and Cuban officials recommended that Batista not attend the event, as his growing unpopularity could create a public relations disaster both for the Hilton hotel and its varied vested interests. T. J. English elaborates:

The March 1958 grand opening for the Havana Hilton hotel were surprisingly subdued. There seemed to be as many members of the military police as there were kidnappings. The establishment of the Hilton name along the Havana skyline was important to President Batista, who viewed the hotel as the biggest step yet in the city’s attempts to present itself as the Monte Carlo of the Caribbean. Even so, Batista did not attend the event, though he did send his wife Marta… In the weeks leading up to the grand opening, many Cuban businessmen had told U.S. ambassador Smith that Batista was so unpopular that they did not want to be seen in his company.\footnote{Havana Nocturne, 269.}

The pressure to not delay the hotel’s opening was determined by political unease in the island, as its opening was seen as a symbolic event. Student protests at the nearby University of Havana, a common affair from 1954 onwards, was one primary concern. Regardless of the political unrest, canceling the event would likewise prove unwise both for the Batista regime and the Hilton corporation.\footnote{Christine Skwiot, The Purposes of Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Cuba and Hawai‘i, 196.}

By the 1958 opening the hotel was most definitely seen as a landmark achievement by officials in the tourism industry; as Evan R. Ward writes: “The Havana Hilton represented the classic union of state power and corporate initiative that provided the model for hotel development in the postwar period throughout Latin
America.43 However, delays had moved the price of the hotel from about $10 million dollars to $24 million, with the construction and operations costs mired in controversy.44 The opening attempted to portray a different image of the hotel – one of refinement and celebrity. Media coverage and ephemera from the event obfuscate the urban revolt happening within the city and the guerrilla warfare advancing in the countryside. The spectacle became a means of building a positive image for a hotel in a time when tourism was beginning to decline in the island due to civil unrest.

Guests flew in on chartered planes directly form New York and Chicago, including celebrities and members of the tourist industry. Film footage shows guests arriving at the front entrance by vehicle, circumscribing the parking ramp and arriving at a glass façade with tall limestone columns.45 Guests arrived with an invitation in hand alongside a Hilton “passport”, illustrated with the image of a concierge person at the front of the booklet (Figure 3.15). The opening took place from March 20 to 22, 1958, and featured all public areas of the hotel, from the rooftop bar and ballroom to the ground level restaurants, casino, and other spaces of leisure. With brief excursions sailing and to a sugar plantation, guests were treated daily to formal and informal

43 Phillip Scranton and Janet Davidson, *The Business of Tourism: Place, Faith, and History*, 215.
receptions. The closing day included gender divided luncheons, with a speech by Conrad Hilton for the men, and a closing gala dinner and bar. The opening spectacle received much attention from the Cuban press, making a clear impression that the Hilton was a landmark achievement, both as a skyscraper dominating Havana’s skyline and as a private-public venture at the height of political turmoil in Cuba.

**Seizing the Hilton**

Before I continue, it is very important to note that the politics of the Hilton as a privileged site in Havana’s urban landscape has significant precedent. Major edifices have often contributed to Havana’s urban identity at large, functioning as iconic sites for constructing a notion of cubanidad as well as, in some cases, places to claim political legitimacy amid changes in power. It is worth emphasizing that hotels have especially played a prominent role in Republican-era Cuba as semi-private sites with public access; as well as sites of exchange between actors in the private economy enjoying Cuba’s tropicality in a semi-public realm.

One prominent example is the 1930 Hotel Nacional, discussed in detail in the doctoral research of Erica Morawski (Figure 3.16). Designed by the architecture firm McKim Mead & White, the opulent Mediterranean Revival building sits atop an oceanside hill in former military barracks. While its prominent site and monumental scale relay its continued role today as Havana’s premier hotel for dignitaries and the like, it
also served as a setting for key historical events in the 20th century. Many scholars pinpoint the mob summit of December 1949 at the Hotel Nacional as a key event in helping promote the role of the Mafia within the private sector and both local and international politics.\(^{46}\)

The Hotel Nacional also served as a site of revolutionary takeover during the Republican era’s initial 1933 revolution, an event that ended the nine-year reign of President Gerardo Machado and marked the rise of Fulgencio Batista’s career. On September 9, 1933 – within a month after the flight of Gerardo Machado from Cuba – deposed military officers gathered at the Hotel Nacional. The hotel “enhanced their position, for it happened to serve as the temporary residence of the American Ambassador and the refuge of the American colony”.\(^{47}\) Rebel forces eventually took over the hotel on October 2, leading to a battle with excessive gunfire as well as military cannons shot from the university hill. As Antoni Kapci notes, the event was key in “removing much of the old military structure and personnel… weaken[ing] the resistance of the ancient regime.”\(^{48}\) In short, the siege is indicative of the importance of significant sites such as premiere hotels in fostering international exchange and holding

\(^{46}\) Also known as “The Havana Conference of 1946,” the summit was organized by Charles “Lucky” Luciano and brought many members of the American Mafia together to discuss policies and business interests. See Michael Newton, Mr. Mob: The Life and Crimes of Moe Dalitz, 124. Also see Peter Moruzzi, Havana Before Castro: When Cuba was a Tropical Playground, 174.

\(^{47}\) Louis A. Perez Jr., “Army Politics, Diplomacy and the Collapse of the Cuban Officer Corps: the ‘Sergeants’ Revolt’ of 1933”, 74.

\(^{48}\) “The Siege of the Hotel Nacional, Cuba, 1933: A Reassessment,” 288.
symbolic and strategic meaning within national conflict. Photographs from the siege show the extent of damage in the hotel, a site of appropriation where the battle lines between mafiosos and political factions within Cuba were drawn.

The Hilton, likewise, became the locus of the 1959 Revolution upon its entry into Havana, transforming the hotel from a landmark of public and private enterprise to a monument of revolutionary takeover. By January 2, the lobby of the Havana Hilton became a refuge for incoming guerrilla fighters, and served as the headquarters of the nascent Cuban Revolution during its first year. Furthermore, the history of the hotel runs parallel to that of the 1959 Revolution, its construction beginning with proximity to the landing of the 26th of July Movement in the Sierra Maestra of Cuba’s Oriente province. While officials attempted to speed up the completion of the hotel as fighting intensified in the East of the island, the Hilton became a unique site of negotiation within a city under siege. While the opening provided a media spectacle highlighting the promises of Havana’s continued hyper-development, media also became a critical tool in the formation of the Revolution moving towards the famed site.

On the evening of December 31st, 1958, Fulgencio Batista announced to close associates that he was leaving the island early that morning. By the following morning guerrillas entered Havana, taking Batista’s primary military base Camp Columbia and laying claim of the city. News of Batista’s departure reached Hilton hotel management
by 2:30 AM the morning of the 1st, amid New Years celebrations. The Habana Hilton

Hotel Assistant Manager Rudy Caspari reported:

In the morning of January 1st, everybody was surprised at first; almost
everyone got up late, and struck by the news heard on the radio, rushed
to the streets. Thousands of people dressed in red and black clothes were
passing by the Hotel in convertible cars and other kinds of vehicles,
shouting ‘Long live Fidel Castro and the Movement of July 26th.’ The
radio was requesting that the front of the houses be decorated with
Cuban flags, which started flying very shortly. Everybody was laughing
and screaming.\textsuperscript{49}

Excitement had arrived with the fall of Batista, whose campaign against other
insurgency movements provided the Movement of July 26\textsuperscript{th} legitimacy as a force that
could take down the autocratic leader. The Cuban flag remained a symbol of
nationalism through various regimes given its association with national pride and
struggle. The simple red and black flag of the Movement of July 26\textsuperscript{th} also entered the
urban atmosphere of Havana, gaining a similar relevance as a symbol of revolution and
takeover.

That morning, members of the Movement of July 26\textsuperscript{th} began raiding the city’s
various casinos, which were targeted because of their association with corruption and
the U.S. Mafia. Members of the army raided hotels such as the Hotel Riviera and nearby
Hotel Capri, smashing windows and wreaking general havoc, then continued on to the
Hilton shortly thereafter. The management, having received news of the raids, held an

\textsuperscript{49} Letter to Mr. Arthur E. Elmiger, no date provided (early January, 1959), 1. Hospitality Industry Archives
Collection, Conrad H. Hilton College, University of Houston.
emergency meeting with personnel – partial owners of the hotel – who lined up in front of the three entrances. The workers locked arms, claiming that it was their hotel, and successfully convinced the raiders to forego attacking the casino and public spaces of the hotel.\(^{50}\) While the casino space was saved, casinos throughout the city were immediately shut down, as a new decree outlawed gambling for the time being.

That afternoon, new leaders of the Workers’ Central Union of Cuba, who had deposed the previous leader that morning, met with hotel officials in an attempt to shut down the hotel, given the request for a workers’ strike by the leadership of the Movement of July 26\(^{\text{th}}\). Managers kept them at bay, attempting to build a positive relationship with the new army seizing the city. By the following day soldiers began to fill the hotel, claiming it as their temporary residence. Rudy Caspari elaborates:

> In the early morning, the Rebel forces started arriving at the Hotel. The lobby was getting full of soldiers and we offered them the Ballroom as quarters to spend the night. It sure filled up the house, for the column consisted of 600 men; from that point, new guards were assigned around the hotel, and our main concern was to be outside, as we had tried to avoid any damage that the soldiers could do to our property.

**January 2, 1959**

The “Barbudos” (DeCastro soldiers all wearing a beard) were filling up every corner of the Hotel. The tourists, who first got frightened by the presence of Rebel soldiers, began making friends with them, noticing their behavior, which was full of respect, humility and simplicity.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 2.
We had the problem of feeding all these people, in addition to the employees… The Communists did not agree to our feeding our guests, and the tension was getting worse. Our employees were willing to help as much as they could, as they showed on many occasions, but they were afraid to get in trouble with the new Union leaders and therefore refrained from working.51

Here Caspari narrates a complicated situation between new national union leadership, hotel management and personnel, and the occupation of the hotel by the army. Caspari elaborated that the occupying army and its friendly relations with the hotel – from its management and personnel to its guest – helped quell the demands of the new union leaders, who were attempting to project their new power or control. Some 1200 or so barbudos had entered the lobby by that evening, many leaving later that evening for Camp Columbia. Press photographs of the army’s presence in the Habana Hilton show a striking visual contrast between the sleek modernism of the largely glass lobby and the barbudos dressed in military green, guns in hand. While he lamented the odor the army men left, Caspari comments that they treated the hotel with the upmost respect, elaborating on why and how they were well received.

On the evening of January 4, 1959, Fidel Castro gave a radio broadcast calling for an end of the general strike, permitting hotel employees to return to work and attempt to clean the hotel and return it to its normal operations. Having gained a reputation as a haven for revolutionaries, while having already become one of the most prominent high

51 Ibid., 3.
rises in the city, the Hilton remained a charged site of revolutionary happenings. Most prominently, Fidel Castro immediately came to the hotel upon his arrival on January 8 in Havana, coordinating with hotel management to take one of its $100 per night presidential suites on the 23rd floor as his temporary residence.

After the initial weeks of the revolution, the Habana Hilton hotel was a site of contested power relations, attempting to maintain its function as a private hotel while becoming the literal headquarters of a leftist revolution. As Alfredo José Estrada notes: “The gleaming, air-conditioned lobby of the vast hotel, open less than a year, became the nerve center of the Revolution. It provided keen contrasts: armed barbudos cheek-to-jowl with carefully coiffed ministers, anxious businessmen together with bewildered tourists, inquisitive journalists alongside even more inquisitive spies.”52 Illustrative of Foucault’s notion that “space is fundamental in any exercise of power,” the Hilton Hotel became a symbol in which the spatial exercise of power took a dramatically different direction than its authors and investors intended.53 And it came to exemplify a “free” or independent Cuban nation, despite its capitalist baggage.

The hotel’s symbolic potency is most evident in how it became a space of media spectacle during the first year of the Revolution, with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara often hosting interviews in the building’s public spaces and their private suites. Perhaps

52 *Havana: autobiography of a city*, 230
53 “Space, Knowledge and Power”, 252.
one of the most memorable was Castro’s February 6, 1959 interview with Edward R. Murrow on CBS, in which the guerrilla leader casually attempts to appear relatable and respectable to a largely middle-to-upper class white U.S. audience. Dressed in silk pajamas in the chic presidential suite of the Habana Hilton, Castro responds in English to Murrow’s questions regarding his desire to build positive relations with the United States and stray from communism. At one point of the video Fidel’s son appears, providing the scene a domestic ambiance, particularly when they discuss the family pet. The humanizing image of the new Revolutionary leader is further emphasized with a discussion of his mother, whom he had not seen in years given political imprisonment followed by exile. Perhaps most memorably, Murrow asks Castro about the beard the leader grew during guerrilla warfare, with which the leader responded, “When we fulfill our promise of true government I will cut my beard”. The image of the bearded Revolutionary leader in silk pajamas with his son is a peculiar image that initially attempted to familiarize Fidel with the broader U.S. public. He coopted a space representative of U.S. luxury, and used it to present a favorable image.

**Symbolic Takeovers of Urban Space**

While the Hilton was a prominent site of revolutionary takeover, many other sites throughout the city were also ripe for appropriation. Upon arriving in the capital on January 8, Castro arrived gave a speech at Camp Columbia, the military site that
Fulgencio Batista had fled over a week before. This site was formerly associated with military torture and repression, and was the first space the guerrilla army occupied upon arriving in Havana that New Years Day. The following day (January 9) Castro gave a speech at the Presidential Palace, followed by a parade down Calle 23, or La Rampa. La Rampa gained a reputation as the Broadway Avenue of Havana – a center for entertainment and nightlife traveling through the middle to upperclass neighborhoods of Vedado. Castro’s use of the very modern space of Havana’s trendiest, commercial artery for the parade and the former ostentatious Presidential Palace for his first public speech represents an inversion and appropriation of elite spaces from the Republican era.

The traditional residence of political leaders had been the Presidential Palace, located adjacent to Habana Vieja and the Malecón seawall and designed by Belgian architect Paul Belau with Cuban architect Rodolfo Maruri (Figure 3.17). The 1919 building illustrates the excessive eclecticism dominant throughout Havana the following two decades, combining elements of German Rococo, Viennese Secession, and Cuban Baroque architecture, among other styles. The luscious multi-tiered palace is as

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55 Eduardo Luis Rodríguez writes that the Presidential Palace “se aparta de la línea central de desarrollo estilístico del momento y, aún hoy, resulta difícil de clasificar, con su mezcla de elementos tomadas del rococó alemán y de la secesion vienesa, entre otras fuentes…” Such eclecticism and decorative luxuriance is evident in future prominent buildings such as the Capitolio (1929) and the Hotel Nacional (1930). A precedent, however, can be seen in Paul Belau’s earlier project in Havana, the redesign of the Gran Teatro
elaborate in the interior as it is from the exterior. Most prominent is the Salón de los Espejos, a Cuban take on the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles (Figure 3.18). With decoration from Tiffany & Co. of New York, the hall includes an elaborate rooftop mural representing “The Republic” by Cuban painter Armando Menocal. Recalling British and French history painting of the prior decade and reaching across the span of the room, the mural is centered by an angelic female figure representing the republic. The palace reflected the decadence and wealth of the big sugar and fruit economies, erected as an expression of opulence befitting the Republican era.

The Presidential Palace became a site of political conflict at the start of the Revolution, as well as appropriation towards a new political means. Its association with the decadence of previous leaders made the palace a not ideal site for the new leaders and president to inhabit. Instead, the palace was repurposed into a Museum of the Revolution. Rachel Weiss writes: “The Museum of the Revolution, occupying what was formerly Fulgencio Batista’s presidential palace, incarnates the process at the heart of Cuba’s history. Celia Sánchez, longtime companion to Fidel Castro and the first woman to take up arms in the guerrilla struggle, was instrumental in founding the museum. Raúl Castro, Fidel’s brother and head of the country’s armed forces since the beginning,

Tacón, or Pacacio del Centro Gallego, which combines elements of the Cuban Baroque with the Rococco and Neoclassical traditions. La Habana: Arquitectura del Siglo XX, 185.
established it by military decree on December 12, 1959: the museum was therefore on of the first institutions established after the revolutionary triumph.” Weiss goes on to refer to the museum as a relic of the revolutionary past: the building came to serve as a vessel or reliquary in which to destroy the Republican past and elaborately encase objects and narratives of revolutionary struggle.

While the Presidential Palace was appropriated into a reliquary to invert the purpose of former civic bourgeois architecture, the Habana Hilton maintained its larger function while serving as a temporary residence and headquarters for the incoming revolutionary leaders. During his initial speech at the Presidential Palace Fidel Castro claimed his ideal home:

If it were for reasons of affection, the place where I would like to live, because I have very deep feeling about it, is Turquino Peak. Because against the fort of the tyrants, we put up the barricade of our invincible mountains, because they are as yet undefeated. However, I want the people to go to [Camp] Columbia, because Columbia now belongs to the people. Let the tanks, which now belong to the people, go in the vanguard of the people, opening up a path.

Here Castro express the role of space both in the countryside and the military outcamps of the city. Though Castro was unable to reside at the mountaintop at Turquino Peak (Cuba’s highest elevation), his choice of the 23rd floor presidential suite allowed Castro to claim dominion of the city. Though the Hilton was not the tallest building in the city,
it was located at the top of the hill; its urban geography definitely made the hotel the most remarkable peak within the city.

The most prominent of appropriated urban spaces, however, is the Plaza Cívica, completed in 1955. Often identified as a city marked by its polycentric nature, Havana’s largest plaza was conceived as a space that spoke to the power and legitimacy of the state, in the outskirts of Nuevo Vedado and built to accommodate the scale of vehicular traffic. As an aerial photograph of the plaza shows, the Jose Martí monument dominates the axial plan, providing a spectacular visual anchor for visiting tourists. Adjacent to, or enveloping the Martí monument, is the massive Palacio de Justicia, designed by architect José Pérez Benitoa. Influenced by the Trocadero in Paris and the 1942 Universal Exhibition in Rome, the scale of the palace recalled the grandeur of authoritarian modernism of fascist Italy (Figure 3.19). In the September/October 1955 issue of Espacio architect Pedro Martínez Inclán echoed general criticism that the building was overly grandiose in scale and only spoke to one older generation fortifying their political power.

The Batista era Palace of Justice is the most ostentatious building on the broad square, and came to house the most significant offices of governmental power by the

58 In their book Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis, Joseph Scapraci, Roberto Segre and Mario Coyula highlight the shift in Havana’s urban development, with the original five squares marking centers to the expansion of the city outside of its walls. It can be argued that today’s Plaza Revolución was one of the final major centers completed at an unprecedented scale.
60 Espacio 15 (September – October 1954), 12.
mid-1960s, including the Consejo de Estado, the offices of the President, and the Comité Central of the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC). I argue that the architectural high modernism of the plaza – ranging from Beaux Arts and fascist inspired monumentality to more stripped-down, refined glass and stone mid-rises recalling a machine-like aesthetic – reflects the design imperatives of state architecture at the height of the Batista regime. That is, both architects and the state collaborated to express power through an expansive architectural scale, technological innovation, a panoptic-like, organized setting, and the production of bureaucratic and innovative form. As discussed in the previous chapter, this included an incorporation of the plastic arts to express a cubanidad, tying the international modernism of the plaza’s buildings to a nationalist sentiment. The plaza aesthetically served the new socialist government superbly well, perhaps serving as a model for future architectural endeavors – that is, expressing technological ingenuity and utopic monumentality, all while providing references to cubanidad.

The most significant change in the program of the plaza after the Revolution was its use as a space of public congregation. As original illustrations and floor plans from the June and July 1953 issues of Arquitectura Cuba demonstrate, the space en masse was not originally conceived as a pedestrian space or a space for masses at large (Figure 3.20). The models and plans show how the newly built urban center was intended for vehicular traffic, with parking space comprising a large part of the center, along with a
broad boulevard. Located southwest of Havana’s Centro area, the plaza is prominently 
located between city suburbs and its major neighborhoods, a new axis point at what was 
during the 1950s an ever-expanding Havana.

The centrality of the plaza in the urban plan of Havana paralleled the symbolic 
potency of its architecture and monuments. The focal point of the plaza is undoubtedly 
the José Martí Monument, a towering star shaped monument featuring a massive 
marble sculpture of the leader. Designed by architects Enrique Luis Varela, Jean 
Labatut, and Raúl Otero, the central plan of the monument’s building is defined by the 
form of a five-point star, making the building determined largely by pentagonal and 
rounded forms. Five pairs of ramps lead up to a round base. The sculpture of Martí  
faces west towards the large open plaza, indicating the primary entrance to the building, 
intended both as a museum and a library. The star shaped tower determines the 
program of the interior. A large round colonnade divides the centralized museum from 
the five study rooms, each the tip of a star. A central star shaped divider also defines the 
museum space. The star and Martí emblematize the republic and its aspirations, stately 
symbols of cubanidad in the new political axis of the city.\(^6\)

This axis point became redefined immediately upon the triumph of the 
Revolution as a site of take over with the masses. As early as January 5, 1959, the date

\(^6\) See “Forum sobre la Plaza de la Republica y el monument a Marti, Colegio Nacional de Arquitectos, 
Exposicion del Arq. Anrique Luis Varela, Sesion celebrada en el capitolio nacional de mayo de 1953,” 
*Arquitectura Cuba* 240 (July 1953), 271-282.
Manuel Urrutia claimed the Cuban presidency, crowds gathered to celebrate the incoming Revolution. The plaza, built around vehicular traffic with state buildings as architectural monuments to the modern Cuban nation, became converted to use by the people. As early as January 5, 1959 the plaza became a marked space for political gatherings of the masses, a means to communicate the prevalence of the revolution. As Lilian Guerra comments, during the first months following the revolution, “the mass rally acquired long-lasting mean and clear political purpose: it became the founding anchor of the Revolution’s grand narrative of redemption.” As Guerra points out, the rally marked the legitimacy of the revolution in its display of unity and mass participation; it became a means to see how the new government appropriated significant urban space and reoriented its usage.

Examples of Havana’s urban takeover are plentiful, and highlight the role of appropriation in the Cuban Revolution. By the time of the triumph of the revolution the National Bank of Cuba, a high rise in a prominent location of Centro Habana alongside the Malecón, was near completion. The sixteen-story building was abandoned for over two decades, as the revolution prioritized other buildings in the area. The abandonment of a building near completion is an example of appropriation, as the [↩]

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63 Visions of Power in Cuba, 37.
government chose to focus on other projects instead of the bank, which represented the corrupt financial order of the Batista era. The government revisited the unfinished building by 1982, however, adding eight floors and opening the most reputable hospital in the island. From its abandonment to its conversion, the never-realized National Bank and present day Hospital Almeijeiras represents the complexity of appropriation. The abandonment and decay of other buildings in Havana also present forms of appropriation, as they present a shift in values with regards to the Revolution’s inherited built environment. In a revolution promoting agrarian reform, the takeover of the city determined its partial abandonment.

Various other documented examples of appropriation of buildings exist throughout the city. With much of the elite fleeing from the start of the Revolution into the late 1960s, many mansions and other properties were seized by the government and reused for various purposes. The area around the posh and lush residential Avenida Quinta (Fifth Avenue) of the Miramar suburb became a prime location for new embassies. The government offered the former private residences to numerous “Tricontinental” nations – or developing and under-developing nations in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, with which Cuba was reaching out to diplomatically. Other homes and apartment buildings of the upper and burgeoning middle classes also came to serve new purposes. Some buildings were adapted into primary schools, clinics and cultural centers. Some large homes were split between families, turning spaces previously built
for one affluent family into adapted apartments for several. A building’s appropriation often correlated with its perceived significance within its vicinity. For example, often the most prominent or ornate buildings within a given neighborhood were utilized for communist party headquarters.

Some buildings were renamed but served similar functions following the Revolution. The most outstanding example is the Casa de las Américas, a building previously owned by the Asociación de Escritores y Artistas Americanos (Figure 3.21). The original building was a private residence dramatically transformed in 1948 when purchased by the Asociación, which completed a series of renovations between 1952 and 1953 by architect Ramón del Busto. Dramatically transforming the space into a late streamline deco building with an additional floor and tower, the building became an iconic edifice facing the Malecón and the monument to Cuban independence fighter Calixto García. Already a cultural space dedicated to writing and the arts, the building was rebranded with the founding of the Casa de las Américas in 1959. Beyond being a connection point between artists and writers from the Americas, it became a symbol of Cuba’s dedication and promotion of the arts.

The repurposing of buildings went beyond meeting a practical need for housing – a concern among much of the socialist Soviet Block in this era. Appropriation was a

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fundamental part of the cultural politics of the Cuban Revolution. Reorienting the usage and purpose of buildings, particularly newer buildings constructed during an era of real estate speculation, allowed these buildings to symbolize the desires of the new government and its utopic, humanistic endeavors. The occupation and reorientation of spaces privileged by the previous political regime and private interests helped maintain the former urban hierarchy, but towards an entirely new means. While some mansions and prominent edifices became neighborhood party headquarters, others became schools, polyclinics, pharmacies, embassies, and cultural centers. The appropriation of space was a form of cultural diplomacy, demonstrating the humanistic sensibilities of the new government – both to its public and to international spectators.

**The City as a Museum of Appropriation**

In 1969, Cuban cartographers worked with Soviet cartographers to create a national atlas to supersede all previous endeavors. Beyond recording the geological and economic features of the island, the mapping project was also dedicated to showing the cultural prowess of Cuba – mapping everything from the number of media outlets throughout the island to the locations of museums and cultural centers. In one section featuring two maps – that of “Teatros y Centros de Cultura, 1967” and “Bibliotecas y Museos, 1966” – one can observe the existence of museums and other cultural institutions throughout the island, with many of the museums in the national capital
These maps attempted to show the modernity and humanity of the revolution, which permitted an expansion of museums and cultural centers throughout the island, utilizing former infrastructure and creating resources anew. The role of appropriation as cultural diplomacy is most apparent in the creation and appropriation of museums and cultural centers, such as the Casa de las Américas and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. The promulgation of these museums and centers was accelerated by the confiscation of private artifacts and objects of art by the state – a much more private and controversial form of appropriation.

The Palacio de Bellas Artes, the primary edifice of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, remains the most illustrious example in this era of a cultural institution’s appropriation (Figure 3.23). Construction of the palace was completed in 1954, creating an official space for a museum that had been in flux since its 1913 genesis under director and architect Emilio Heredia. The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes was located in several buildings after its founding in 1913, before settling into its permanent home in 1954, the former site of the late 19th century Mercado de Colón. In addition to the founding of the Academia Nacional de la Historia and the Academia Nacional de Artes y Letras in 1910, ideas for the creation of a national museum were discussed extensively among city officials and concerned citizens. The creation of a national museum – to

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67 In reference to the writing by Emilio Heredia in the November 1st, 1910 issue of the periodical *La Discusión*: “Se confiere al Museo la misión de coleccionar las ‘reliquias’ de valor histórico – principalmente de las
cover both the history of the island and the arts – was thought to be essential to the formation of the nascent nation state for Havana’s lettered elite. Architect and museologist José Linares, who renovated the 1954 Palacio de Bellas Artes in the late 1990s, describes the early idea of the museum as a “temple... to patriotism”, a means of legitimizing the new nation. Embodied within its architecture and its museography is the tension at the nexus of modernity, nationalism, and coloniality: the tension between tradition and the avant-garde.

As early as 1925, the Mercado de Colón was suggested as an ideal site for the new museum. The market building was constructed between 1882 and 1884 and located behind the later built 1919 Presidential Palace, with an open square in between that today hosts the Memorial Granma. Some critics viewed the market as an architectural treasure, while others argued the market was historically insignificant as it was a late 19th building that mimicked the previous century’s colonial architecture. Its stylistic authenticity contested, the building would later be destroyed, though its layout and original ground level windows were kept intact. Debates about the new museum laid bare underlying tensions about architecture style and innovation. The courtyard plaza guerras de independencia – y ‘contribuir a robustecer el culto a nuestros heroes y arraigar los sentimientos patrióticos’, de manera que sea ‘análogo a los existentes en el extranjero’. Y es que en ese momento histórico, de la naciente República, esa institución se concibe y sustenta sobre conceptos decimonónicos que legitiman el museo como ‘templo’ en este caso, del patriotismo”. José Linares Ferrera, El Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 32.
floor plan remained as an ode to coloniality in a modernizing project, with the Mercado having an impactful blueprint on the final design.

Following the construction of the Presidential Palace (1919), the Secretary of Public Works expressed concerns about the Mercado Colón, as it had become an abandoned edifice in decay. Large renovations within its vicinity marked the area as a new center for the state, with 1925 plans by French urban planner Jean Claude-Nicolás Forestier highlighting the area’s importance within a polycentric ring.68 In 1925, architects Evelio Govantes and Félix Cabarrocas created a plan to readapt the building, maintaining its colonnades as a perimeter encasing a modest Beaux Arts building that matched the colonial style market to its new grandiose surroundings. Their plan never came into fruition, though it was debated throughout the decade in the 1940s.69 By 1949, the Ministry of Public Works (founded after the 1933 revolution as the primary arbiter of new public edifices and infrastructure) proposed a new plan by architect Manuel Febles with a similar architectural language (Figure 3.24). Architect Enrique Caravia wrote that the new museum reflected Cuban society’s need for a museum that housed art and cultural artifacts, while drawing various comparisons to the United States and the civic

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68 Reforms by the Machado regime resulted in the master planning of Havana, as discussed in Chapter 1. The earliest known plans for convert the colonial era market into a museum date to the plans of Govantes and Cabarrocas in 1925. Ibid., 13-14.
69 According to Dr. Tomás Felipe Camacho, president of the Patronato Pro-Museo Nacional, the 1925 project, with its mainatinece of the “conservación de las arcadas, con sus inútiles portales, sus sombíos entresuelos y sus múltiples columnas, que lo hacían inadecuado a las exigencias contemporáneas de un museo...” Ibid., 37-8.
role of its great museums.70 In a way, the new plan attempted to bridge the past of the market with the newness of a prominent national museum. Keeping the original colonades, the plan differs from its 1925 counterpart by creating a second tier that entirely united the old façade with its new building, not reflecting the three stories of the interior. The architectural language, however, remained in the past, presenting a neoclassical pastiche rather than evoking the modern trends and “International Style” that had become mainstream by the close of the 1940s decade.71

The final plan revolved around the controversial demolition of the building, reflecting growing trends in development in the 1950s. The building was secretly destroyed during the night of December 11, 1951, as previous plans to incorporate the colonnade of the Mecado Colón were abandoned and the design of a new museum was overtaken by architect Alfonso Rodríguez Pichardo. The design maintained the original courtyard plan of the market, a colonial referent to a bygone era in what would become an ultimately modern edifice. In comparison to its other counterparts of the 1950s, such as the hotels and state buildings discussed above, the Palacio de Bellas Artes became one of the most evocative examples of plastic integration in contemporary Cuban architecture.

70 Arquitectura Cuba 234 (May 1951), 231.
71 José Linares Ferrera, El Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 40-41.
Floor plans of the new museum illustrate the means by which the museum revolutionized the courtyard plan, adapting it to the infrastructure of the 1950s (Figure 3.25). At the northeastern edge of the parallelogram shaped building, facing Calle Trocadero and Avenida Bélgica, is a fan shaped theater whose curvature is repeated in the organic ramps towards the southern end of the building. The central courtyard provides an axis to an open plan extending to series of block colonnades in each direction. At the western edge facing Calle Agramonte is shaded parking space, speaking to the need to accommodate vehicular traffic. The openness and complex forms of the ground level contrasts to the simplicity of the 2nd and 3rd floors, whose galleries wrap around the open air courtyard, suggesting a programmed directionality for the museum viewer and recall the box-like space preferred for traditional gallery displays. The building shows clear referents to the modernist ethos of architects like Le Corbusier with its brise-soleil spatial order, while also showing the influence of organic forms in North American architecture.

Plastic integration, along with its clear invocation of International Style modernism, was key to the building’s success. A variety of artists were invited to work on the new museum, implanting it with murals and sculptures that redefined its streamline modernity. The façade of the main entrance is marked by a protruding concrete shade above the front doors and windows as well as a sculpture by Rita Longa (Figure 3.26). Longa’s sculpture, titled Space, form and light, features three human figures
enmeshed with organic forms recalling the work of the British sculptor Henry Moore and Romanian sculptor Constantine Brancusi. A headless female body stretches across the foreground providing a horizontal sway, her arm extending out to an obscure shaped wing. In the background two contemplative male figures point inwards as if to frame the soaring female. The sculpture engages the viewer in a contemplative dance, presenting a sensual image that redefined the rigid grid-like façade of the front entrance.

Other sculptures sit above “eyebrows”, or cantilevered concrete slabs, extending just below upper level windows (Figure 3.27). Above the front entrance is a sculpture by famed Cuban artist José Sicre, most prominently known for the José Martí monument. Unlike the classicizing forms of Martí with which Sicre is usually associated, this sculpture features abstract, organic forms that contrast with the building’s rectilinear exterior, much like the entrance sculpture by Rita Longa. Around the corner on the Western façade adjacent to the parking is another sculpture by Ernesto González Jerez whose organic abstract forms recall entangled bodies. With each work either created in situ or specifically for the architecture of the new museum, the adaptation of sculpture into building’s program provides a sensual and spatial redefining of the modern architecture’s rectilinearity.

Bas-relief sculptures throughout the building redefine the architecture in a prominent manner as well. The Vestibule José Martí, or the main lobby one encounters immediately at the front entrance, features a prominent bas-relief sculpture by Jésus
Casagrán with sumptuous female figures rising the height of the tall two level walls. Adjacent is a major mosaic regarding knowledge and the arts by Enrique Caravia, an art deco-like presentation of muse-like figures representing different epochs of knowledge production and the arts. The most architectonic examples of the building’s plastic integration are the bas-relief sculptures by Ernesto Navarro, which encircle the third level within the courtyard as a large decorative band (Figure 3.28). The repeating image almost recalls the decorative role of a tile; however, each panel is a unique original geometric pattern. The strict grid formed by the building is entirely redefined by playful geometric forms. In this installation one sees two of the major trends of the Cuban vanguardia of the 1950s: one of the plastic integration of architecture, especially by the second generation vanguardia, and the other a movement towards abstraction, a project taken on largely by a new, third generation.

The integration of arts and architecture continued in the content and methods of display within the museum space, which incorporated design and curating into the traditional gallery space in unique ways. With a permanent collection ranging from historical and anthropological displays to displays of ancient art and contemporary Cuban art, the museum provided a broad spectrum of material to display within the building’s clearly organized space. José Linares has suggested that the Palacio de las Bellas Artes was on the forefront of thinking about the relationship of exhibition design and vanguardist art, utilizing the design of Cuba’s premier artists in the design of the
exhibition spaces as much as it did with sculptures on the surface of the building.\textsuperscript{72} While this is true, especially as the museum developed over the following decade, the museum was also beholden to more traditional international standards.

The permanent galleries dedicated to “arte universal” are a prime example of the more traditional curatorial designs of the museum. While the building finished construction in 1954, the permanent galleries were not open to the public until their December 14, 1955 inauguration. The prominent collections included that of the Conde de Lagunillas, featuring examples of ancient art from Egypt, Eretria, Greece and Rome.

The gallery offered a clear and open “white cube” aesthetic that responded to the organic, modernist architecture, while conforming to the standards of European and North American museums of the time (\textbf{Figure 3.29}).\textsuperscript{73} Nearby the Greek vases, blue and white curtains recall modern Greece; otherwise the display is formulaic and spatially open. This differs greatly from the historical exhibits on the third floor, which displayed topics ranging from Cuba’s wars for independence to Afro-Cuban culture. In the section of ethnology, coordinated by Cuban writer, anthropologist and ethnologist Lydia Cabrera, features more conventional anthropological demonstrations recalling life-size

\textsuperscript{72} Interview with José Linares, 15 November 2012.
\textsuperscript{73} Here I refer to the “white cube” aesthetic as based on the writing of Brian O’Doherty in \textit{Inside the White Cube: the ideology of the gallery space}, where deference is payed to the 1929 Museum of Modern Art and Alfred Barr for playing a pivotal role in promoting the white cube. North American influence is undoubtedly seen in the galleries of the new Palacio de Bellas Artes, as art historian and curator Dietrich Bothmer consulted the display and collection of the Havana museum, as did Francis H. Taylor, director of the Museum of Metropolitan Art. Linares, \textit{El Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes}, 58.
dioramas. For example, one exhibit features religion in Cuba through a variety of artifacts, ranging from Santería batá drums to altars dedicated to a variety of saints (Figure 3.30). The eclectic diorama reveals the syncretism and diversity of Cuban culture, going as far as to place these publicly presented artifacts in a manner that recalls private, domestic space – and putting this anthropological display in direct communication with adjacent galleries of colonial furniture and decorative arts.

The differences between the displays of fine art versus and those of history and popular culture reflect the frenetic nature of the all-encompassing museum, a modernist temple representing Cuba’s past as well as its vast connection to international notions of art and refined culture. The galleries presenting the foundations of Cuban art, created in 1955 and presented on the third floor along with the historical and anthropological exhibits, are most indicative of national politics. Unlike its adjacent displays, the aesthetic of the vanguardist Cuban art shares the curatorial refinement of the galleries of international collections on the second floor, conforming to the white cube standard (Figure 3.31). Wall partitions seem to break up the massive space into the more traditional white cube gallery – that is, the partitions help provide a seemingly pure display for aesthetic contemplation, one that contradicts Cabrera’s more cluttered and contextualized displays of ethnology.

The galleries of contemporary art were adjacent temporary exhibitions, many of which traveled from abroad to Havana’s new museum. The influence of the
international artistic and architectural vanguardia is clear in the museum’s programming, giving the museum a dual role as nationalistic proprietor – which documented the past while looking towards the future – and as an arbiter of international cultural exchanges. It might seem that the exhibition galleries provided more innovative curating than the permanent collections, given the diversity of the work featured. However, these shows relied largely on the institutions from which the exhibitions originated. One example is the exhibition *Latin American Architecture since 1945*, organized by Henry Russell Hitchcock of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). The exhibition consisted of massive photographs of utopic contemporary buildings throughout Latin America, as the blockbuster exhibition presented new trends in the region.74 The exhibition featured three photographs of prominent Havana buildings, and was well received by the architecture community. The large scale black and white photographs of the buildings, some accompanied with smaller floor plans, immersed the viewer in utopic architectural spaces across Latin America. This trend of using enlarged photographs in an immersive manner became prominent in exhibitions and urban design of 1960s Havana, as discussed in the following chapter.

The triumph of the revolution is generally thought by the public to be a significant break in history. While there is a notable break from the past, there is also a reliance of past structures of power that left the polycentric spatial hierarchy in Havana

74 *Arquitectura Cuba* 296 (March 1958), 112, 115.
largely intact. Spatial appropriation is a dual process. The first is the process of laying claim over public and semi-public spaces of power while maintaining the power of such spaces. The second is the inverting of private spaces throughout Havana, resulting in the creation of a network of newly formed institutions and habitations across the city. While this remapping challenges the former dichotomy between private and public space assumed in urban real estate, the overturning of property in the creation of a socialist city complements, rather than supplants, former power relations across urban space. As an edifice embodying institutionalized notions of national culture, the Palacio de Bellas Artes became a new center of focus and diffusion – an example of a dual process that mixed things up while maintaining the order. While the palace remained Havana’s premier arts venue, it also became the key site for a radical decentralization of the arts and culture from formerly “elitist” bastions. As discussed below, the museum’s appropriation is manifested in the changes to the gallery displays and exhibition programming, as well as in the dispersal of various objects to new museums throughout the city and the island at large.

The Museo de la Revolución (in the former Presidential Palace), one of the first museums created following the triumph of the Revolution, assumed the role of the third level of the Palacio de Bellas Artes – that of presenting Cuban history and culture. It did so along with the Museo de la Ciudad in the Plaza de Armas, which housed objects relating to the broader history of Havana. The Museo de la Revolución focused on the
history of revolutionary struggle and Cuba’s contemporary revolution, providing grand
narratives of a triumphalist revolution – a nationalist teleology of revolution that
became a curatorial mission throughout the island. The Museo de Revolución presented
artifacts of the revolution in a privileged site, a position of relative esteem over the
displays of Taíno artifacts, Afro-Cuban culture, and the decorative arts of the colonial
era, all of which were dispersed to new, more peripheral locations. For example, the
Museum of Colonial Art, created in the mid-1960s, acquired many of the colonial era
objects, while Taíno artifacts were dispersed to museums around the island nation,
including the archeological museum at the Universidad de la Habana.

Along with the government’s repurposing of public and private spaces, the
procurement, expropriation and confiscation of objects was a key act of appropriation in
the 1960s. The Museum of Decorative Arts, for example, was formerly the estate of
María Luisa Gómez-Mena, or the Countess Revilla de Camargo. This elaborate Beaux
Art mansion, located prominently in the heart of residential Vedado, came equipped
with an elaborate collection of decorative arts from Western Europe and East Asia. After
the countess went into exile in 1959, her mansion was maintained as a relic of Cuba’s
bourgeois past, unlike other elite villas, homes and mansions that were repurposed and
appropriated by the state. As Giuliana Bruno writes, the museum “shows what these
mansions looked like, and how they functioned before their socialization.” The museum
is unique in keeping all the decoration in tact as a museological display, open to the
public to show the extent of wealth garnered in the Republican era. A similar museum is the Napoleonic Museum near the University of Havana, which combined the collections of Orestes Ferrara and sugar baron Julian Lobo in Lobo’s grand, Italianate palazzo. The government confiscated the large collection of paintings and decorative arts from the Napoleonic era, as well as the extensive library and Napoleon-related memorabilia, and converted them into one of the most significant Napoleon-themed museums worldwide. Like the Museum of Decorative Arts, it became a temple that showcased the peculiar collecting habits of Cuba’s former elite.

The creation of new museums exploring material ranging from the historical to the cultural permitted a rearrangement and radicalization of the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Cuba. The display of fine arts within the broad space of the museum became a priority, with the creation of permanent galleries of Cuban art in 1964. The focus of the museum was now entirely on painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, as the Palacio de Bellas Artes changed from an all-encompassing museum into the island nation’s premier visual arts museum. This necessitated the reorganization of the spaces beyond the addition of permanent Cuban art galleries – that is, a reorganization of the entire museum to reflect the initiatives of the revolution and trends in curatorial design. One vibrant example is the creation of new vitrines for ancient art. Designed by sculptor Eugenio Rodríguez, the vitrines for Greek vases radically transform the previous conventional vitrines (see Figure 3.29), placing them in dialogue with vanguardist
Cuban sculpture (Figure 3.32). The vitrines specifically recall many of the building’s outdoor sculptures, placing the design of the permanent galleries in dialogue with the plastic integration of the building. The new vitrines revolutionize the presentation of Greek art, placing objects of Western antiquity within an undoubtedly modern, Cuban setting.

The museum continued to host temporary exhibitions, both international and national, but the exhibition programming changed markedly from the 1950s in the revolutionary era. From 1960 on, the museum hosted a series of national exhibitions, on subjects such as printmaking related to the revolution, homages to first generation vanguardist artists, and trends in contemporary art.75 Organized under the aegis of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura, these exhibitions expanded the curatorial endeavors of the 1950s and adapted them to a new era. Annual competitions in printmaking in particular were influenced by the Mexican Taller de Gráfica Popular, and the growing philosophy that printmaking was a medium to better reach the masses (as discussed more specifically in the following chapter).

The museum’s mission quickly became attached to the politics of the new government, as exhibition themes showed. In 1960, the museum hosted the exhibition Declaración de la Habana: 40 Xilografías Cubanas, featuring political prints and celebrating

the passing of the Declaration of Havana. The document, recognized today as the First Declaration of Havana, proclaimed Cuba’s stance against imperialism from the North and its acceptance of assistance by the Soviet Union as not being an intrusion of any sort.

The exhibition drew from the aesthetics of Cuban printmaking at the start of the Revolution and adapted it to a specific political moment. Further, the catalogue for the exhibition described how art could serve a political cause while preserving its artistic integrity, or vanguardism. This exhibition was a precursor to exhibitions that would follow throughout the decade, focusing on contemporaneous political moments as well as the anniversaries of historical milestones. Appropriating the museum meant “revolutionizing” its programming, gearing exhibitions towards a political means while remaining au courant with global trends in contemporary art.

While the focus of the museum was largely the fine arts, one major exhibition hosted in 1960 – the Exposición Soviética de Ciencia, Cultura y Tecnología – reveals a sea of change in exhibition programming and its relationship to Cuban foreign policy. A major exhibition based on the Soviet pavilion of the 1958 World’s Fair in Brussels, the exhibition transformed the space of the Palacio de Bellas Artes through its emphasis on Soviet ingenuity from new construction technologies to the development of space travel.

(Figure 3.3). The exhibition on Soviet science, culture and technology had traveled to New York and was about to close in Mexico late 1959, when Fidel Castro personally suggested it visit Cuba while in its immediate vicinity. Soviet statesman Anastas Mikoyan traveled to the island as he did to other locales, giving a speech for exhibition’s opening on February 20, 1960 that garnered international media attention. The museum was not only a temple of past cultures and present day Cuba, but a means to represent growing Cold War alliances through cultural diplomacy.

While the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes redeveloped its mission as a fine arts museum, the Palacio de Bellas Artes was transforming itself into the ideal venue to welcome Cuba’s new economic benefactor, the Soviet Union. The museum’s identity in the first years following the revolution was arguably in flux, as the curatorial mission of the past was adapted to new economic and political contexts. While the Soviet exhibition of 1960 showed new influences and approaches – which would be explored in future exhibitions of the 1960s – Cuba never accepted the cultural policies and reverence towards social realism predominant in the Soviet Union and many of its satellites. As the famous adage by Fidel Castro goes, “our enemies are capitalists and imperialists, not...

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27 The exhibition was previously discussed in the February 1959 edition of *Arquitectura Cuba*, where it was compared with the U.S. and French pavilions, each displaying designs of Cold War ingenuity. As Greg Castillo highlights, the design of consumer goods became a battle ground for the Cold War – Cuba’s discussion of the exhibition prior to the 1959 revolution and Castro’s encouragement for its travel is indicative of the manner in which Cuba was looking at various models for implementing new technological advances. “Recuerdos de la Exposición de Bruselas de 1958”. *Arquitectura Cuba* 307 (February 1959), 84-90.
abstract painting”. The space highlighted Cuba’s commitment to the arts and its worldliness – as it had in the previous decade. Cuba’s understanding of itself and its orientation in the world, however, was forever changed.

Nonetheless, the integration of art and architecture evident throughout the Palacio de Bellas Artes remained significant in marking the building as a utopic center for the visual arts. The modernist temple with the colonial foundation of the Mercado Colón today remains the most prestigious museum in the island, still carrying out its role as an arbiter for Cuban art and art history while reflecting changing international relations. The major renovations and expansion of the museum in the late 1990s are themselves a more subtle form of appropriation and revision. Moving the universal collection into the formerly unused and dilapidated Centro Austuriano de La Habana – formerly an elite social club on the Parque Central – the Palacio de Bellas Artes received a postmodern renovation that rebranded it as the temple par excellence for representing the visual arts in modern Cuba from the colonial era to today. Its re-adaption and siting has made it one of the most visited museums by tourists in the island. Such contemporary appropriations are apparent in the history of the Habana Hilton as well,

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78 Cited in David Craven, Abstract Impressionism as Cultural Critique, 16.
79 The manner in which international relations impact the programming becomes apparent in the kind of international shows displayed at the National Museum today. Recently the museum hosted an exhibition entitled “Beijing to Havana: New Contemporary Art Revoluion” (2009), and has also hosted two exhibitions from the U.S.: “Chelsea visits Havana”, an exhibition coordinated for the 2009 Biennale, followed by the exhibition “Wild Noise”, coordinated with the Bronx Museum of Art for the Biennale in 2015. The hosting of prominent contemporary art exhibitions from such locales recalls the 1960s and 1970s era, when the museum hosted exhibitions from throughout the socialist world.
rebranded the Habana Libre in 1960, and today partially owned and operated by Spanish hotelier Sol Meliá. The appropriation of public and private spaces by the incoming Cuban revolution in 1959 both repurposed spaces and resignified their prominence with Havana’s urban terrain. This legacy of appropriation persists today, as Cuba continues to change and adapt to its contemporary situation.

In 1963 the Palacio de Bellas Artes hosted an exhibition celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes’ establishment. The exhibition traced the lineage of the museum in its various manifestations, claiming that “the role of the museum takes its true meaning within a cultural revolution that, like ours, is closely linked to the process of socialist edification”.80 The exhibition catalogue’s essay emphasized that the museum was for everyone, for the people. This attitude is reflected throughout the built environment of Havana. Building a revolutionary aesthetic and representing the Revolution required an overtaking of the past. The confiscating of objects and spaces took on a symbolic meaning for the nation and the greater public. Appropriation and its inherent re-signification of the past is essential to the Cuban Revolution, and to the creation of a revolutionary arts and culture.

80 “Por ello, el papel del museo cobra su verdadero sentido dentro de una revolución cultural que, como la nuestra, esta estrechamente vinculada al proceso de edificacion socialista”. Catalogue, 1963. Library at the National Museum of Fine Arts.
The Palacio de Bellas Artes had to be receptive an entirely new audience at the start of the revolution, as it became filled with barbudos just like the Habana Hilton in the first days of January 1959. As a former docent of the museum, design historian and theorist Lucila Fernández Uriarte notes how tours were being provided to barbudos, showing a shift in audience and the use of space. Many of Castro’s militia came from the countryside, where minor museums only existed in provincial capitals. Their presence among collections of Egyptian sarcophagi and Roman busts is perhaps an ideal representation of the Revolution, and the role arts and culture would come to play in the following years. The fleeing of the former bourgeoisie and eventually much of the middle class, and the socialist endeavor to create a more equal society, largely determined the program of appropriation.

While attempting to invent and promote a revolutionary aesthetic or style, the new government inherited the art, architecture and design of previous generations. As the various case studies above reveal, the process of appropriation is multi-layered in this period of fervent political change. It entailed a tactical appropriation of space by human subjects, one that impacts the visual receptions of space. It also entailed the deliberate altering of spaces, be it through design or through legislation. Furthermore, appropriation is also seen in the use and display of objects belonging to a former elite. In most cases, there is a deliberate claiming of a past iconography, and an inversion of

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81 Interview with Lucila Fernández Uriarte, December 18, 2010.
what place and visual representation meant in various contexts. More specifically, while the revolution showed the fluidity of art and architecture beyond the intentions of their original authors, significant objects and spaces retained their former glory or significance as markers of power relations. As the following chapters will reveal, appropriated spaces, artistic and design practices, and objects informed new artistic and architectural endeavors. The utopic notion of cubanidad was central to exhibitions of art, public art installations, urban design, and new art and architecture of the 1960s – a cubanidad that draws its heritage to, or is appropriated from, articulations made prior to the Cuban Revolution of 1959. A lens of appropriation must take into account that a notion of the “revolutionary” in arts and architecture was already a central concern of Cuba’s former vanguardia and lettered elite. Hence, examining patterns of appropriation reveals the ideological, spatial and visual contexts in which new art and architectures would emerge, as these new expressions professed the utopic promises of revolution.
Concrete Utopias: Experiments in Architecture + La Ciudad Gráfica

“In any case, if we are architects, we are architects of a new society, a new world, that is, if you will allow us to use that beautiful word ‘architect’” – Fidel Castro, 1963 World Congress of Architecture

“To my mind, in architecture, the mediate content should be the expression of the historical moment of its creation” – Ricardo Porro

The very first exhibition hosted in the 1963 brutalist Pabellón Cuba, titled *The History and Architecture of Cuba*, utilized image projections, film, graphics, fine art, and sculptural photographic installations to provide a teleological narrative regarding architectural production in Cuba (Figure 4.1). The intermedia spectacle curated by Enrique Fuentes – one of the three student architects of the 1955 Exposición Lam – complemented the architecture of Pabellón Cuba, as they both alluded to Cuba’s unique historical heritage while also promoting the island’s new technological advances in the realms of architecture and curatorial practice. Together they presented to the viewer a utopic narrative regarding the promises of modernism and the future of socialist Cuba.

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1 “Speech by Fidel Castro”, *Arquitectura Cuba* 331 (1964), 69.
Pabellón Cuba was not only a model for Cuba’s latest architectural ambitions and technological prowess (the building—built in a mere 72 days using technologies of prefabrication developed in Cuba—was intended as a statement to its international audience); it was a new means to consider the spatiality of exhibition display in the tropics. Further, the pavilion was a direct expression of the importance of the visual in the Revolution, something emphasized by the extensive graphic campaign coordinated by graphic designer José Lucci for the purposes of the World Congress of Architecture.\(^3\)

Organized under the aegis of the International Union of Architects, the triennial Congress brought together architects from around the world to discuss architecture in “underdeveloped” nations. The Congress provided a unique opportunity for Havana to serve as a stage for debates regarding politics, architecture, and the city. The meeting became a means for Cuba to portray its utopic aims to an international network of professionals, something made evident in major architectural projects of the 1960s as well as the Pabellón’s inaugural exhibition. In this chapter I explore the contours of utopia in the new architecture and urban visual culture of Havana and its surrounding environs, looking broadly at urban art projects and new architecture. I argue that manifestations of utopia become central to a revolutionary mythology, as Cuba portrayed itself to the larger world as a purveyor of anti-imperialism and Third World

\(^3\) The ad campaign featured everything from cigarette and match boxes to postal stamps. Jorge Bermúdez, *La Imagen Constante*, 94.
modernity. Utopia becomes defined within the ideological confines of the Revolution, its “revolutionary” impulse being manifested in new technologies of construction and communication. The *History and Architecture of Cuba* exhibition and its architectural framework illustrate the role mass media and architectural innovation play in defining a “revolutionary” aesthetic into the mid-1960s, placing it within a teleological and triumphalist narrative.

The utopic narrative of the *History and Architecture of Cuba* exhibition was expressed in a dynamic manner recalling both vanguardist displays of art (see Exposición *Lam*, Chapter 1) and World Expo pavilions. The utopic endeavors of the Cuban Revolution were immersed in new media, using photography and film to express their vanguardism. Despite dynamic, experimental evocations of the Revolution’s utopic ambitions in visual art and architecture, this chapter suggests that utopia itself was contested, as made apparent both in discourse and the legacy of 1960s architecture in Cuba. In his influential book *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, Marxist architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri explores the various ideological contours in which utopia is manifested, from an agrarian utopia to “architectural and supertechnological utopianism”⁴. Particularly apt is Tafuri’s suggestion that “Architectural, artistic, and urban ideology was left with the utopia of form as a way of recovering the human totality through an ideal synthesis, as a way of embracing

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⁴ *Architecture and Utopia*, 139
disorder through order.”⁵ A utopia of form – or the association of spatial and visual form as symbolic of the human condition and aspirations – is already seen in the large architectural and planning projects of Cuba’s Republican era, and this would continue in the Revolutionary era, when space came to represent or symbolize Cuba’s socialist endeavors. Utopia was to appear more concrete, as an expression of the desires of the collective masses and within the confines of a scientific Marxism.

In his 1926 essay “The New World”, influential Bauhaus architect Hannes Meyer writes: “The revolution in our attitude of mind to the reorganization of our world calls for a change in our media of expression… Art is becoming invention and controlled reality”.⁶ While Meyer’s notably universalist ethos did not fully translate to the nationalist sentiment of Cuba’s lettered elite, his writing on design and technology was influential to Cuban architects and designers.⁷ For Meyer, new technology creates a greater “realism” in that the use of mediatic devices allows a great understanding of our broader world. As discussed in this chapter, realism in Cuba is marked by an embrace of the expressive forms of abstraction and figuration in the fine arts, the photographic, and the cinematic, and does not imply the social realist style dominant throughout the Soviet bloc. Realism here assumes, according to Jesús Martín-Barbero, an

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⁵ Ibid., 47.
⁶ Hannes Meyer, Buildings, Projects, and Writings, 95.
experimentalism that expresses “the great vigor and mode of expression of the popular classes”.

While experimentation in art, design and architecture defined the primary years following the Cuban Revolution, debates regarding that which falls “within the Revolution” became more narrowly defined. In my exploration of new architecture and urban design in relation to the fine arts, I discuss both the break from previous models of utopia and the radical shift to a more dogmatic notion of “reality” as the decade progresses. Therefore, I explore how utopia transforms over the 1960s decade, from the arch of appropriation to its propagation as propaganda.

Ernst Bloch wrote extensively on utopia and Marxism, particularly in his multiple volume tome *The Principle of Hope* (1938-1947). Distinguishing between abstract and concrete utopias, Bloch suggests that abstract utopia is fantastic and compensatory – that people aspire towards utopia regardless of the social and economic constraints. Concrete utopianism, on the other hand, impacts and changes economic and political realities in an aspirational manner. Bloch writes, “Marxism thus rescued the rational core of utopia and made it concrete as well as the core of the still idealistic tendency-dialects”. While Bloch’s writing on architecture is largely critical of the technological rationality that breached the ideological chasm between socialism and capitalism, his discussion of architecture’s goal to present the futurity of its inhabitants is compelling.

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8 *De los medios a las mediaciones: Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*, 30
9 *The Principle of Hope*, 141
That is, architecture “attempt[s] to produce a homeland” for Bloch, corresponding to its natural environment to fulfill the ambitions of the masses – to express the spirit of the people.¹⁰

This need to produce a homeland, or heimat, is reflected in the ideological mechanisms of cubanidad. This is most evocatively expressed in the writing of Ricardo Porro, lead architect of Cuba’s National Arts Schools. His writing on the role of tradition in Cuba identifies the “sensual baroque” as most characteristic of Cuba’s architecture.¹¹ His essay echoes Alejo Carpentier’s 1964 poetic treatise “City of Columns”, where the reader “encounters an incredible profusion of columns” amid an undulating, sensual metropolis despite a notably neoclassical architectural repertoire.¹² Porro’s nod to tradition recalls the writing of Bloch, looking to historical epochs in order to inform architecture expressive of the people it serves.¹³ Porro’s approach to creating a revolutionary architecture defined by sensual form and embracing diverse traditions, as this chapter will reveal, comes up against the tide of a functionalist ideology emphasizing the economy and technology of prefabricated construction. Such a

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¹⁰ The Principle of Hope, 744. Quoted in and cited from Hilde Heynen, where she elaborates: The aim of great architecture is to build an image of Arcadia: it exploits the potential that is present in the natural surroundings of a site to create an environment that is in harmony with the aspirations of the human subject. Even when—in Gothic art, for instance—beauty and pleasure are infused with melancholy and a sense of the tragic, the promise of a better world can be discerned in its complex harmony...”, Architecture and Modernity: A Critique, 120.


¹³ In Volume III of his tome The Principle of Hope Bloch outlines many forms of utopia that connect the scientific with the dreamworlds of civilizations past. Bloch’s admiration for past architectures as utopia translates to Porro’s fascination with medieval culture, African cultures, and Cuba’s colonial past.
polemic, however, is complicated by attempts to produce a notion of “heimat” or cubanidad within prefabricated architectures – to reimagine concrete with a concrete utopianism.

Experiments across architecture reveal the tension in Cuban modern architecture highlighted in Chapter 1, that of the universalist ethos of international modernism versus the goal to express cubanidad. In many cases new technologies of prefabrication were developed in Cuba that proposed new geometric models, attempting to express some notion of regional identity and Cuban sensuality through repeating form. As this chapter will highlight, architects also considered their tropical setting and landscaping as a means to present a Cuban sensuality, along with a plastic integration. Much less defined by ceramic and painted murals, the plastic integration of architecture in the 1960s was redefined by a graphic revolution informed by new forms of media. Roberto Segre has suggested that the mediatic is an intermediary between the everyday and rational architecture, and that the graphic arts played a dominating role in Cuban architecture of the 1960s and 1970s. Graphic arts, photography and film began to redefine the new technologies of concrete, becoming additional means to construct the utopic endeavors of the new government.

The word utopia is introduced in Thomas More’s 1516 text *Utopia*, where Utopia is envisioned as an idealized island in the New World. Comprised of citizen

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14 Interview with Roberto Segre, 21 March 2012.
“Utopians”, the island is defined by rational communal relations among inhabitants, with outsider populations and criminals within serving as slaves. Utopia in its inception is seen as both communal and strictly rational, a society lacking transparency and where “the citizen’s body belongs to the collective”.15 While the account of Utopia seems like an idealist, almost absurdist vision of a perfect society according to More, the ideas in the book are analogous to the colonial conquest of the Americas. Maps of Tenochtitlan, the former island Aztec capital located in modern day Mexico City, themselves suggested a foreign and fantastic form of utopia for the for the 16th century European viewer – who transposed their own architectonic ideals on the American continents in the following decade.16 Many colonial settlements began to reflect rational ideals of their corresponding colonizing empire, as seen in the original forts and plaza-based plan of early colonial Havana. This is further observed in the urban reforms throughout 18th and 19th century Havana, suggesting that utopia is directly manifested in the coloniality of urban form.

In his oft-cited essay “Of Other Spaces” Michel Foucault cites the creation of colonies in the Americas as a “heterotopia” of compensation, rather than a utopia of

15 Frédéric Rouvilois, “Utopia & Totalitarianism,” 318.
16 The April 1953 issue of Arquitectura Cuba featured an article titled “Tenochtitlan y La Ciudad Ideal de Dürer” by Erwin Walter Palm. The article explores Dürer’s design for an ideal city, placing it in dialogue with images of other ideal city’s and the 1524 Nuremberg Plan of Tenochtitlan. The article hence explores how ideas of ideal or utopic cities at the height of the Renaissance were reflective of perceptions regarding civilization in the Americas as well as part of the project of European conquest. Arquitectura Cuba 237 (April 1953), 153-157.
illusion. Defining utopia as a non-space, heterotopia refers to an “other space” that is both real and counter to the dictums of society. Whereas the utopic may present an idealized image or idea, the heterotopic refers to real space (in a physical and/or mental capacity) that overlaps and counteracts other spaces, and can take form in the concretization of utopia. While Foucault claims the colonial settlements of Jesuits in South America to be “marvelous, absolutely regulated colonies in which human perfection was effectively achieved”, it must be acknowledged that the heterotopic “otherness” of Jesuit communities is countered by their utopic imposition of order on spaces. Perhaps the currently perceived failure of utopia stemming from the Cuban Revolution can be best understood on the ground, in the diverse and complicated heterotopia(s) formed in the newly socialist city.

In his book *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment* Henri Lefebvre explicates and expands upon notions of concrete and abstract utopias, looking at the manner in which the abstract was attached to the State and the technocratic – that is, the way abstract utopia became one created by officials “who want to build the perfect city”. Lefebvre’s reading of abstract utopia and its political contexts is defined by the role of the mediatic where architecture “is a form of communication”. More simply, the practice of architecture becomes a sign of state desire, its utopia abstracted, or in other words

\[\text{17} \text{ Toward an Enjoyment of Architecture, 148.}\]
\[\text{18} \text{ Ibid., 53.}\]
transmitted as a message. However, Lefebvre suggests the political imperative of the state does not determine the efficacy of spatial and architectural forms, as such forms can be transfigured as a means of communication (abstract) and as a vessel for human desire and enjoyment (concrete). More specifically, form can be communicative of power relations, or present an attempt to defy them via human engagement (or a combination of both). As explored in this chapter, Lefebvre’s formulation of utopia differs from accounts by major thinkers such as Ernst Bloch and Manfredo Tafuri in its clear delineation of that proposed to be “real” and an architecture of personal experience and enjoyment.

This chapter opens with a discussion of the 1963 World Congress of Architecture and Pabellón Cuba’s inaugural exhibition, History and Architecture of Cuba. Both serve as venues to show new revolutionary architectures presented to the larger world of architecture professionals as well as the Cuban public. The teleological narrative of the History and Architecture of Cuba exhibition and the meetings of the Congress permitted Cuba to express its desire to be the vanguard of the Third World. Further, the new graphic language of modern architecture and urban design presented at the Congress emphasized Cuba’s technological achievements and identify with la lucha, or the struggle, both for the island’s sovereignty and for those of the greater world impacted by imperialism. Through creative uses of photography, film, and abstract design, Cuba
expressed its unique contribution to the world, citing itself as a potential 20th century utopia for its developing world counterparts.

I follow with a discussion of new architectures in early 1960s Cuba, focusing on the phenomenon of the *ciudad universitaria*, or university city (or campus). I specifically look at the Ciudad Universitaria José Antonio Echeverria (CUJAE) and the National Arts Schools, which best exemplify the diversity of approaches taken in Cuba’s new architecture. While the former embraces new technologies of prefabrication and incorporates plastic integration, the latter utilizes organic, esoteric form and native materials to express a revolutionary aesthetic spatially. Their polemical approaches and histories illustrate changes in attitude regarding architecture and ideology across the 1960s decade, and they become models to consider the varied politics of architectural form. While the range of new architectural projects following the 1959 Revolution manifest the utopic discourse in which they were created, the variety of new projects complicates a singular vision for the socialist state, presenting a rift where architects negotiated how architecture best served the people.

Lastly, I close with a discussion of how utopia is incorporated to design practices at the urban level, and how architectural form translated to the graphic realm and vice versa. Beginning with an analysis of the journal *Arquitectura Cuba* as a venue for expressing Cuba’s utopic aims, I expand my discussion to consider graphic arts campaigns and urban design. Drawing from Alejo Carpentier’s notion of the “city of
columns”, I cite the 1959 revolution as creating a ciudad gráfica. The notion of a ciudad gráfica runs counter to popular images of the Baroque and romantic city that emerged in the literature of the era, and suggests the important role new technologies of communication played in supplanting Havana’s new lettered class (see discussion of Rama in Chapter 1). That is, graphic arts (including photography and film) notably impacted the built environment, entirely redefining the relationship of architecture to the fine arts and the state. Such a graphic revolution is presented in the World Congress of Architecture’s inaugural exhibition, which served as inspiration for future exhibit pavilions and graphic arts campaigns. By the close of the decade, the use of graphic arts by curators, architects, artists and other designers helped transform the city and its many neoclassical arcades. More succinctly, the graphic arts visually came to define Cuba’s “revolutionary” architectures, both in representing architectural, spatial and social ideals, and in the plastic integration of graphic material with new architecture and urban space. As made evident in the case of the World Congress of Architecture, the employment of new technologies in media and architecture came to (re)present Cuba as utopia, as a model socialist island in a decolonizing world.

Staging Modernity

Attendees at the World Congress of Architecture in 1963 were greeted with a grand spectacle on its inaugural night. Following welcoming speeches at the Palacio de
Deportes, guests were ushered to La Rampa, where the newly minted Pabellón Cuba appeared as a massive concrete stage adjacent to an urban carnival. A cabaret recalling the history of Cuba unraveled as a parallel narrative to that of the Pabellón’s inaugural exhibition. Including a *comparsa* of construction workers, a fireworks show, and other dance performances, the festivities formed a nationalist spectacle that recalled the opening of the Habana Hilton four years prior. *Arquitectura Cuba* exclaims: “The impact of the mal intentioned, propagandistic distortions and ideological digression all but disappeared to coalesce into a feeling and common language, one that united all the visitors with a heroic public, who greeted them with the joy of those now helping build a new world.” The World Congress of Architecture provided Cuba a stage on which to present its architectural modernity to the world, allowing the island to portray the political and social imperatives of the new country while also entertaining guests in a manner sensitive to the political manueverings of the International Union of Architects.

Planned two years prior to the Cuban Revolution, the triennial conference did not arrive in Havana without controversy. Formed after World War II, the International Union of Architects sought a program of cultural diplomacy in its advocating of the

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19 *Arquitectura Cuba* 331 (1964), 40.
20 “Todo el efecto de las distorciones de la propaganda malintencionada y de las contracciones ideológicas desaparecieron para aglutinarse en un sentimiento y un lenguaje común que unieron a todos los visitantes con el pueblo heroico, que ahora los recibía con la alegría de quien contribuye a construir un mundo nuevo” *Arquitectura / Cuba*, Vol. 331 (1964), 8.
profession, attempting to work beyond the ideological chasms of the Cold War. As Miles Glendininning has thoughtfully researched, the selection of Havana as the site for the 1963 Congress came into dispute with U.S. officials as tensions grew between the U.S. and Cuba. The introduction of an international competition for a monument celebrating Cuba’s victory against the Bay of Pigs invasion, to coincide with the 1963 Congress, added fuel to the flames, as the U.S. State Department encouraged architects to not attend the Congress. Compromises with U.S. officials resulted in the selection of Mexico City as an alternative assembly site immediately following the Havana Congress. Nonetheless, UIA Prime Minister Pierre Vago and then President Sir Robert Matthews continuously defended the selection of Havana as a host city, despite mounting protest. Aware of the volatile situation, Cuban officials sought to emphasize their hospitality while portraying the island as a utopic model in architectural production for the developing world.

Drawing 1275 participants from abroad with delegations from 79 nations, the World Congress of Architecture’s theme of architecture in developing nations prompted debates regarding the ethical role of architecture at a global level. With the three previous Congresses having explored the themes of housing (Le Havre, 1955), urban construction and reconstruction (Moscow, 1958), and new technologies of architecture

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21 “Cold-War conciliation: International architectural congresses in the late 1950s and early 1960s”, 197.
(London, 1961), the 1963 Congress aimed its focus specifically on the developing world. As UIA President Robert Matthews emphasized at the opening session of the Congress, the International Union of Architects “belonged [today to] architects of almost every nation, both developed and developing”. The UIA’s goal of outreach to lesser-developed countries was met with a nascent Cuban nation trying to prove its muster among professionals working in the developed world, while trying to build strong alliances with other developing nations. Though not explicitly stated, this Congress took in the concerns of a postcolonial world, where the language of development and nationalism became central to world leaders mitigating their role within the broader Cold War.

The inauguration took place in the bright blue and modernist Ciudad Deportiva, an architectural hallmark of utopia by Lín Arroyo (see Chapter 1), which set the stage for an all-consuming spectacle. The round stadium or colisseum was converted to an assembly hall, with massive vertical banners dividing the space and marking the Congress (Figure 4.2). Towards the back of the stage was a long curved table for significant participants, towards the front of the stage the podium rose, seeming elevated from its audience, the speaker framed by the vertical banners behind them. The more formal setting of the large assembly hall was a precedent for a grand welcoming

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23 Translated from Spanish: “La importancia de la UIA radica en que es una organización internacional a la que hoy pertenecen arquitectos de casi todos los países, tanto desarrollados como en vías de desarrollo.” Arquitectura Cuba 331 (1964), 16.
with a spectacular Cuban flair, one that showed of the architectural prowess of a city whose selection for an international congress of architecture was based on the architectural boom of the previous political era.

Upon departing the Ciudad Deportiva visitors were led to festivities at La Rampa, where grand festivities created a celebratory mood. Rumba dancers, rum and fireworks welcomed guests as the city’s former commercial artery was converted into a large carnival. Encompassing the length of La Rampa (Calle 23) from the Habana Libre Hotel – formerly the Habana Hilton and the official hotel hosting delegates – to the Malecón, Havana’s commercial and entertainment core became a vanguardist bacchanalia displaying Cuba’s hospitality and joviality. Formerly the epicenter of Havana’s speculative highrise development, La Rampa was reconceived as a cultural space for the masses. It became the space to welcome delegates and open up the city to them. As Diana Rowtree writes: “The delegates’ slightly patronizing recognition that the spirit of the Cuban welcome was something far above any oddities that might occur in organisation changed quickly to an astonished regard for the Cuban architecture achievement, both concrete and organisational.”

Among those concrete manifestations was a new pavilion at the center of La Rampa, serving as a nationalistic stage that expressed Cuba’s architectural ambitions.

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24 Diana Rowtree, “Architects in Cuba”, The Guardian (October 9, 1963), 10A.
Designed by Cuban architect Juan Campos Almanza, Pabellón Cuba utilized existing urban infrastructure and took advantage of open, urban space for its exterior porticos (Figure 4.3). One of the last major projects to contribute towards the urban development of La Rampa, Pabellón Cuba became a largely exterior and monumentally brutalist structure redefining the neighborhood. Located centrally between the Malecón and the Habana Libre Hotel, the Pabellón Cuba infused Brutalist architecture and sensual, tropical landscaping. Visible from numerous World Congress of Architecture sites, its centrality and its architecture encourage a more public exhibition, as it is predominantly comprised of a terraced exterior. Nonetheless its massive prefabricated concrete grid ceiling upheld by repeating concrete columns, or pilotis, provide the building a sculptural, monumental appearance. It expressed a technological and nationalist utopia, one full of a revolutionary fervor reverberated in the spectacle of the congress’s opening festivities.

In his essay “Tropical Minimalism: Excellences and Ambivalences of an Exhibition Pavilion,” Eduardo Luis Rodríguez identifies two clear referents for the architecture of Pabellón Cuba. First, he discusses the Pabellón’s strategy of integrating tradition and modernity spatially through its referents to colonial Cuban architecture.

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25 In the 1950s La Rampa featured the city’s first Technicolor theatre, three theatre halls, and the more alternative Arte Cinema La Rampa. It also became Havana’s hot spot for high-rise development, with the 25-story Habana Libre Hotel (formerly the Habana Hilton Hotel) at the top of the slope. In an essay regarding personal recollections of La Rampa, self proclaimed “Rampista” Antón Arrufat discusses how, “By chance, La Rampa became kind of a cultural center,” playing particular attention to the amount of theaters in the area. Schmidt-Colinet (ed.), Pabellón Cuba 4D: 4Dimensions 4Decades, 40, 48.
Rodríguez insightfully comments that the two massive terraces form porticoes that directly recall the great mansions of the Havana’s Vedado neighborhood. New technology is used to recall the spatial grandiosity of a previous era, creating an urban continuity despite a brutalist aesthetic. Rodríguez writes:

In this way, Pabellón Cuba – at one and the same time building, portico and courtyard – incorporates strategies and elements that clearly refer to that tradition, such as the achievement of maximum interrelation between interior and exterior, crossed ventilation, noble proportions, large ceilings simultaneously covering ample salons, wide eaves, the orthogonal framework of beams that bring to mind the coffering typical of some colonial buildings, the constant repetitive rhythm established by the columns, as well as the air of monumentality offered by the main façade, opposite 23rd Avenue (La Rampa).26

This sense of tradition, however, is counteracted with its radical gesture towards modernity – particularly in its use of material. Rodríguez cites Ludwig Mies van der Rohe as the second major referent for El Pabellón, particularly his never built design for Bacardi Rum Company office in Santiago de Cuba (Figure 4.4). Mies van der Rohe’s design complements Pabellón Cuba’s grid-like program, presenting a utopia of technological and rational form. And Mies, taking into account the tropical climate, replaced his emblematic use of steel with reinforced concrete. The tension made apparent in the Pabellón regarding international influence and a nationalist drive towards exploring a “Cuban” spatiality arises in both public and private works of the 1950s, where the grid both proved to be a rationalizing, ordered element as well as a

26 Schmidt-Colinet (ed.), Pabellón Cuba 4D, 51.
referent to urban form emanating from the colonial era. Pabellón Cuba became a radicalized, public stage to explore the meaning of modernity in a newly arising socialist era, and its minimalist forms were undoubtedly conceived alongside its tropical landscaping and its curatorial potential.

The World Congress of Architecture not only highlighted Cuba’s very contemporary contribution to the world of architecture, but also that of museography. With the Hotel Habana Libre serving as an anchor, delegates were able to visit various exhibitions hosted throughout the vicinity (Figure 4.5). Mimicking the expanded museographical presence across the city and island, the official map for the Congress highlights exhibitions encompassing an area that extended to the Universidad de la Habana and the intersection of Infanta and Calle 23 at the edge of Centro. Havana’s commercial zone was reconceived as a vanguardist cultural hub, with many hotel and commercial spaces being used for semi-public, small scale educational and cultural exhibitions. The World Congress of Architecture provided a unique opportunity to truly transform Vedado’s commercial core into a curated space, with the Pabellón Cuba providing radically new architectonics for Cuba’s museographical landscape. Its inaugural exhibition became a means to represent Cuba’s cultural ambitions in

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27 See Chapter 3.
28 It is significant to note that some of the shops and the casino of the Habana Hilton were converted into exhibition and cultural spaces for the Congress and throughout the early 1960s – appropriating formerly commercial enterprises into spaces of national culture. Interview with Lucila Fernández Uriarte, December 20, 2009; Interview with Alejandro Alonso, former director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, January 11, 2010.
relationship to technology and construction, to use curation as a means to present a concrete utopia.

The content, spatial layout and thematic narrative of Pabellón Cuba’s first exhibition make apparent the utopian fervor of 1960s Cuba as it looks away from the nation’s past and into the future. Engaging the topic of architecture and culture throughout Cuban history, the exhibition was divided into three major epochs, beginning with Precolumbian and Colonial Cuba at the pavilion’s front entrance (Figure 4.6). With the pavilion comprised of two porticos extending from an existing building, the opening galleries of the exhibition served as a dramatic porch-like entrance overlooking the popular commercial boulevard La Rampa. The sloped terrain allows the front portico to grow in height towards the sidewalk, its front concrete columns reaching 14 meters and contributing to the pavilion’s monumentality. Pabellón’s front pavilion used the site’s natural features, embellishing it into a concocted tropical landscape comprised of a spiraling ramp that brings visitors up to the building’s 3rd floor entrance.29 The landscaping, completed by Lorenzo Medrano, was thought to evoke the Cuban landscape, to be a primordial expression of cubanidad within an inherently modernist edifice. Hanging at front center from the coffered concrete ceiling is a massive stained glass representation of a colonial ship, its back turned towards the viewer. The symbol of colonial invasion welcomes the viewer to an exhibition rich in

29 Schmidt-Colinet (ed.), Pabellón 4D, 55.
ephemera yet clear in its historical narrative – that of advancing from an oppressive past.

In one display, presentations of colonial architecture are placed alongside images of the oppressive sugar economy and a marble commemoration dedicated to Cuba’s recent invasions. Images of past oppression were thematically connected to Cuba’s 1959 revolution, all while the visual elements of coloniality were celebrated as objects of a Cuban ingenuity emanating out of a troubled past. In a photograph of a display featured in the journal *Arquitectura Cuba*, a large vitrales is the centerpiece of the display (Figure 4.7). Black and white photographs accompany this display, creating a busy and dynamic display of colonial artifacts, a display that celebrates the designs while commenting on the turmoil of plantation economies. Such a narrative continues into the third floor and surrounding areas of the Republican-era building that anchors Pabellón Cuba. Focusing on architecture from 1902-1958, the official description in the journal *Arquitectura Cuba* states: “During her [Cuba’s] period of foreign intervention, the frustration, the protests, the anguish, the dissatisfaction of her condition, take form in hybrid volumes with cinema, slide projections and photos that resemble reality”.30 Utilizing graphic prints, videos and other forms of media, the exhibition continues its narrative of Cuban ingenuity amid massive oppression. Both the

30 “En ella la intervención extranjera, la frustración, las protestas, la angustia, la inconformidad de una suerte, toman formas en los volúmenes mezclados con cine, transparencias y fotos que ambietan realidad”. *Arquitectura Cuba* 331 (1964), 40.
Precolumbian/Colonial pavilions and the Republican pavilion provide a narrative emphasizing the struggle of the Cuban people for liberation, with photography and graphic displays working to represent “reality” in order to express the concrete goals of the Revolution. The teleological narrative is completed in the gargantuan back portico with its presentations on “revolutionary” architecture, which inventively combined mass media and architectonic displays to spectacularize the utopic aims of Cuba’s nascent socialist regime.

Such a narrative ushers the guests into the utopic back pavilion, an extensive and spectacular exploration of revolutionary approaches to architecture and new construction technologies (Figure 4.8). While the tropical, primodial landscaping transformed the brutalism of the building’s façade, the rear of the pavilion relied on massive sculptural and architectonic displays of graphic art, text, large-print photographs and film to enhance the seemingly minimalist space of Pabellón Cuba. Stark black-and-white pictures stand next to colorful graphics, the two-dimensional media art forms transposed onto massive geometric sculptural forms, or held up by a long metal posts complementing the pavilion’s columns. The intermedia exhibition pushed beyond traditional boundaries between art, commercial design and architecture, placing the practices in dynamic unison with a proclaimed socialist ethos, and recalling the allure of World Expo pavillons.
While entirely nationalist in orientation, the *History and Architecture of Cuba* exhibited a triumphalist narrative that implied Cuba’s role as a model for postcolonial modernism, something corroborated in the official texts of the Congress. In the elegantly curated catalogue for the Congress, published in Havana by the International Union of Architecture, the history of architecture in Cuba and the imperatives of the new government are expounded upon. Meticulously outlined and encyclopedic in tone, the catalogue served as a national portrait of architectural ingenuity in Cuba, drawing from the Cuban experience to suggest broader, global implications. Divided into four primary sections, the book highlighted the major imperatives of the Congress and the Cuban government, especially in discussing the role of housing and new technology. The publication can be seen as corollary to the exhibition, providing textual context to the visual spectacle at Pabellón Cuba.

The catalogue highlighting architectural initiatives in Cuba was published in English, French, and Spanish, and accompanied by a survey conducted by the Cuban Section of the UIA. Addressed to participating nations of the Congress, the questionnaire invited participants to contribute a report covering four sections: Development of a Region, Housing, Building Techniques, A Neighborhood Unit. Resulting in a limited two-volume publication, reports were bounded alphabetically by

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participating nations. Varied in length and detail, each report mimicked the organization of the Cuban catalogue, closing with a close study of a specific (planned) neighborhood unit. The reports followed the format highlighted by the questionnaire itself, which was included at the end of the two-volume publication. The catalogue was yet another opportunity for Cuba to show its architectural prowess and to highlight the island’s unique contribution amid its international hosts.

Dividing the history of the island into four historical epochs, the first section provided a teleological narrative much like History and Architecture of Cuba exhibition. Providing maps showing economic exchanges across the periods of Cuban history, the final map suggested a more integrated Cuba, where a new independence allows a network of global exchanges (Figure 4.9). The opening section of the catalogue highlighted new architectural projects, outlining how they fit the sociopolitical aims of Cuba’s new government. Presented in a much more formal manner than the immersive exhibition, the catalogue placed Cuba’s new projects within a broader historical context. Utopia was envisioned with a notion of appropriation, where the past is represented both as a point departure and as providing legacy for new architectures to draw from, to create a notion of heimat.

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32 The first map for the First Colonial Era focuses on Cuba’s ties to Spain up until the Treaty of Paris in 1763, which brings the Second Colonial Era – where Cuba has greater exchange with other European powers. The Republican Era, also defined as the “Semi-Colonial” era, has a map portraying Cuba’s economic deference to the U.S. International Union of Architects, Cuba: la arquitectura en los países en vías de desarrollo, 8-15.
Further, the historical narrative of both the exhibition and the catalogue implied the radicality of Cuba’s new architectural ambitions. Though an emphasis on using new technologies and innovative architectural forms was common in Cuba prior to the Revolution, the attempt to rethink such architectures within the geopolitics of the island – to serve a socialistic means – provided strikingly new proposals. This is especially evident in both industrial and rural projects, which were part of the agrarian reform attempting to bridge notable inequalities between the capital city and the countryside.

The closing “Section D” of the catalogue particularly focuses on the Unidad Vecinal No. 1 of Habana del Este as representative of the new architecture of the Revolution (Figure 4.10). Located east of the Bay of Havana, the project inaugurated a series of public housing projects in Habana del Este that extended into the 1970s with the microbrigades, or self-help housing.$^{33}$ The catalogue does not list the team of architects and engineers working on the project, their anonymity indicative of the project’s socialist aims.$^{34}$ Charts and floor plans help visualize and quantify the space available across various buildings, while photos provide a semblance of the neighborhood. While the large residential blocks featured a stripped down concrete

$^{33}$ Microbrigades were an idea introduced by Fidel Castro in 1970 that encouraged citizens to build housing for themselves and their colleagues. Excused from normal work duties, citizens formed brigades and worked together to build their own housing, with the state continuing their salary and providing materials. See Kosta Mathéy, “Recent Trends in Cuban Housing Policies and the Revival of the Microbride Movement”.

$^{34}$ The team of architects and engineers working on the project included Hugo D’Acosta, Mario González, Mercedes Álvarez, and others. Juan de Las Cuevas, 500 Años de Construcciones en Cuba, 323.
architecture, the placement of buildings, the landscaping, and the design of non-
residential buildings help evoke the neighborhood’s local setting. For example, new
schools and other public service facilities for the residents of Habana del Este utilized
innovative form to break the monotonous rectilinearity of the mass housing. The
nursery built for Section D emphasized round forms, evident in its landscaping and the
organization of classrooms, and recalling the tradition bohíos of Cuba’s indigenous
population (Figure 4.11). The secondary school and the market also used unique
prefabricated forms, such as wavy or undulating concrete ceilings (Figure 4.12). In
dialogue with debates about mass housing at the height of the Cold War, Cuba
presented its own unique proposals, attempting to place itself at the vanguard of
contemporary architecture.

Adjacent to the Pabellón Cuba during its inaugural exhibition was a large
graphic sign of a note personally written by Le Corbusier for attendees of the conference
(Figure 4.13). Located on the sidewalk on Calle N, the large sign was visible from La
Rampa as well as several vantage points within the back pavilion. It read “watch, look,
observe, discern, invent, create”. The sign existed as a reminder of the international
scope of modern architecture, and the CIAM ideals that influenced new architecture in
Havana. Visible from the displays of contemporary Cuban architecture, Le Corbusier’s
message came into dialogue with Cuba, which presented itself as being at a unique
historical juncture – the opportunity to create a new society. Along with Habana del

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Este, two ciudades universitarias became emblematic of Cuba’s utopic endeavors, drawing from the notion that society could be recreated through education.

**The Ciudad Universitaria**

In its inaugural 1959 January edition, Cuba’s sole architectural journal, *Arquitectura Cuba*, expressed praise for the incoming Revolution in its opening pages, claiming: “The First of January, 1959!” “What a Glorious Day!” (Figure 4.14). To the left were images of Sagua de Tánamo of the Holguín province in Eastern Cuba, a town that had been bombarded by the forces of ousted dictator Fulgencio Batista in an attempt to quell the incoming Revolution. As a journal organized under the auspice of the Colegio de Arquitectos, a professional organization of architects akin to the AIA or American Institute of Architects, such an overt exclamation regarding politics was unheard of for the magazine, which had never included opening editorials or commented overtly on politics during the past decade. The sentiments expressed by the editorial board, however, came as little surprise given the context of the Revolution and the final years of Batista regime – a regime that became mired with unpopularity given growing repression and unrest. Sagua de Tánamo’s destruction became a mirage of the past, a past that – as displayed in the *History and Architecture of Cuba* exhibition – opens onto a utopic future. In this section I argue that the ciudad universitaria is emblematic

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35 *Arquitectura Cuba* 306 (January 1959), 3.
of the utopic aims of the Cuban Revolution, as it is the creation of an idealized small-scale lettered society within the greater project of national utopia. By focusing on two major ciudad universitaria projects on the outskirts of Havana – the National Arts Schools and CUJAE – I also explore the complicated terrains in which expressions of utopia become mediated or constrained by state sanctioned ideologies and their lived (concrete) “realities”. I propose that the utopia of these megaprojects lies in their concrete manifestation of architectural form as revolution, and in the way such form became “abstracted” to communicate revolutionary ideals in the realm of media.

While many correctly mark the arrival of 1959 as a watershed moment in Cuban history, the thoughts expressed in Arquitectura Cuba’s January 1959 editorial continues its tradition of adapting to the current political context so as to be agreeable to dominant parties, all while highlighting the promise of the profession of architecture at large for the Cuban nation. The revolution allowed a moment where the journal’s editors, who very much saw themselves as official representatives of the most substantial collective of professional architects in the island, could reconsider and comment on the role of architecture in Cuba – something that becomes apparent in the new editorial features of the journal following the Revolution. The images of a destroyed colonial city in the inaugural edition became a call for rebuilding from the nation’s fractured past. Such images became a marker for radical change, signified by the destruction of the past and the utopia of the future.
Also included in the January issue of 1959 is a feature article by acclaimed Venezuelan architect Carlos Villanueva titled “On the Integration of the Arts”. The architect of the famed Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas, Villanueva describes the necessity of integrating architecture with painting, sculpture and new technology, creating what the architect describes as a “plastic synthesis”. Since the early 1950s the Cuban journal began to frequently look at examples of modern architecture and urban planning as integral towards nation building in Cuba – particularly examples from Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela. Along with the construction of Brazil’s new capital Brasilia, the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas became the project par excellence for considering the integration of the arts in architecture, with Villanueva inviting over 25 artists between 1940 and 1960 to create installations to work in sync with the architecture of the radically modernist campus. Villanueva’s ciudad universitaria very much inspired a new generation of campus architecture in Cuba, made most explicit in the construction of an arts university and polytechnical university, both on the outskirts of Havana.

The campus of the Ciudad Universitaria Caracas – built on the grounds of the former hacienda belonging to Latin American liberator Simón Bolívar – became a modernist gallery of sorts, featuring the work of at least 10 recognized international artists as well as works by the newly developed modernist vanguard of Venezuela. Examples include French-German artist Jean Arp’s sculpture Cloud of 1953, in front of

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36 Ibid., 29.
the 1954 untitled bimural (or two-sided mural) of Venezuelan artist Mateo Manaure, and Alexander Calder’s 1953 installation *Clouds*, a collaboration with audio engineering firm Bolt, Beranek & Newman Inc. to artistically enhance the acoustics of Villanueva’s auditorium, the Aula Magna (Figure 4.15). In his essay on the integration of the arts, Villanueva writes of a hybridity that exists over time, and the need for the individualist language of the artist to speak towards a greater social means, or as he states explicitly, “to assume social responsibility”. He elaborates: “In effect, the twentieth century man is more attuned to the contradictions between new technology and the decorative, between new social problems and older customs, as he is born with an eye to the immense possibilities and transformations offered by technology, allowing him to develop the basic elements of his language, separating each of these elements into his artistic expressions. It is only later, when that language is already developed, the need is announced, and thus the possibility of re-integrating those elements.”³⁷ Drawing on the idea that modern man exists at a juncture between the old and new, Villanueva argues that artists and architects must work together to draw semiotically from the past,

³⁷ “En efecto, al agudizarse las contradicciones entre la nueva técnica y la antigua decoración, entre la nueva problemática social y las antiguas formas, el hombre del siglo XX, que nace con el ojo puesto en las inmensas posibilidades y transformaciones ofrecidas el maquinismo, vuelve a elaborar los elementos básicos de su lenguaje, separando netamente cada una de las expresiones artísticas. Es solamente tarde, cuando ese lenguaje ya está elaborado, que se anuncia la necesidad, y por ende, la posibilidad de volver a integrar esos elementos.” - Ibid., 30.
creating new expressions that go beyond the decorative in order to express our communal contemporaneity.

Serving a nationalist fervor and working within complicated cultural terrains, models regarding the integration of arts and architecture from Latin America held a specific sway among artists, developers and the state in Cuba from the 1940s well into the 1960s. A monumental spatiality and the application of abstract geometric forms (two and three dimensional) informed the utopic architecture of the revolution much like it informed the work of architects from Cuba’s recent capitalist past. The model of the ciudad universitaria, a late or high modernist phenomena, itself had a precedent in Cuba’s republican era past. This is most emphatically witnessed in the neoclassical campus of the Universidad de la Habana, which relocated to a contiguous campus at the edge of the Vedado and Centro Habana neighborhoods beginning in May 1902. Reminiscent of the campus design of Columbia University by McKim Mead & White, the campus was most noted for its dramatic staircase rising from Calle L to the Aula Magna, the first building completed in 1911. While Greek style architecture spoke to its North American and European disposition, the campus was also a new marker of power in the Republican era city.

The siting of the university on a prominent hill at the frontier of Vedado marked the urban campus as a indexical site within Havana’s greater urban framework.

38 Juan de las Cuevas Toraya, 500 Años de Construcciones en Cuba, 194.
Further, the implementation of a master planned campus came to present the utopic ideals of the nascent state – the creation of an infrastructure where scale (urban) and style (neoclassical) presented an ethos of modernity, mediated by Cuba’s relationship to the U.S. One of the oldest universities in the Americas was to be rebranded, abandoning its former Dominican monastic setting for the modern temple. As Eduardo Luis Rodríguez notes, “The classicism employed at different scales in all the buildings, along with the high elevation of the campus, suggests a symbolic reading of the place as an intellectual acropolis, an image reinforced by through the use of a propylaea entrance”39.

The classical ideals of the University were complemented by the interior murals of the Aula Magna by painter Armando Menocal y Menocal. Representing neoclassical and romantic ideals, the central space for official university gatherings used warm tones of marble that countered the white limestone of the strictly neoclassical tradition, with decorative accents of gold recalling the baroque. Against the back wall are seven large murals framed by their architectural setting, incorporating French Republican era ideals. This is further emphasized in the angelic ceiling mural framing the chandelier and recalling the heavens. The Universidad de la Habana’s transformation into a modern campus incorporated the language of architecture (the neoclassical venacular in this case) with its plastic integration, both presenting Republican and Eurocentric ideals.

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39 “El clasicismo empleado, con matices, en todos los edificios, y el alto emplazamiento del conjunto, sugieren una primera lectura simbólica del lugar como una acrópolis del intelecto, y la solución de entrada a través de unos propileos refuerza esta imagen.” La Habana: Arquitectura del Siglo XX, 180.
By the 1940s and 1950s the international modern movement came to influence Cuban architects, as an expanding middle class and population growth created the need for more universities. In Havana, the private Catholic university Universidad Central de Las Villas was founded in 1946, along with the Universidad de la Salle in 1956, along with impressive campuses for new private primary and secondary educational institutions. New directions in architecture, however, where greater witnessed in the University of Havana’s expansion in the 1940s and 1950s, including the never built designs for a modernist school of architecture adjacent to the more neoclassical campus. One prominent design by the University of Havana’s School of Architecture was presented at the Panamerican Congress of Architecture, held in Havana in 1951, and showed how the model of the ciudad universitaria impacted architectural form and development. In a project led by architecture students Narciso Onetti and Joaquin Cristofol, a ciudad universitaria for the School of Architecture is conceived adjacent to the University of Havana’s main campus (Figure 4.16). Its rectilinear orientation recalls both the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany and the ciudad universitaria of the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de México (UNAM) in Mexico City. In his 1952 article on the UNAM campus, influential Cuban architectural historian Joaquin Weiss suggests that when finished, the ciudad universitaria will be one of the most significant project of its type in the world – a model for Latin American modernity and democracy.\footnote{Arquitectura Cuba, January 222 (1952), 28.} For Weiss
the architectural ambitions of Mexico, as presented with UNAM and other projects throughout Mexico City, were symbolic of progress at the national level. It displayed new technological means of construction, the plastic integration of architecture, and was built with a social utility, or speaking to its function as an education institution.

The architectural impact of UNAM and the Ciudad Universitaria Villanueva remained apparent in other large scale projects throughout Cuba in the 1950s, but it was the Cuban Revolution that led to the initiative to build ciudades universitarias throughout the nation. Looking more broadly at the notion of social utopia, education played a central role with the new government, something made immediately apparent in the Literacy Campaign inaugurated on January 1, 1961. In a speech to students at the Central University of Las Villas in December, 1959, Che Guevara highlighted the “fundamental duty” of the university in a new Cuba: “[It] should color itself black and color itself mulatto – not just as regards students but also professors. It should paint itself the color of workers and peasants. It should paint itself the color of the people, because the university is the patrimony of no one but the people of Cuba”.41 In many ways the university became a microcosm in which the revolution’s social ideals could be experimented upon; a laboratory for a utopia that unites the social with the technological imperatives of the state. With 1961 branded as the “Year of Education”, architecture served an important role in creating infrastructure for the Revolution’s

41 In Che Guevara Talks to Young People, 83.
ambitions. The creation of the *ciudades universitarias* across the island in every province is indicative of the desire for Cuba to educate its masses and to replicate social utopias beyond the nation's capital.\(^{42}\) Mimicking the monumentality of the Universidad de la Habana, the new universities throughout Cuba were often in a suburban or rural settings and completed using technologies of prefabrication.

Remaining a symbol of progress and the nation, campus planning broadly introduced the vanguardism of the new government, as well as the ability of architecture to formulate its social utility. Regardless of the potent symbolism of the *ciudad universitaria*, the campuses often failed to impact the urban imaginary given their suburban settings, each utilizing different forms and materials in their attempt to present the educational and broader ideals of the revolution. This varied approach to utopia is seen throughout the island in the early 1960s, with the *ciudades universitarias* CUJAE and the National Arts Schools serving as two prominent – even polemical – models to think of the way the university continued to be a symbol of the nation while attempting to revolutionize the idea of an intellectual acropolis.

\(^{42}\) This is seen not only in the creation of *ciudades universitarias* but also in the creation of schools and educational institutes throughout Cuba, particularly in formerly underserved rural areas. Educational facilities presented inventive, prefabricated forms emblematic of 1960s Cuban architecture, as Roberto Segre notes: “El crecimiento constante de la población estudiantil así como la existencia de escuelas en las zonas rurales, motivaron una tipología arquitectónica basada en esquemas elementales - compositivos y constructivos - a partir de la célula básica, o sea del aula, que cubría la variación temática: círculo infantil, escuela primaria, secundaria básica, preuniversitario, constituyendo unidades autónomas distribuidas en las ciudades y en el campo”. *Diez Años de Arquitectura en Cuba Revolucionaria*, 63.
CUJAE more strictly followed the model of its *ciudad universitaria* predecessors in Caracas and Mexico City, utilizing prefabricated architecture with thoughtful, often luscious landscape design and scattered with public art works that became framed by the notably brutalist architectures. Named in honor of famed student protester José Antonio Echeverría – the president of Cuba’s Federation of University Students who was massacred by Batista forces in 1957 – CUJAE was built to be Havana’s premier technological university, housing the city’s schools of engineering and architecture. Located in the periphery of the city, the program of the campus reveals a grid-based logic in a campus organized around its social functions (Figure 4.17). As the general plan of the Faculty of Technology exhibits, the campus is planned upon entirely rectilinear forms providing interacting horizontal and vertical axes. Not only does the plan present a network of prefabricated buildings, but the plan is drafted in a manner that recalls the facades and forms dominant within such buildings. As a 1971 issue of *Architectura Cuba* on architecture and education emphasizes: "Urban and Agrarian reforms liberated the land of conflicting values between the countryside and the city center, as well as unfounded the argument that has prevailed in many countries in Latin America, to locate the University outside of the center to isolate to the student body and thus prevent concrete political action".\(^{43}\) Rather than seeing the creation of a campus at

\(^{43}\) “Las reformas Urbana y Agraria liberaron los terrenos de los valores contrapuestos entre el campo y el centro de la ciudad; así como carecía de fundamento la tesis que ha primado en muchos países de América..."
the outskirts of the city a drawing from a Latin American model of depoliticization of student masses, the new campus is perceived as a utopia where students solve the problem of the countryside at an equal or greater rate to that of the countryside (Figure 4.18).

Designed by several architects at different stages over the 1960s, the plan of CUJAE displays a network of buildings entirely rectilinear in orientation. While architects such as Humberto Alonso, José Fernández, Fernando Salinas and others worked collaboratively on the project, architects Juan Tosca and Selma Soto were integral in the creation of the SMAC structural system, which allowed the creation of emphatic spaces of a monumental, concrete scale. Roberto Segre writes:

According to the then current principles - the recreation of the city in new ways that keep traditional content, assumed the Team X and antagonistic to CIAM - apply the categories of flexibility, growth, hierarchy of spaces, without changing technological components and structural principle: the CUJAE, lift-slab system makes possible the multiplication of slabs and spaces, while Tosca flexible designs that allow casting molds beams and columns of different size, without affecting the unity of the whole.44

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44 “Según los principios vigentes entonces – la recreación de la ciudad con formas nuevas que mantienen contenidos tradicionales, asumidos del Team X y antagónicos al CIAM –, se aplican las categorías de flexibilidad, crecimiento, jerarquización de los espacios, sin variar los componentes tecnológicos y el principio estructural: en la CUJAE, el sistema lift-slab hace posible la multiplicación de losas y espacios; mientras que Tosca diseña moldes flexibles que permiten fundir vigas y columnas de diverso tamaño, sin alterar la unidad del conjunto.” Roberto Segre, Arquitectura Antillana del Siglo XX, 364.
Here Segre emphasizes how architects worked with structural engineers to rethink prefabricated architecture, and to give it “traditional content”, or more specifically to embed the concrete campus with a notion of cubanidad. The national sentiment and local setting of a brutalist, prefabricated campus is evident in its components that allowed circulation of air, open terraces, and the implementation of gardening and art within the campus. Utilizing new technological means productions, the ciudad universitaria is a recreation of a spatial utopia – recalling an idealized city while abstractly referring to traditional notions of social space.

CUJAE also bears similarities to the architecture of Pabellón Cuba – both architectures express technological prowess through their unique use of reinforced steel and pre-cast concrete, while dually relying on landscaping and a spatiality to evoke cubanidad. The Industrial Engineering building, for example, features a building standing on pilotis, with an open exterior plaza with a staircase leading up into the building from the plaza. Similarly, CUJAE draws largely upon an aesthetic notion of the grid, making use of orthogonal beams in a manner that recalls the Pabellón’s coffered ceiling. Prefabricated architecture comes to represent new revolutionary ambitions, both through its adoption of international construction technologies and the attempt to sculpt a nationalist or more Cuban spatiality, albeit at a massive scale. The use of scale (monumental) and material (concrete) display Havana’s dialogue with trends abroad. At the same time the long-held concern of modern architecture in Cuba remained
fervent – to deal with the chasm between the national and regional along with the universal. CUJAE provided a national model for employing new technologies of architecture within Cuba’s tropical and cultural setting, becoming the model for future *ciudades universitarias* by the middle of the decade.

The National Arts Schools, another collaborative style project led by architect Ricardo Porro, provides a diametrically opposed notion of utopia to that of CUJAE, both in material and visual/spatial form. While CUJAE employed the newest technologies to radically recreate utopia in rectilinear spaces, the National Arts School attempted to evoke utopia in seemingly irrational ways. The National Arts Schools sought to express the ethos of the arts in modern Cuba, to express the spirit of the revolution in architectural form (*Figure 4.19*). As Jaime Saruski and Gerardo Mosquera write, “In a Socialist society, art is one of the main roads to knowledge, and it uses aesthetic appreciation as a means of inquiring into and representing reality by its own methods.”45 The idea of utopia came to present a notion of reality – a concrete idealization of human aspiration – that could only be presented through evocative, irregular and undulating forms which situated the Cuban experience within a non-rational traditions. Organically shaped roof structures overlapped over one another; curvilinear forms playfully lead the eyes in several directions across the golf green. Made entirely out of Cuban produced brick, the bricks themselves formed patterns

creating porous and textured walls that are often in unison with the organic, curvilinear
forms of the building. Utilizing innovative and playful forms, the campus became
famous for presenting a sort of dreamscape of revolutionary ambitions.

Conceived of by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara after a friendly if not ironic game
of golf in suburban Havana’s most prestigious golf course, the revolutionary leaders
sought to create an arts school for the Third World. Ricardo Porro, previously in exile in
Venezuela, had himself worked for Carlos Villanueva on the Banco Obrero project in
Caracas, having first hand experience the recently built Ciudad Universitaria Caracas.
Porro invited two Italian colleagues also working in Venezuela with him – Roberto
Gottardi and Vittorio Garatti – to work on the grand project to reconceive utopia and the
ciudad universitaria. The master plan shows each division of the school taking up its own
section of the golf course greens, forming clusters of tropicalized, city-like brick
structures (Figure 4.20). The buildings invoke organic forms – a seashell, a crab,
corporeal fragments of a woman – to highlight the role of nature and indigenous ideas
regarding nationality. The means by which the building tried to form to a manmade
landscape creates an exceptional spatial experience. Located on the suburban outskirts
of Havana, a sense of isolation allows the building to exist outside of the dynamics and
rhythm of the city – to provide something radically new, to rebel entirely from the grid
and notions of rationality. The ciudad universitaria was not abandoning Cuban tradition
but redefining the artistic rhythms of Cuba within an entirely new, utopic architectural
space.

Most notably the architects were influenced by the arts themselves – drawing from notions of abstraction in Cuban painting, the corporeality of dance, and most significantly the notion of music and noise within space. At the time of its construction critic Hugo Consuegra notes: “Spatially there is a common will to break up the unity by creating unsyncopated – unexpected – rhythms, which make for a cumulative vision, never a total one; that is to say, perpetual motion.” Consuegra insightfully comments that the National Arts Schools provide an idyllic “architectural stroll,” engulfing the artist, musician and dancer within a Dionysian-like architectural trance. This project was constructed with the intentions of containing a Cuban sensibility, of locating the heimat. The architects claimed a direct influence from African form, and also studied the forms of bohíos, or Taino round homes made of straw and palm leaves. In many ways the National Arts Schools is an exceptional complex that attempts to capture Cuba’s racial and ethnic heritage through modernistic, primitivist spatial forms. It privileges a modernist ethos highlighting a notion of cultural roots and identities, a spatiality counter to that of the technological. Its cubanidad can be conceived as counter to that of CUJAE, whose utilization of plastic integration and tropical landscaping, in its interplay between interior and exterior space, largely ignores non-rational spatialities.

Ricardo Porro’s School of Plastic Arts, for example, attempted to represent the

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46 *Arquitectura Cuba* 334 (1965), 58.
birth of the Revolution through its organic, enveloping forms (Figure 4.21). The architect’s placement of various domes (which he refers to as breast) and a central “fruta de bomba” (or vaginal) fountain express the vitality of the revolution, with the corporeal references serving a greater spiritual expression – in this case, the Santería deity of Oshun. As Porro suggests, he attempted to “make an arquitectura negra, a city seized by negritud that had been given a presence in the paintings of Lam, to draw from Cuba’s African culture in architecture was a radical step”. Here Porro seems to reject plastic integration, treating architecture itself as an art form incorporating formal gestures and figurative content. The evocation of Santería and verdant female sexuality, a controversial gesture for its time, recalls the prostitutes and deities that make up the protagonists of Lam’s 1942 painting La Jungla. The spatial forms seem to recall two aspects of a revolutionary sentiment: that of appropriation (of vanguardist gestures, spiritual symbologies, and popular culture) and that of utopia (the dreaming of a new world order through formal expression).

Complex references to Cuban culture are also made apparent in the School of Music and the School of Ballet, both designed by Vittorio Garatti. Connected by a pedestrian bridge, both campuses evocatively stretch alongside the Quibú River bisecting the large campus. Thinking about the use of the space, Garrati organized the forms of the buildings to ideally situate music and dance students with spatial notions of

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47 Quoted in John Loomis, Revolution of Forms: Cuba’s Forgotten Arts Schools, 57.
their practice. He claims to have conceived of the School of Music through a design based “analysis” consisting of various vectors – the physical or geographic (its siting and setting), its cultural milieu, as well as vectors of history and typology (Figure 4.22). In discussing his School of Music Garatti claims, “I have always thought of the design process like a trip, and the attention one has to pay in packing one’s suitcase. In my suitcase there are the records of Johann Sebastian Bach, of Igor Stravinski, of Béla Bartók, the paintings of Lam (introduced to me by Porro), the books of Lezama Lima and Alejo Carpentier, and naturally ‘The Revolution’ which was the spark to my creative process”.48 These various Cuban and European influences collide in the attempt by Garrati to express the fervor of the Revolution, in a figurative manner distinct to the School of Plastic Arts by Porro. Instead of thematically presenting a notion of birth through popular Cuban culture, Garatti presents the notion of the polyrhythmic, of undulating forms whose influences are esoteric and whose spaces can be explored in a seemingly improvisational manner.

The School of Ballet, on the other hand, reflects the movement implied in ballet dancing, using exterior domes with a large oculus to form the major assembly spaces (Figure 4.23). Various architectural elements recall Mediterranean and Cuban traditions, providing a mix of architectural vernaculars to create a wholly newly modernist space. For example the use of wooden medio puntos, or semicircular window like fixtures

48 John Loomis, Revolution of Forms: Cuba’s Forgotten Arts Schools, 85.
common in Cuban colonial architecture in cities such as Trinidad, span across each dome’s pendentives like sun rays receiving light. These recall the vitrales, or colonial stained glass windows, used elsewhere on campus. The use of Catalan vaults throughout the ciudad universitaria, especially seen in one of the more grand entrances of the School of Ballet, permitted broad open curvilinear spaces that allowed exterior light to shine in and provided a cost effective solution given the thin load bearing walls (Figure 4.24). As John A. Loomis writes, “the cultural significance of the Catalan vault as a craft of Hispanic and Mediterranean origins was well understood by the architects of the National Arts Schools, who sought an appropriate idiom in which to develop their vision of a revolutionary cubanidad.”49 Here tradition – even craft – inform a modern, utopic expression of the revolutionary, aiming to use innovative means outside of the realm of technology to create an expressive architecture.

With its eclecticism, its brace of generative geometric and organic forms, and its denial of technological means of architectural production, the National Arts Schools stood counter to dominant architectural practices in Cuba and, arguably, at a global level. They became an inspiring enigma, something commented extensively upon in recent scholarship and press about the schools, most notably the documentary Unfinished Spaces and John Loomis’s pivotal work on the National Arts Schools.50 Using the

49 Ibid., 28.
50 Also notable is the Belmont Freeman article, “What is it about the Art Schools?,” discussed in Chapter 1, footnote 8.
antithesis to the technology-based solutions of CUJAE, the National Arts Schools attempted to present the artistic ethos of the revolutionary rather than its social utility. A polemic between the expressive role of architecture versus its functionality shows how the expression of utopia, at the magnanimous scale of the ciudad universitaria, can reach dramatically varied conclusions. Readings of these buildings, their histories and their forms exhibit the political contours of architecture on the nationalist front, or rather – as will be highlighted in the next section – how forms reveal the broad ambitions of a generation of architects working in a new political setting.

**Forms of Utopia**

The April-May 1964 edition of *Arquitectura Cuba* featured an article by Ricardo Porro tracing the heritage of Cuban architecture. Published as a photo-essay, Porro’s article summoned the pictorial tradition of painting, idealized in the figure of Wifredo Lam, as providing a model for Cuba’s future development (Figure 4.25). Despite suggesting that most traditional architecture in Cuba conformed to the European style, Porro claims that the architecture “manifests a sensual means to conceive its environments”.51 Outlining a history of Cuban architecture from colonial fort to baroque

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51 “Y surgen pintores que inician una tradición pictórica importante y dan las bases para un desarrollo futuro. En cambio, existe una tradición extraordinariamente rica en música, danza, y poesía popular. Si la arquitectura no se concibió con sentido social, sólo se dirigía a la clase que podía pagarla y naturalmente sus formas eran muy próximas a las de España. En cambio, también en nuestra arquitectura encontramos ese elemento común a las otras artes. Se manifesta de un modo sensual de concebir sus ambientes. Todo se
sentiments, he highlights sensuality as an important aspect of Cuban architecture – of allowing the built environment to reflect a cubanidad. Aspects of former modern architectures are cited as providing a rhythmic sensuality that could contribute to Cuba’s new utopic efforts, no longer to be expressed through the architectural styles and trends of Europe and the U.S.

While Porro’s article provides a portal to the past, the article immediately following highlights a notable futurity in its acclaim for technology and innovations in construction. Also in the form of a photo-essay and written by architect Hugo D’Acosta, the new architectures seem devoid of a sensual past. Titled “The Investigation and Technical Development of Construction in Cuba, After the Revolution”, the article is split into three sections, the first involving an essay highlighting the technological advancements achieved since the 1959 revolution – primarily how the Department of Technical Investigations within the Ministry of Construction took over the endeavors of the prior Ministry of Public Works, developing new technologies to serve the needs of the people and Cuban industry.52 Highlighting a new program of research within a

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hace para agradar más a los sentidos, su meta era provocar en el espectador una sensación de frescura, de sosiego, de buen vivir.” *Arquitectura Cuba* 332 (1964), 28.

52 “Las actividades en el pasado trataron de resolver las tareas especiales, de una forma más o menos planificada. Todavía no existía la investigación en el sentido tradicional, es decir, no se producían actividades experimentales sistemáticas. La actividad, en el presente, tiene una organización básica, como objetivo para realizar la informándose un organismo para la investigación en el sector de las construcciones, que satisfaga las necesidades nacionales de investigación, contribuyendo básicamente al desarrollo técnico del país.
department that strengthened in 1963, the article is followed by a photo essay featuring the many new structures in varied states of construction. Closing with a list and description of various forms of prefabrication, both those indigenous to Cuba and those imported from other countries, the essay uses the photographic as a form of evidence and spectacle akin to the photographs in Porro’s article (Figure 4.26). Both essays recall the graphic orientation of Pabellón’s inaugural exhibition – its presentation of a celebrated yet distant Cuban architectural past to that of an endless, experimental future.

In 1964 work was halted on the National Arts Schools. The polemic between architecture as an art and architecture as a technology became defined by the means by how it could serve the state. Ricardo Porro went into exile by 1965, as a power of politics made itself apparent in the relationship between professionals and state organizations.53 A period of experimentation in form and expression did not necessarily end, as made apparent in various new architecture projects into the next two decades. However, the implementation of foreign and local models of prefabrication as well as the mandates of the Ministry of Construction had a much greater impact on a new

53 The fissure between practicing architects and the state is made apparent in interviews from the film Unfinished Spaces, which documents the exile of Ricardo Porro and Vittorio Garratti. Both architects discuss how their relationship with the Ministry of Construction and a more dogmatic state, as a supposed “Soviet-style” of prefabrication came to dominate. Unfinished Spaces, Directed by Alysa Nahmias and Benjamin Murray (2011; PBS Direct, 2013), DVD.
generation of architects. Architecture needed to better conform to the ideological imperatives of the state and its economy. This, however, does not imply that the organic and non-Euclidean forms that were celebrated by the National Arts Schools do not make themselves apparent in new architectures, whose utility is still placed within a broader cultural and tropical milieu.

The divide presented by the two adjacent Ricardo Porro and Hugo D’Acosta articles fits a certain teleology that comes to dominate architectural production by the end of the decade, and in some way still defines our understanding of modern architecture in Cuba today. The legacy of the Cold War impacts the common assumption in scholarship and discussions among architects of prefabricated architecture in Cuba being of the “Soviet style”, and hence characterized as opposed to the formal innovations of the National Arts Schools. The divide presented by the National Arts Schools and CUJAE also encapsulates two ways of thinking about utopia: the former drawing expressively from its broader cultural contexts, and the latter reflecting an emphasis on social utility, engineering at the macrosocial level, and the wonders of technology. In his book *The Architecture of Enjoyment*, Henri Lefevbre writes:

> Today, however, abstract utopia relies of technocrats; they are the ones who want to build the perfect city. They concern themselves with the ‘real’: needs, services, transport, the various subsystems of urban reality, the urban itself as a system. They want to arrange the pieces of a puzzle

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54 See Chapter 1, where I discuss the film *Unfinished Spaces* and the critique of Belmont Freeman, who such assumptions regarding architecture and the Cold War.
to create an ideal. Contrast this with concrete utopia, which is negative. It takes as a strategic hypothesis the negation of the everyday, of work, of the exchange economy. It also denies the State and the primacy of the political. It begins with enjoyment and seeks to conceive of a new space, which can only be based on an architectural project.\textsuperscript{55}

Here Lefebvre contrasts the abstract with the concrete through the polemic made evident between architecture as technocracy versus an architecture of enjoyment, something triumphantly evident within the melodic playfulness and ethereal forms of the National Arts Schools. Drawing from the writing of Ernst Bloch, Lefebvre emphasizes the importance of the project, or that a concrete utopianism is likewise planned and implemented. For Lefebvre, the project of concrete utopianism works against the interests of the state and politics – it presents an architecture of negation, focused on humane indulgences and experiences. Such an idealized notion of a concrete utopianism does not make itself fully apparent in the model of the National Arts Schools, which rose out of a politically charged moment with noted political motivations as a project of the state. Despite being a project of the state, the architects’ creation of dream worlds – of campuses organized around spatial experience – inevitably worked against the interests of the state. Porro, Garrati, Gottardi proposed an architecture of indulgences, attempting to recreate a notion of revolution through elusive and engaging spatial environments. They created an architecture of negation that attempted to present a concrete reality regarding revolution and the production of culture.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment}, 148
Even today the National Arts Schools presents an idealized peculiarity, with the complex garnering a celebrity among advocates of modern architecture. Calls for the preservation and completion of the arts schools tend to take a political form, emphasizing a revolutionary mythology that supersedes the political contours of the 1960s and draws attention away from the manner in which the prefabricated architectures were rethought within Cuba, and the ways in which a variety of architectural expressions contributed to a discourse regarding vanguardist innovation within a Latin American and global context.

In the third volume of *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch provides a critique of the role of the bourgeoisie in technological utopias. For Bloch, an abstract utopia is defined by the Marxist notion of *alienation*, both in a socioeconomic sense but also as the means by which the theoretical relates to material conditions. Bloch writes:

> But sugar as an abstract commodity is different from real sugar, and the abstract laws of mechanistic natural science are different from the substratum of content within which these laws remain no relation. What is true of theory is all the more true of technological practice, it contents itself with laws about sheer contingency.56

Bloch highlights the ability of technology to be manipulated and rationalized – to content itself with laws of sheer contingency – and makes apparent the means by which technology can be abstracted or made alien. At a basic level, Bloch suggests that concrete utopia is about technology and nature not being defined by material and

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56 *The Principle of Hope*, Volume 3, 667
economic relations, which remove it from the bourgeois thinking of the past. The example of Cuba might then suggest that the 1959 revolution transformed the utopias of architecture in Cuba, from the abstract to their concrete means.

Bloch’s analysis of technological utopias and architectural utopias goes beyond material relations, becoming one of a concrete subject-object-relation where technology takes a non-Euclidean form. Drawing upon examples of physics and non-Euclidean forms of radiation, Bloch suggest that the development of technology in an ideal society does not contain its form but relates to its subjects (human) as an object (in nature). He later elaborates, “just as technology may possibly penetrate into the non-Euclidean realm, so architectural space, in so far as it promotes abstract ‘compositions’, particularly in glass structures, displays the unmistakable ambition to portray an imaginary space in the empirical one”. For Bloch the concrete in utopia is not only implied in material relations, but in the imaginative – something made evident in his interest in ancient architecture and the baroque. Utopia can both be Cartesian and planned on a massive scale (abstract), but also contain organic forms and ethereal ornament (the concrete) that relate it to the greater human and societal spirit. That is, utopia may aspire to become concrete as a relationality between human subjects and their objective realities.

57 Ibid., 666.
58 Ibid., 743.
The 1960s in Cuba was a period when architects’ experiments reflected the endeavor of a concrete utopia, the stepping away from a previous model of private commissions serving speculative private development, all while enhancing a relationship with the state with its socialist project and its technocratic means. A myriad of architectural projects throughout the decade show how utopia was manifested in the imaginative realm. Architects working across materials and technologies explored architecture’s social utility and its formal construction, all under the auspices of the state’s interest but also within the revolutionary ideals that reached beyond the dictates of state power. One early example is the 1960 Parque Deportivo José Martí, which demonstrates how architecture borrowed from its environment and cultural contexts while employing new technologies of construction (Figure 4.27). The park, building on a previous sports facilities complex, included an outdoor stadium, a gymnasium, a pool, and a children’s area. Architect Octavio Buigas used thin-shell concrete to create parabolic like spans emphatically fluting upwards, recalling the Mexican architect Felix Candela and the Cuban architect Max Borges’s earlier experiments in Havana with parabolic and pyramidal forms. Located oceanside along the Malecón, the Parque Deportivo José Martí’s deployment of curvilinear concrete forms that are repetitive and undulating mirrored the nearby ocean waves. As the floor plan reveals, it is a rationally organized space, with facilities taking rectangular forms organized with rectilinear

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59 Juan de las Cuevas Toraya, *500 Años de Construcciones en Cuba*, 361.
settings (Figure 4.28). Like the nearby wall containing the undulating ocean, the rectilinear and functionality of the facilities were overcome by their deployment of the thin-shell concrete form. Spans of concrete curve upwards and outwards emphatically, as interior spaces are left open to and entirely defined by the exterior setting. The spectator and athlete are dually embraced by the buildings concrete materiality and exterior setting.

In his 1970 book Diez Años de Arquitectura Revolucionaria, which overviews the past decade of architecture in Cuba, Roberto Segre writes: “Projects corresponding to utopia took the hypothesis of reality – today actualized – a typical manifestation of the ‘romantic’ character of the first years of the Revolution, [a hypothesis] that expresses itself in art and architecture like an ‘instantaneous exaltation, mixed with fervor and confusion’”. Citing a notion of the carnivalesque from Roberto Fernández Retamar’s Ensayo de Otro Mundo, Segre recalls earlier debates regarding utopia – both in its imaginative air and its relationship to reality at the social and political level. This utopia comes into being, Segre elaborates, in an era when Cuban architects have new technological and political means to create their utopias, be it in the realm of housing or public infrastructure. The Parque Deportivo José Martí is a great early example of how
the aspirational romance of the early revolutionary period is grafted onto architectural form, its sensuality recalling its urban and natural setting.

Highlighting a period of diversity and trepidation, Segre proposes that architects hold on to the romantic sway of experimentation, the defining element of architecture in the first decade, with projects that complicate the narrative regarding an end of experimentation by the mid-sixties, with the domination of the Ministerio de Construcción over the Colegio de Arquitectos. The ethos of an experimentation committed to a noted social, utilitarian purposiveness, continues to be expressed in diverse architectural forms throughout the end of the decade, with many structures even recalling the National Arts Schools following its abandonment in 1965. The Vivienda experimental en materiales laminares of 1965-8 by architects Hugo D’Acosta and Mercedes Alvarez, for example, used mass-produced laminate units to create portable housing units (Figure 4.29). The portable, laminate sheet metal homes recall the National Art Schools’ anthropomorphism, forming caterpillar-like honey combs connecting in various configurations, and showing the way new technology could materialize into a unique, playful form. Innovative forms recalling cubanidad work to show the influence of the National Arts Schools, as a utopic fantasy whose failure to be fully actualized did not negate its rhythmic potency, the way it appropriated forms from the past and present,

61 Such perspectives regarding the decline of experimentation and freedom in architectural expression by the end of the 1960s are shared in the personal accounts of architects and scholars in the film Unfinished Spaces. The scholarship of Segre, on the other hand, suggests that the spirit or ethos of experimentation and expression remains pertinent in the prefabricated architectures of the latter 1960s and 1970s. Ibid., 157.
and the ways those forms reverberated in architecture during the development of socialism in Cuba.

Another work where form figures nationalist ideals evocatively is the Parque Monumento de los Mártires Universitarios, a prominent urban plaza in Vedado converted into a sculptural park serving as a large monument to student martyrs killed in the resistance against Batista (Figure 4.30). Designed by a team of architects and sculptors including Sonia Domínguez, Emilio Escobar, Armando Hernández and Mario Coyula, the monument features a near rounded winding path with pointed blocks emerging on both sides, like expressive walls whose violent jutting from the ground reflects the struggles of the students. The concrete slabs feature bas-relief sculptures, etchings into the textured prefabricated surface abstracted human figures in movement. According to Mario Coyula, it was the first major monument completed in Havana completed since the 1959 revolution, and the first monument to visually present the masses, emerging in a concrete form. At the meeting of sculpture and architecture, the monument sought to redefine the urban space with an experiential organization, going against the ethos set by the previous traditional monuments of prominent figures and triumphant classicizing architecture. The drama of the revolutionary, the push to utopia, was figured as a spatial stroll through the poetics of struggle, the expression of a concrete utopia.

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62 Mario Coyula, “¿Para qué sirve un monumento?”, 20.
In some cases, works of architecture themselves took on a monumental flair. The Brutalist-style 1967 Multifamily Experimental Building, or Edificio Girón, by architects Antonio Quintana and Alberto Rodríguez, has an especially notable, iconic presence (Figure 4.31). Located on the Malecón, the two tall 17 story residential towers rise above massive concrete pilotis, floating over an exterior plaza lobby. Facing diagonal to the curving Malecón, the two long towers are connected by a grid of stairwells and passage wells. Repetitive patterns, from the vertical concrete slabs defining the stairwells to a grid of concrete blocks embellishing the side facades, help elevate the concrete behemoth to the level of sculpture. Squares of multi-colored ceramic tiles form a visual grid that interacts with the overall program of the building. Recalling Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation, the building rises above its urban environs and provides a sculptural grid with its façade. Both long and tall towers are angled to maximize their visibility. The ground base of the building is slightly elevated, portraying the building’s prominence. The corridor connecting the buildings helps elongate it further, its concrete tubes contributing to the sculptural, expressive feel of the edifice.

In many ways, the Edificio Girón recalls the former Habana Hilton in the way it overtakes and redefines its urban environs, and how it formally plays with the notion of the schematic grid in highrise and urban form. Its materiality – its brutalist embrace of concrete – and its symbolic potency differ greatly, however. Rather than being a sign of tropical leisure and foreign investment, it is a sign of a concrete utopia, an expression of
the revolutionary ambitions to provide housing for the masses. The Edificio Girón also expressed the means by which technologies of construction contributed to new architecture. Featuring a method of sliding molds developed on the island, the concrete panels used in the building were constructed in situ. The unconventional form of the building, quite harrowing in its urban setting, shows how Cuba was developing its own technologies of pre-fabricated architecture while also adopting models from a diverse set of nations. In addition, it reveals the creation of new forms of power in relation to the city, where the spatiality of the grid (scene in the façade and program of the building and the plantation (recalled in its monumentality) remained ever relevant.

One example provided by architect Hugo D’Acosta in his April-May 1964 article in Arquitectura Cuba shows how Cuba was not merely importing models of prefabrication but transforming them within their local setting. Reconfigured by D’Acosta himself, the Soviet I-464 System was manufactured in Santiago de Cuba for notable housing projects, with the new panels produced in Cuba being thinned and perforated, resulting in cost savings and allowing for ventilation within the tropical setting. As Pedro Ignacio Alonso and Hugo Palmarola Sagredo note: “The Cuban transformation conceived the panels as a lighter, sculptural piece, bringing together the

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63 “Se hicieron de forma experimental, con dos bloques paralelos de 7.5 x 37 y 6 x 37 metros, unidos por unas gale- rías prefabricadas, que se apoyan en las cuatro torres de escaleras y elevadores. Se construyeron timpanos y vigas fachada in situ, utilizando moldes deslizantes. La solución de los pisos la constituyen unas losas rectangulares aligeradas de 1.50 x 9 metros, pretensadas en planta. Los depósitos de agua se construyeron segmentados en planta y pos- tensados en obra”. Juan de Las Cuevas Toraya, 500 Años de Construcciones en Cuba, 321.
local demands for technical efficiency with a more ‘plastic’ appeal.”

As chapter six concludes, this plastic appeal becomes graphic in the 1960s, with later prefabricated buildings utilizing wall painting to express a revolutionary aesthetic outside the architecture’s pure materiality.

Perhaps the most iconic yet modestly scaled buildings of the 1960s is the ice creamery Coppelia (Figure 4.32). Located cattycorner to the Hotel Habana Libre, the 1966 saucer-shaped Coppelia is an infamous cathedral of ice cream named after the famous ballet Coppelia. Designed by architect Mario Girona, the rounded forms and ramps provide a sense of playfulness much like that of the National Arts Schools, while its deployment of blue and white recalls the nearby Habana Libre Hotel (Hilton). Located in a plaza-like park, the saucer shaped gathering spot appears to have bright blue concrete tentacles reaching outwards, as if the modern structure were a pitched tent. Stained glass windows and wood finished ramps provide a more traditional feel, recalling the vitrales or stained glass windows of Cuban colonial architecture. Its rounded form further recalls the Taino bohío, arguably a reference to heimat.

Nonetheless the building is unabashedly modern, its central staircase appearing like the eye of a hurricane, its forms unequivocally geometric and aspirational. It recalls the tropicality of the previous vanguardia in its employment of playful forms within a

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64 In Patricio del Real and Helen Gyger (eds.), Ambiguous Territories: Latin American Modern Architectures, 156.
seemingly syncopated space. At the same time is space age form defies its cubanidad, as a utopia of pleasure amid the prefabricated and highrise wonderment of the city.

Utopia took on various apparitions. Literature regarding architecture referred to new projects as embedded within the utopic discourse of the revolution, with results as varied as those of the previous generations. That is, new architectures of the revolution were somewhere between abstract utopia, where the forms of architecture are produced within and adhere to confined political and economic contexts, and concrete utopia, where they aspire to imaginatively and thematically depart from these confines, to communicate an ethos that goes beyond the dictates of Cold War politics and economic realignments. Manfredo Tafuri suggests we explore “utopia as a project” to understand how it is embedded in a political terrain.65 The Cuban revolution provides a unique looking glass to understand how utopia reformed itself on a global stage in an era of heightened politics. Whether the physical form of architecture can concretely express the utopic goals of a society at large remains dubious, as the meaning of architecture appears to be seemingly ephemeral, embedded in its changing contemporaneous contexts. I close this chapter by exploring graphic arts in 1960s Cuba, as architecture comes to be embedded in a system of signs that redefines the city and its urban context. That is, perhaps the most evocative expressions of a concrete utopia are found in the

65 Tafuri, Architecture and Utopia, 50.
visual, communicative form, and architecture’s ability to communicate its utopic ideals came into being with its direct relationship with varied modes of graphic presentation.

**La Ciudad Gráfica**

In his famed text “La Ciudad de las Columnas” (or “The City of Columns”), writer Alejo Carpentier eulogizes Havana’s urban imaginary, wherein the reader “encounters an incredible profusion of columns,” overwhelmed by the city’s combination of chaos and order. Havana is portrayed as a city that is experienced visually, and Carpentier’s “infinite colonnades” recall an urban form that is, while classicized, endlessly undulating and poly-rhythmic, amid neocolonial spectacle and poverty.66 Drawing from Baroque and neoclassical elements of the city, Carpentier mythologizes the city by spatially engaging the reader, by emphasizing the somatic experience of 19th and 20th century modernism through the proliferation of architectonic fragments. In many ways, he recalls the sensuality admonished by Ricardo Porro on his writing regarding the Cuban architecture tradition of the same era. Carpentier’s poetic treatise, originally published in 1964, included a photographic essay by Paolo Gasparini consisting of around 120 photographs. Carpentier expressed the potency of visualizing Havana’s architectural milieu with photographs in the essay recalling the *History and Architecture of Cuba* exhibition’s colonial and Republican era galleries.

66 Quoted from *Arquitectura Cuba* 334 (1965), 31.
Published alongside photographic essays in various magazines such as *Arquitectura Cuba* and the more popular *Cuba*, Carpentier’s profile became the most famed poetic treatise on the city – a thesis on the uniqueness of Havana’s urbanity in the context of the Americas. In his article “The Mysteries of Havana,” Carpentier is teamed with photographer Paolo Gaspirini, whose photographs of architectural details have a crisp graphic effect, using sharp contrast to create a sense of depth, and recalling Havana’s architectural past in a romantic fashion similar to that of the drawings by 19th century English art critic John Ruskin (Figure 4.33). The romanticism of the *ciudad de las columnas* emerged out of a revolution of signs, where advertisements and storefronts slowly transformed to reveal the supposed original surfaces of the city’s buildings. As Emilio Escobar writes, the city’s canvas awnings were disappearing alongside the city’s many advertising signs, as the “new socio-economic structures redrew the architectural image of Havana”.67 The architectural surfaces suddenly laid bare, with the many modernist, baroque and neoclassical details revealing a city rich and eclectic in architectural history and wonderment.

While Carpentier eulogized the city’s romantic past, however, a new aesthetic was rising out of the Cuban baroque ashes. This is made evident in the design of the publications featuring Carpentier’s essays, in their use of photographs to compliment his

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67 Escobar specifically cites how “the economic control of the incipient revolution had restricted the import of canvas”, a material that was used for the fabric awnings advertising the many private enterprises of the city. “Dressing Havana”, 13.
evocative descriptions of Havana’s elusive and colonial era urbanity. Likewise, 
Carpentier’s nostalgic recalling of the past and its modernist ethos, where architectural 
details serve as signs of cubanidad, existed alongside many graphic campaigns that 
expressed a newly dynamic and high modernity. The World Congress of Architecture is 
a prime example of this graphic impulse, where the portrayal of high modernity existed 
alongside an idealized narrative of progress from a sensual past, providing a narrative 
that extended beyond the new architectures of Havana into one that redefined the city a 
sign of modernity via the graphic impulse. For example, the hosting of the World 
Congress of Architecture resulted in the reconfiguration of Havana’s former commercial 
center in Vedado. New terrazzo tiles featuring the work of Cuban modern artists were 
placed approximately five feet from one another on the sidewalks of La Rampa and 
Calle L near the area’s most prominent intersection, where Coppelia, the Habana Libre 
Hotel and Cinema Yara meet. Examples by Wifredo Lam and Amelia Peláez display the 
means in which their painterly aesthetic becomes part of Havana’s everyday urban 
street life, while abstraction in the in-situ works recall graphic renditions of each artist’s 
style – as signs of modern style (Figure 4.34). The tiles complemented other graphic arts 
campaigns that drew from the painterly aesthetics of modern Cuban art to create a more 
populist, accessible form of visual communication. New technologies in the production 
of art began to redefine the aesthetics of the city, finding a dynamic place within 
Havana’s architectural milieu.
This is further translated in the world of publishing, where various journals and books utilized abstract graphic design that recalled the playful rhythms of the city. Journals such as *Lunes de Revolución*, *Casa de las Américas*, and *Cuba*, explored in the following chapter, are prime examples of the ingenuous designs of Cuban editors, using aspects of photographic realism along with graphic abstraction to communicate various literary, socio-political, and aesthetic ideals. This is also evidenced in articles such as those discussed above by Porro, D’Acosta and Carpentier, which overtly show how ideas regarding the city were written in relation to images, to the city’s graphic visualization. The letrado class had become, to some extent, indebted to the graphic – a trend visible elsewhere in Latin America and even globally. Another article in the same issue of *Arquitectura Cuba* as its original publishing of “Ciudad de las Columnas” focused on the National Arts Schools, emphasizing its utopic endeavors with the emphatic images of the project. The inside back cover featured a large abstract graphic of the ceiling oculi of the School of Plastic Arts painted in the bright colors of colonial Havana’s vitrine windows (Figure 4.35). The graphic image of the oculus appears throughout the article in a smaller, black-and-white format, functioning as a sort of branding that recognizes the expressive nature of abstract form and cubanidad. The graphic impulse was becoming undeniable, with the photographic playing a potent role in expressing Havana’s urban sentiment – both past and present. That is, by the close of the 1960s the city of Havana becomes redefined by the utilization of graphic arts,
through new technologies of printmaking and photography used at a variety of scales. The example of the mass-produced image of Che Guevara, draped over the Ministry of the Interior building at his Havana eulogy, is emblematic of this ethos (see Chapter 1). The city of columns also became la ciudad gráfica, where the present utopia of socialism encounters a city embedded in historical eccentricities.

In his essay “An image travels the world”, Julio García Espinosa writes: “The technical and technological explosion of the sixties made the world of the image irrevocably reach universal dimensions. It is precisely in those years that our image appeared.” The world of the image in the age of mass-media, Espinosa notes, also allowed an image of Cuba to reverberate throughout the world. Elaborating on the age of cinema and the big screen, Espinosa remarks on how a cinematic image-based conception of the world developed following the Cuban revolution, one that contributed to a notion of Third World solidarity. This translates into the graphic arts, as the visuality of the film reached beyond the reel and into a network of film posters. As Jorge Bermúdez suggests: “Film and the poster, taken as manifestations of modern urban culture, are children of the city and the street”. While the city’s architectural

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68 “La explosión técnica y tecnológica de los años sesenta hizo que el mundo de la imagen alcanzara dimensiones irreversiblemente universales. Justamente en esos años nuestra imagen apareció. Tuvo la posibilidad de recorrer todas las pantallas grandes y chicas alimentando definitivamente el pensamiento y la sensibilidad universales. Una imagen recorre el mundo.” Una imagen recorre el mundo”, in Letras Cubanas, Revolución, Letras, Arte, 608.

69 “El cine y el cartel, en tanto manifestaciones de la cultura urbana de la modernidad, eran hijos de las ciudad y de la calle.” La Imagen Constante, 135.
past laid bare in the socialist city, its modernity became redefined in film, photography, and the graphic image. Utopia becomes not only manifested in the new architectural projects throughout the island, but also in the various forms of visual representation that present the social, political, architectural and technological ambitions of the Cuban Revolution. Havana, while largely abandoned in the country’s agrarian reforms, still produced iconic examples of revolutionary architecture. But more than anything it served as a stage to present revolutionary ideals, something interrogated more fully in the next chapter.

As evidenced in the exhibition *History and Architecture of Cuba*, graphic media and photography are tools for expressing utopia. Here I define the graphic as the production of two-dimensional images utilizing technologies of reproduction, ranging from lithographs to photographs to image projections. The plastic integration of architecture implies a graphic undertaking, but the scope of the graphic reaches beyond the permanence of the plastic integration of architecture to include the implementation of visual arts onto the architectural surface in a more temporary or ephemeral manner. Given the communicative role of art and architecture in expressing a variety of revolutionary ideals, graphic media becomes the means by which such ideals are represented to a broader public, where the graphic overtakes the former dominance of the plastic integration of architecture. That is, the plastic arts come to no longer define the ideals of high modern architecture in Havana, and when utopian ideals are
implanted onto architectural contexts, they are primarily done so in a graphic rather than a plastic manner. Utopia, drawing from abstract forms of a painterly past, is concretized in the new technologies of reproduction.

Further, as highlighted at the end of this chapter, urban campaigns as well as the placement of graphic media throughout the island exhibits the manner in which utopia sought to utilize new technologies to present its futurity. The relationship between the graphic and the architectural intensifies in the 1960s, both in the reference the representation of architectural forms and ideals and in the graphic art’s consideration of its urban setting. In his exploration of the graphic impulse in Cuba, Jorge Bermúdez writes:

Photography initiated a process of molding the image to conform with the identity of revolution. In principle, this process was achieved through national and international media, which placed the everyday activities of the revolution a central theme at the center of their news. The revolutionary image would proliferate among a myriad of media, from the design of interiors and expositions, to book design, publicity, posters, billboards, stamps, informational films and documentaries. These proved a reliable means for refining the image of the Revolution and distributing it widely. State mass media was the purveyor of a highly effective visual language, which forced all other media to rely upon it as the basis of their own graphic representations of national identity.70

70 “La fotografía inició el proceso conformador de la imagen de identidad de la revolución. En principio, este proceso se obtuvo por intermedio de las publicaciones periódicas nacionales e internacionales, las cuales hicieron del diario acontecer revolucionario tema central de sus noticias para luego multiplicarse en la diversidad de funciones que le cupo asumir a su imagen por vía del diseño de interiores y exposiciones (Pabellón Cuba, Expo ‘67, Montreal) o por su aplicación al diseño de libros, anuncios publicitarios, carteles, vallas, postales y filmes de carácter noticioso y documental. Funciones y aplicaciones en las cuales demostró ser un medio ya cualificado para fijar y generalizar las imagines de la revolución, poseedor de un lenguaje visual de alto nivel estético-comunicativo, al cual siempre tendrían que recurrir los otros medios
The graphic comes to be the key in the search for a national identity – that is, cubanidad becomes a graphic expression in the 1960s, reaching beyond the vanguardist practices of artists and writers into the popular, communicative realm. Utopia is not merely expressed in the concrete form of architecture, but presented in graphic media, and in its interaction with the built environment.

Fidel Castro and Che Guevara not only imagined the Cuban Revolution as a project to create large political and socio-economic changes within the landscape of Cuba, but also as a movement of cultural change. Within the first few years of the revolution many institutions were founded – most significantly the Casa de las Américas and the Taller de Gráfica Experimental – expanding the role of the arts in society and making them accessible to the greater public. Exhibitions such as the History of Architecture in Cuba utilized print media alongside other forms of graphic media, with Cuba claiming multiple influences, ranging from Mexican modernism to social realism and abstract expressionism. They reveal what Armando Silva identifies as “urban imaginaries,” with imaginary constructs signifying “the borders between the individual psyche and collective states, perhaps one of the most revealing terms for describing the encounter between collective fantasies and the social production of cultural
meanings”.\textsuperscript{71} The graphic print becomes a communicative means to express *heimat* or cubanidad, but is placed within an urban setting as signs impacting the urban imaginary. While the socialist project of Cuba focused on agrarian reform, the city provided an imaginary essential to the revolutionary project – both as the mirage of a baroque, decadent and mysterious past, and as the stage of revolutionary vanguardism and technocracy. While the expressive gestures of Porro and Carpentier reflect the latter, the development of poster art became one predominant means in which images of the city and the revolution reached broader audiences, redefining the romantic cubanidad of the past and setting the past for utopic formulations of abstract and concrete variations.

Initially poster art in Havana emerged during the Republican era in a tradition akin to the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP) in Mexico, employing black and white woodcuts and lithography in a manner exhibiting a clear German expressionist influence and with a nationalist, political bent. The TGP represented a revolutionary ideal in the context of Cuba, drawing its legacy back to Mexico’s 1910 revolution and having direct connections to the influential muralist movement. As David Mateo writes on printmaking after the revolution: “Technical experimentation was subordinate to the revolutionary projects that were forming, whose primary conceptual and formal principle seemed to reproduce forcefully the creative model of popular Mexican

\textsuperscript{71} “Imaginaries,” in Armando Silva, ed., *Urban Imaginaries from Latin America: Documenta11*, 23.
graphics and German expressionism”. Mateo continues to note such a method brought artists to national fame, highlighting how the nationalist imaginary was made possible through printmaking and technological innovation. However, his critique fails to consider advancements following the initial years of the revolution, where styles and techniques reached beyond the more traditional lens of printmaking as the decade progressed. By the close of the 1960s decade Cuba’s print culture did not express the social realist and expressionist means of the TGP, instead using figural and abstract forms to present new political, largely anti-imperialist ideals in a notable pop aesthetic. Further, realist representations of figures were represented through photography, complementing graphic media that portrayed figures of power and revolutionary ideals through abstract form and color. In this closing section I provide a partial history of graphic arts in Cuba through an analysis of the development of the poster and its development as an art form, followed by an exploration of new media projects taking the aesthetic of the graphic poster into a larger, experiential scale. The following chapter will expand upon these graphic representations more closely, looking more critically at the utopic ideals they purport and their impact on the plastic arts and representations of the city.

First, it is important to consider printmaking after the revolution to its varied influences, particularly that of Mexican and German expressionist inspired printmaking,

72 “A Look at Cuban Printmaking,” 15.
whose heritage recalls the communicative potency of political graphic art.

Collaborations with the Taller de Gráfica Popular in Mexico were already common among the second generation of Cuba's vanguardia, whom were looking for models of modernism outside the dominating centers of New York and Paris. The anti-fascist politics of the TGP had a particular sway among the complicated politics of Cuba's vanguardia following its 1933 revolution, with works from the TGP being exhibited in Cuba as early as the 1940s. The first known exhibition – “Exposición de grabados y litografías del Taller de Gráfica Popular de México” – took place in Havana over a week in March 1941. Five more exhibitions took place in Havana during the years of 1943, 1946, 1955, 1956, and 1957. The numbers of exhibitions featuring the work of the TGP increased during the early years of the revolution. Two exhibitions took place in 1959, including one at the Casas de las Américas in December. The exhibition took place alongside a Mexican cultural festival, as a premonition of a shared revolutionary and nationalistic aesthetic. Two more exhibitions took place in 1962, and two more in 1963, with such exhibitions reaching cities outside of Havana, such as Santiago de Cuba, Pinar del Río, and Guantánamo.73 These were complimented, as well, by exhibitions of home-grown printmaking, including annual salons at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.74

73 Prignitz-Poda, El Taller de Gráfica Popular, 434, 436.
74 A survey of pamphlets and catalogues of the museum displays a several exhibitions taking place throughout the decade. For example, the small pamphlet like catalogue for the Salón 1962 exhibition Carteles Cubanos (January 3-30, 1962) includes an essay by Oscar Morriña that discusses the way art from the earlier period influenced the development of graphic arts in Cuba, which utilized new technologies to evoke
The Taller Experimental de Gráfica (TEG), founded in 1962, shows how Cuban artists were following the model of TGP workshop in Mexico and applying it to the Cuban context, providing the seed for aesthetic advancements on the front of printmaking. Concerned with experimenting with various techniques, the TEG’s main project was to “develop the art of lithography in Cuba”.

Several poster and print works from the early 1960s not only present the influence of Mexican modernism but also the means by which artists were experimenting so as to fit their work within a nationalist and revolutionary framework. The 1960 lithograph Firmes junto a Fidel (Stand Strong with Fidel), an early work produced by the Comisión de Orientación Revolucionario (COR), places images of the masses gathering within an arm pointing upwards and holding a gun; the image extends along the length of the gun (Figure 4.36). Cropped so that neither the arm nor the gun is in full view, the t-shape arm-fist-gun collage frames the text to the lower right. The directness and readability of the image, as well as the combination of text and image, provide a graphic semblance of guerrilla warfare, extending from the taking of arms to the post-revolutionary gathering of masses. Its pro-communist, nationalist message complements the TGP’s anti-fascist fervor, bearing notable aesthetic similarities. Further, the lack of authorship – its

“the traditions and environment of our space tropical”. Archives, Biblioteca de Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

75 Taller de Gráfica Experimental, El Libro de Taller, 7.
creation within a collectivity – mimics the practices of the TGP, where artists often
gathered and collaborated on prints together. The sharp red background and the brush
strokes outlining the arm and gun recall the militant urgency of the moment, and recall
the 26th of July Movement.

Eladio Rivadulla Martínez’s 1959 lithograph 26 de Julio/Fidel Castro depicts a stern
leader sitting with his gun erected upwards (Figure 4.37). The social realism of this
piece as well as its general style draws largely from the TGP and the works of artists
such as Luis Arenal or Leopoldo Méndez. Further, Martínez’s relationship with the
Revolution is implicated within the print. As Teresa Eckmann writes: “On January 1,
1959, a phone call with news of Fulgencio Batista’s overthrow awoke artist Eladio
Rivadulla Martínez. Taking up pen and paper, he sketched an image of Fidel Castro
based on a photograph based on a photograph printed in the New York Times. By dawn,
Rivadulla had produced one hundred serigraphs of ‘el primer cartel de la Revolucion’ –
the very first political poster of the Cuban Revolution”. Igniting a poster art
movement, the new government displayed the prominent role art and design played in
imagining a new cubanidad. As Gerardo Mosquera notes, “In a Socialist society, art is
one of the main roads to knowledge, and it uses aesthetic appreciation as a means of
inquiring into and representing reality by its own methods”. Leaders Fidel Castro and

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76 In Russ Davidson (ed.), Latin American Posters: Public Aesthetics and Mass Politics, 45.
Che Guevara proposed a social policy that encouraged the proliferation of the arts outside of formerly elitist contexts, and the graphic became a particularly apt means to counter the supposed elitism of art at large. These early examples serve as a seed to more innovative printmaking that progressed during the first two decades of the revolution, as graphic artists expanded the scope of printmaking to incorporate the more abstract designs and vivid tropical hues made apparent in 1940s to 1960s painting. That is, the graphic arts went beyond conventional modes of political communication, capturing the rapture of cubanidad as a visual, communicative force.

Drawing influence from U.S. pop art, Mexican printmaking, Cuban modern art, and the 1950s “Polish School” of graphic arts, a new generation of internationally trained as well as self-taught graphic artists came into prominence in the first few years of the Revolution. The posters they began to produce moved beyond the former commercial and starkly political means of earlier printmaking. Posters came to serve a variety of purposes: popularly they advertised Government supported and produced films, often times they contained political slogans much like the simple painted billboards appearing throughout the city. Nelson Herrera Ysla writes: “The poster was an aesthetic experience of the highest level, a visual metaphor of aspirations having to do with the relationship of art and the public, and one that was able to function beyond the
limits of its primary intentionality, becoming a collector’s item”.

Film poster’s such as Rene Portocarrerro’s 1964 silkscreen poster Soy Cuba and Raúl Martínez’s 1968 poster Lucía display the vivid use of color and composition within film posters (see Chapter 5). Alfredo Rostgaard’s poster for the 1967 Protesta Canción, features a flat, abstract pink flower that is crying blood from one of its stems, meant to express the pain and joy of the protest song (Figure 4.38). Created for the First Meeting of the Protest Song, the flower became a prominent logo for an event that brought musicians from around the world to share protest songs. His poster of the same year commemorating Che upon his death depicts the silhouette of the famous Alberto Korda image of Che repeated across the picture plane. As Adelaide de Juan point out, graphic arts not only received official recognition by national galleries and museums, but had a much more public realm that allowed the graphic to be infused into everyday life.

Posters were placed throughout the city, and in the case of ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográfico) on their headquarter’s surface, becoming part of the urban art displays along the main boulevards of Vedado. The poster came to transform the columned city of the past into the graphic city of the future.

The impact of the graphic arts in Havana was wide reaching, as it developed within a socialist ethos of collaboration. Various developments throughout the 1960s

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78 “An Island Graphic Poetics,” in Luïsa Borràs et. al., eds., Cuba Siglo XX: modernidad y sincretismo, 403.
show the way posters, much like the murals and vallas (or silkscreened murals), were completed collaboratively with the intention of communicating a particular message to the public eye. In many ways enlarged photographs came to replace the early prints of the revolution, as graphic arts utilized new technologies that expanded the photograph onto the architecture surface. As Rafael Rojas Gutiérrez notes: “The photographic image of the Revolution, of its young and attractive leaders and its ‘uniformed masses’ which were featured throughout the Western press (The New York Times, Life, Time, Le Monde) between 1959 and 1968, at minimum speaks to a society of spectacle quite different from that envisioned by Guy Debord and the Situationists. It was a staging of utopia in the Third World, more specifically in the Caribbean – a frontier zone in which touristic, sexual, religious, and revolutionary symbols were converted into the markers of an alternative political community”80 Many examples abound of photographs of various prominent revolutionary figures – Fidel, Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, José Martí – being expanded to a mural form and serving as a backdrop for significant meetings and public rallies. The photographic backdrop – the image of a young revolution and its leaders – in many ways provided a counterpoint to the coloniality of the city of columns, a new visualization of power and order.

In this chapter I argued that utopia is a central component of a revolution that sought, in its public discourse, to create a more ideal society. A notion of utopia is

80 “Anatomía de un entusiasmo: la revolución como espectáculo de ideas”, 41.
manifested in the social motivation of new architectures and overall embrace of construction technologies, as well as in visual media’s ability to express a variety of ideals central to Cuba’s socialist project – be it anti-imperialism, Marxist Leninist ideals, or projections of nationalist modernities. The graphic media campaigns of 1960s Cuba have become symbolic of a concrete utopia, providing visual snapshots representative of those ideals. As the next chapter demonstrates, the mediatic impulse extended to the close of the decade, providing a backdrop for Cuba’s broader cultural politics, staged at a global scale. Cuba hosted cultural and intellectual congresses, participated in world’s fairs, and facilitated a variety of artistic exchanges. As economic and political changes created a greater reliance on Moscow, Havana marked itself as a cultural center of the Global South, a symbol of “Third World” modernism at the height of Cold War tensions. The utopia of the state became mediated by its global transmission, and as the next chapter explores, transforms the meaning of the revolutionary as the decade closes. Utopia is revealed by images of international solidarity and a revolutionary cubanidad. Such images become concrete in their symbolic valence within the spaces in which they are reproduced and presented, providing a communicative veneer for calamitous times.
Third World Modern: Center, Global, Left – Defining a New Cubanidad

The *Mural Cuba Colectiva*¹, organized by Cuban artist Wifredo Lam in 1967, was a communal effort among Cuban and French artists to create a socialistic expression in response to the politics of the late 1960s era (*Figure 5.1*). The painting of the mural on the front portico of Havana’s Pabellón Cuba was a well-attended public spectacle that complemented the 1967 Salon de Mai exhibition inside the pavilion. Each artist was allotted a small piece of a massive grid that swirled into a concentric circle towards the center. The *Mural Cuba Colectiva* is a vibrant mélange of late modern art styles, a visual testament to the dialogue between Cuban artists and France and the international community, as well as new approaches to public and collective art. The 1967 exhibition was the first Salon de Mai to take place in the Western hemisphere, bringing an impressive collection of French, Cuban and international modern and contemporary art to the cities of Havana and Santiago, including work from artists such as Pablo Picasso, Hervé Telemaque, Willem de Kooning, Joan Miró, Man Ray, René Magritte, Alexander

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¹ Also referred to as *Mural Cuba Colectiva* (see Gribaudo, *Mural Cuba Colectiva 1967 Salon de Mai*).
Calder, Victor Vasarely, and Jean Arp. The Cuban national press described the accompanying mural as a crowning achievement of the exhibition; it would travel to Paris for the Salon de Mai exhibition of the following year, only to be closed down within hours of its opening due to the political protests of May 1968.

The *Mural Cuba Colectiva*, along with other exhibitions, architectural projects and arts projects in Havana throughout the 1960s, were designed to demonstrate Cuba’s revolutionary modernity to both global and local audiences. The mural presents a compendium of styles in an ordered manner, recalling its placement within the *ciudad gráfica* while also showing the breadth of a revolutionary aesthetic. The portable mural is one of the terrains where the messiness of the painterly directly confronts the rationality of the graphic. By the close of the 1960s, the Cuban revolutionary aesthetic had solidified as reflected in Cuba’s participation in international events such as cultural congress and world expos. As Cuba became increasingly aware of its position in the heightened politics of the Cold War, cultural production became a mechanism for state to communicate its ideals to broader audiences. Cuban’s participation in and hosting of exhibitions and congresses show how the island nation was taking new, innovative

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2 Praise for the event was reflected in two major state-released newspapers – the *Salon de Mayo* (June 30, 1967) served as a newspaper catalogue with essays about contemporary art, comics and drawings by various participating artists, and reflections of the event. Various articles in the *Revista Granma* discuss the impact of the mural and exhibition, particularly the special themed magazine titled “54 Artistas de Europa y Cuba opinan Mural Cuba Colectiva” (July 22, 1967).

3 This is a practice akin to the United States, where the Marshall Plan was an economic and political mission to develop significant architectural and development projects abroad while promoting U.S. artists abroad, whose abstract expressions became symbols of freedom.
approaches to public art both within the traditional gallery space and throughout Havana’s urban landscape. Many of the works themselves, like the clamorous Mural Cuba Colectiva, convey how the revolutionary aesthetic expressed futurity while drawing from various historical and contemporary tropes. I argue that the revolutionary aesthetic of Cuba comes to its fore at the close of the 1960s, when graphic media, or the technical means by which the utopia of the revolution is expressed, encountered the painterly, or the muddled materiality of the plastic arts. Their interaction produces a new or enhanced aesthetic form for cubanidad, one that reached beyond the markets of tobacco and sugar and into the branding of a “Third World” modernity.

Expressions of Cuban modernity were embedded in the historic moment, and Cuba’s antagonistic relationship with the U.S. itself became subject matter for the projection of its revolutionary modernity, for establishing its position in a Third World politic. This chapter traces the direct aesthetic influences – notably pop art and the city’s graphic turn – that emanated from the U.S. and were redefined in the Cuban context. A revolutionary aesthetic emerges in the 1960s to express both a cubanidad counter to the dictates of imperialism, as well as a futurity that places Havana at the center of a Third World modernity – transforming Cuba into a pivotal player in new transcontinental relations, seeking cultural and political alliances between leftist movements and governments throughout Asia, Latin American and Africa. The Civil Rights Movement and controversy surrounding the Vietnam War shaped this tricontinentalism, as Cuba’s
peculiar relationship with the U.S. materialized into propaganda. As images of protest circulated around the world, visual media became a way to amplify the call for a global solidarity, in the name of both Marxism and anti-imperialism. A mythology of the revolution emerged, produced within the political confines of the state and disseminated globally. The 1960s is a decade where Cuba provided an globally recognizable aesthetic for the revolutionary in a global moment of broad decolonization and heightened Cold War tensions.

Cuban filmmaker Santiago Álvarez’s 1968 film *LBJ* highlights the way visual form – both painterly and graphic – impacted the political messaging of the vanguardist news documentary.¹ The film opens with photographs of the extravagant White House wedding of the U.S. president’s daughter Luci Baines Johnson, establishing itself as a satirical, dialectical critique of capitalism and U.S. empire. Set to a soundtrack ranging from operatic to soulful, the film lampoons the mythological grandeur of U.S. power, recalling the three major assassinations of the 1960s, attached to the initials of the U.S. president Lyndon B. Johnson: L for Martin Luther King, B for Bobby Kennedy, and J for John Kennedy. The tongue-in-cheek satire not only implicates Johnson in these assassinations, but parodies the leader’s heroism, placing seemingly staged photographs of the leader (many from *LIFE* magazine) with a harrowing soundscape, matched by an

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¹ The 15 minute film is featured in *Antología de Santiago Álvarez: Volumen 1* (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Arte y Industria Cinematográfico, 2009), DVD.
uncanny montage of loosely related and varied images. As Joshua Malitsky notes: “The
decadence of Johnson’s daughter’s church wedding is associated with the immorality
and hypocrisy of American society that is at its heart pornographic and violent”.5 The
fifteen-minute film emphatically plays the drama of the U.S.’s leader with an almost
religious, eschatological undertone, critically recalling a mythology of patriarchy and
respectability central to U.S. national identity.

In many ways Álvarez’s political critique of the U.S. shows the central,
seemingly contradictory roles the United States played in the revolutionary imaginary of
Cuba – both as a place of antagonism idealized as a dynamic counter to the revolution’s
lofty ideals, and as a place of influence when it comes to the forms that express this
antagonism. The artistry of the content, its dramatic narrative in triptych form, closes
with an obscure sense of horror. Photographs of Johnson with his baby grandson are
montaged while the protest song titled “Yo vi la sangre de un niño brotar” (or “I saw
blood gushing from a child”) by young Cuban musician Pablo Milanés plays in the
background.6 The lyrics of the song illustrate the violence and death of children in the
face of war, in sharp, ironic contrast to the joyful images of the U.S. president, and lead

5 “A certain explicitness: objectivity, history, and the documentary self”, 27.
6 A video of Pablo Milanés performing the song was made in association with the International Protest Song
Meeting at the Casa de las Américas in August 1967. The video features him performing in front of the
official poster of the meeting, Protesta Cancion by Alfredo Rostgaard (see discussion below). The video also
shows him performing in front of large photograph mural of faces of people from Vietnam. The video
recalls the graphic sway of the revolution, the way in which the aesthetic emanating from mediatic aims of
the government extended to art and music that pertained to international concerns. Video accessed March
20, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZ-Es9ca0Wc. The video is also featured in the 1980
documentary Vamos a caminar por Casa.

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to the closing image of the film – a body on fire, running from an abode into a grass field, an image of immolating death in monochromatic hues of red. The film recalls a collage, a smattering of images extended across time and music, of photographs serving as a delirious evidence of injustice and power.

As the previous chapter shows, film plays a significant role in constructing Havana’s Cold War era modernity, with the filmic being a significant contributor to the ciudad gráfica and its global projection of a Third World modernity. Films also highlighted Cuba’s international relations, as seen in the content of LBJ and other Álvarez documentaries. Mikhail Kalatozov’s 1964 film Soy Cuba, for example, shows a Soviet perspective of the Cuban revolutionary drama, from the Republican era to the triumph of the revolution. The film, however, was ill received by Cuban and Soviet audiences. Nonetheless, its cinematography engages the legacy of Republican era urban reforms and skyscraper architecture, something made apparent throughout Cuban film of the 1960s. Álvarez’s film LBJ used static images to contribute to the cinematic, demonstrating the graphic element’s contributes to propaganda. Indeed, Álvarez referred to himself as a news pamphleteer, as someone assembling images and music in an inherently mediatic yet incredibly artistic manner.

While the aesthetic influence from and critique of the United States became

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7 I am Cuba, directed by Mikhail Kalatozov (1964; Harrington Park, NJ: Milestone Film and Video, 2007), DVD.
fundamental to the production of propaganda, the revolution placed Cuba on a much
broadercglobal stage. Military support for independence movements in Africa, growing
Soviet economic dependency, and political exchanges between world leaders trying to
pivot themselves beyond a Cold War politic – the Non-aligned Movement, for example –
all become major factors in the branding of a new, revolutionary cubanidad. The
historical drama of Cuba is matched, by revolutionary accounts, to a global struggle for
liberation – the utopic imaginings of a new world order outside the dictates of North
American and Western European imperialism. This chapter lays out the many
revolutionary manifestations of the mid-to-late 1960s, beginning with the Tricontinental
Congress of 1966 and the Cultural Congress of 1968 as pivotal moments in Cuba’s
promotion of a Third World modernity. Cuba’s role as an arbiter in international affairs
impacts its own historiography, something witnessed in the example of the Pabellón’s
initial exhibition, discussed in Chapter 4. Beyond presenting a history of triumph, the
revolution provided a new moment to reconsider Cuba’s history and heritage,
particularly to rethink its African heritages, or its présence africaine.\footnote{Here I refer to Stuart Hall’s definition of the présence africaine: “Présence africaine is the subterranean trace or voice of ‘Africa’…,” “Creolité and the Process of Creolization,” 32.}

Exhibitions hosted at the Pabellón in conjunction with the Tricontinental
Conference of 1966 and the Cultural Congress of 1968 display how both national identity
and the global struggle for liberation became visualized outside of the debates and
meetings of the congresses. With the Negritude and Pan-Africanism movements transforming in the 1960s, black culture in Cuba came to be understood through the new lens of decolonization. I discuss these exhibitions in detail to understand how the visual connects to the ideas shared at these congresses, as well as the way such events impacted the politics of the nation. I follow this with a discussion of the 1967 Salon de Mai, which highlights the role fine arts played in negotiating global relations and national identity, in particular how artists of the revolutionary vanguard incorporated elements of U.S.-style pop art with the graphic impulse of the city. Beyond a mere blending of design and art practices, the style and content of these works were also subversive, often referring to or using forms of media to engage and critique their present reality. I close with a discussion of the influence of trends in fine art on popular propaganda, looking at examples such as World Expo exhibition halls and political posters.

The production of Havana as an artistic, cultural and intellectual center of the global left and Third World solidarity movements provides an alternative model for understanding the formation of the global city. Caught between the economic and political machinations of Washington and Moscow, Cuba branded its own identity in the realms of culture and Tricontinental solidarity. The often self-proclaimed exceptionalism of the Cuban experience provides a model for rethinking globalization outside the dominant paradigms of neocolonialism and neoliberalism. The mythology
of the Cuban Revolution tells of another story regarding globalization, one where the
notion of a Third World identity became a badge of pride and solidarity, rather than a
demeaning categorization from abroad. By exploring the art, propaganda and design of
the era, I argue that images were central to projecting a recognizable image of Cuban
modernity abroad and at home. The examples below are mirages of a utopia beyond the
concrete reality of the nation state, dually functioning to symbolically maintain the
nation state’s sovereignty and its global prominence.

Such images, however idealized or symbolic, have an impact at the ground level,
and this can perhaps be seen most prominently in the exploration and promotion of
Cuba’s African legacy, a prominent theme in the cultural and intellectual discourse of
the late 1960s. While blackness previously stood as a trope for national ambitions (see
Chapter 2), Cuba’s place within a changing world gave the island’s connections to the
mother continent new meaning on an amplified scale: an aesthetic of blackness,
previously idealized in the paintings of Lam, had achieved a broader communicative
relevance. The revolutionary aesthetic became enveloped in the contemporary politics
of Africa, as Cuba proclaimed its solidarity with anti-colonial movements in Africa, in
some cases sending military support.

In 1965, a translation of Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* was published in
Cuba, under the recommendation of Che Guevara to Casa de las Américas director
Roberto Fernández Retamar. Two years after its first Spanish publication by the Fondo
de Cultural Económica in Mexico, Fanon’s ideas would become influential in Cuba. As Robert J. C. Young suggests, “Che’s writings and speeches show a marked change in this period – as his focus shifts from building socialism in Cuba, to a Fanonian vision of a world split between the exploitative imperialist and the progressive socialist countries.”

Fanonian explored the psychological and social dimensions to which systems of oppression operated; in Fanon’s logic, violence against colonial rule of law is itself responsive to the violent conditions that legitimized and were endemic to the oppressive mechanisms of the modern colonialism. Revolution in Africa – from the Algerian War of Independence to Che’s endeavors in the Congo – became part of Cuba’s revolutionary identity. In this way, Cuba’s revolution against previous forms of corruption and tyranny in the island became represented as a broader, global struggle against the dictates of empire and colonialism.

This shared sense of revolutionary identity is clear in the summer 1966 issue of the journal Casa de las Américas, an issue entitled “África en América”. The introduction to the edition states: “Africa is not only part of our heritage, but it is at the same time twined with us today, in our shared situation as underdeveloped countries”. The magazine went beyond an exploration of roots, to encouraging alliances with Africa and the broader African diaspora and promoting Tricontinental solidarity. Featuring essays

\(^{10}\) Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction, 122-123.

\(^{11}\) “Africa no sólo está en nuestra raíz, sino que hoy mismo está hermanada a nosotros, en nuestro condición común de países subdesarrollados”. Casa de las Américas, 36-37 (May – August 1966), 3.
by figures such as Fernando Ortiz, W.E.B. DuBois, Aimé Césaire, Malcolm X and Franz Fanon, it presented African religiosity and thought as contributing to a uniquely American, cross-continental identity. The journal also visualized this solidarity and connectedness through collage and graphic semblages.

The graphic design of the journal, led by artist Umberto Peña, reflected new, politicized representations of Africa and the African diaspora in the visual and mediatic realm, in a style similar to the films of Santiago Álvarez. The front cover itself is an homage to Álvarez’s 1965 film Now, which featured striking black-and-white images and video clips of the Civil Rights movement serving as a backdrop to Lena Horne’s rendition of the song “Now” (Figure 5.2). The cover evoked the call for protest underlying the film’s use of documentary footage of struggle against a racist state. The journal featured collages by Umberto Peña throughout, combining photographic images of the Civil Rights movement and other African struggle for independence, photographic images of poverty, eclectic patterns, drawings of vèvès (or African diasporic pictograms often seen in Haitian vodou), anthropomorphic figures from the art of Wifredo Lam, African traditional art, and other visual ephemera. In many ways the journal shows how the African presence in the arts, previously apparent in the ghosts, monsters and defiant creatures of Wifredo Lam, came to be presented by the graphic and the photographic. In the front cover of the journal, to the left of the word “NOW” written in black text with a red background, is a black and white image of an
emaciated child – a figure of black poverty, a call for a fight against injustice. The cover recalled Alfredo Roostgaard’s 1965 poster for Álvarez’s film, a simple black and white silhouette of a women’s bust with an ominous sun-like red dot to the upper right. Third world solidarity, as much as its varied heritages, was part of the national reimagining of Cuba.

**Del Tercer Mundo**

In January 1968, the Pabellón Cuba hosted *Del Tercer Mundo*, its most prominent exhibition since its inaugural 1963 exhibition, *The History of Architecture in Cuba*. The exhibition was a major event for the Cultural Congress of 1968, featuring an multimedia approach akin to earlier exhibitions hosted in the Brutalist pavilion, utilizing film, graphic, sculptural and other visual elements to express the “Third World”. The exterior space of the Pabellón recast the exhibition as a tropical garden of images, comprising large, gridded cube structures displaying photographic and graphic representations of humanity and the struggle of the oppressed. The logo of the exhibition, located at the front of the pavilion, was a three-dimensional cube in neon lighting, with the red text of Del Tercer Mundo wrapping around the green 4x4 grid of the cube (Figure 5.3). The logo reached beyond the two-dimensional relation of the grid, forming an off-center cube floating in space and transforming its grid-based concrete environs. The exhibition *Del Tercer Mundo* expressed the story of the Third World, of resistance, in a totalizing
manner. The cube as a conceptual structure, held on its axis like a globe, recalled a totality of form, presenting in its complexities the dramas and traumas of a revolutionizing world.

*Del Tercer Mundo* captures an aesthetic that reached its acme in the politically charged year of 1968. A series of exhibitions hosted in the Pabellón and elsewhere, along with Cuba’s hosting of a variety of congresses and conferences, marked a new dynamic aesthetic. The assassination of Che Guevara intensified Cuba’s role as an arbiter of anti-imperialism. I shall discuss the exhibitions and meetings that preceded *Del Tercer Mundo*, highlighting the substance and meaning of these forms of presentation. The cube, the logo, and the grid become representational schema in which to understand the use of technology as a communicative tool, and how propaganda superseded the autonomy of the state. As he 1963 *History and Architecture in Cuba* exhibition showed (see Chapter 4), the technological is attached to the historical, as idealized forms such as the cube and the grid serve as interfaces for presenting heroic leaders of revolutionary pasts. And, as I described in Chapter 1, the guerrilla came to be represented as a saint, with an undertone of religious reverence central to the project of Cuban socialism. In this chapter, I argue that the sacrality of formal representations of leaders and the people encounters the formal apparatus of the cube and the grid, resulting in a totalizing rationality that incorporates the diverse expressions of a revolutionary ethos.
In early January 1966, guests from across the world arrived at the inaugural Tricontinental Conference amid bright neon lights stretching across the façade of the Habana Libre Hotel (Figure 5.4). The former Hilton hotel had experienced revolutionary changes during the previous decade, its façade now emblazoned with the logo of a globe and rifle, a surface for the branding of armed revolution and anti-colonial struggle. Drawing from the model of the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the 1961 Summit of Non-Aligned States in Belgrade, the conference was the first of its kind, seeking to forge political, intellectual and cultural connections between nation-states in Africa, Asia and Latin America. While the previous Bandung conference sought solidarity between 29 participating nations in the struggle for independence, the Non-Aligned movement aimed to form alliances outside the Cold-War era dominance of Washington DC and Moscow. The first Tricontinental Conference drew from both models, with Havana as a stage and a center for dialogue around Third World-ism. The image of the globe and the rifle showed a certain audacity in its open support of armed resistance and revolution, as Cuban came to be seen as a foe and a threat to officials in the United States.12

These events transpired in an era of high tensions, in which decolonial projects

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12 The following June the United States government, under the auspices of the U.S. Senate, released a report regarding the conference, highly critical of its intention. The report states that Havana was chosen as the “headquarters for worldwide subversion”, a “sanctuary” for communist propagation. It states: “There is overwhelming evidence that the machinery of the Cuban Government has been progressively organized over the years, to carry out its number one task – the export of Communist subversion”. *The Tricontinental Conference of African, Asian, and Latin American Peoples: A Staff Study*, 31.
and socialist endeavors were met with extreme violence. The state of Havana’s paranoia extended beyond the famous Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961. The Cuban Missile Crisis, or the October Crisis as it is referred to in Cuba, defined this era of intense negotiations and tension, as Cuba became further embroiled in the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States. While the scope of this dissertation does not allow me to discuss these key historical events at length – and indeed other scholars have done a more thorough job than I – these events show that Cuban sovereignty existed within a larger context of the global Cold War. Amid Cuba’s growing economic dependence on the Soviet Union, the Third World represented a new frontier that resisted antagonism from the U.S. government and acts of terrorism committed by the Cuban exile community. A visual culture of Third World solidarity emerged, drawing on visual cues from the U.S., the Soviet Union and elsewhere, with technologies and modes of representation that expressed the Third World modern.

The Tricontinental Conference of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin American took place from January 3-16, 1966, featuring representatives from some 77 countries and other territories such as Guadeloupe (France) and Puerto Rico (United States). The delegates from each country sat on stage, with portraits of revolutionaries lined up behind the participants (Figure 5.5). Major leaders and thinkers were present, such as Guyanese president Cheddi Jagan, Guinea-Bissauan and Cape Verdean writer Amílcar Cabral, and South Vietnam president
Nguyen Van Tien, who served as the Vice President of the conference, along with Ghanian leader John Kofi Tettegah and Venezuelan captain Pedro Medina Silva. While the Soviet Union’s was the largest delegation with 40 members, the conference ushered in a new era of collaboration among developing nations, amid the drama of the Cold War. The communist threat to the United States had courséd beneath the conference from the planning stage onwards, something highlighted by the 1965 kidnapping and presumed murder of Medhi Ben Barka, president of the Preparatory Committee, just two months prior to the conference. As the U.S. Senate Staff report explained, Barka had proposed Havana as a site that “would blend the two great currents of world revolution: That which was born in 1917 with the Russian Revolution, and that which represents the anti-imperialist and national liberation movements of today.”¹³ In a time of war, conflict and assassinations Cuba became a revolutionary front whose reverberations threatened U.S. empire in the face of Soviet communist expansion.

Paradigms of the Third World and the Tricontinental allowed Cuba to distinguish itself from its economic dependence on the Soviet Union. Cuba could instead serve as a model of revolution and alternative modernities, providing a space to ponder on decolonization in the face of imperialism. The backdrop of the Vietnam War was a central focus of the Tricontinental Conference, as Cuba became a bellwether of

resistance to U.S. imperialism and global political influence. In his discussion of the
meaning of the Third World, Roberto Fernández Retamar recalls Peter Weiss’ writing on
underdeveloped nations, claiming that in the “confrontation between the U.S. and
Vietnam, which is the essential frontier of our epoch, the developed country the United
States are the criminals and the underdeveloped nation is the admirable Vietnam.” For
Retamar, the figuration of the United States as an aggressor brings legitimacy to defined
oppositions such as Third and First World. His contemporary reading of geopolitical
divisions such as First and Third World nations is implied in the mythology of the
Cuban Revolution, as Retamar claims the José Martí is “one of the first men of this third
world”.

The infusion of a Third World identity into a visual semblance of cubanidad and
the proliferation of Cuban propaganda to a global audience is manifested through two
primary venues: the formation of OSPAAAL and the development of the intermedia
exhibition. The Tricontinental Conference resulted in the formation of OSPAAAL, or the
Organization for the Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which
drew from the Comisión de Orientación Revolucionaria (COR).

14 “Eso es lo que acaba de decir Peter Weiss: al rechazar él también las demonicaciones ‘tercer mundo’ y ‘países subdesarrollados’, Weiss se pregunta cómo podemos aceptar que en la confrontación Estados Unidos-Viet Nam, que es la frontera esencial de nuestra época, el país ‘desarrollado’ sean los criminales Estados Unidos y el país subdesarrollado sea el admirable Viet Nam”. Ensayo de Otro Mundo, 17-18.
15 Ibid., 20.
16 “El primer cartel cubano en abordar el tema de guerra de Viet Nam, se hizo bajo la influencia de esta tendencia estética, y que realizó el diseñador gráfico de la COR [Comisión de Orientación Revolucionaria], Jesús Forjans, con motivo de la Jornada de Solidaridad con Viet Nam del Sur, convocada por la Conferencia
tradition of printmaking that developed over the decade, OSPAAAL mass-produced colorful, artistic political posters calling for Third World solidarity. René Medero’s 1968-70 poster *Semana de solidaridad con Viet Nam* uses a simple direct design, with the text of “Saigon” repeated four times and composing of a gradient of flags, with the U.S. at the top and that of North Vietnam at the bottom (Figure 5.6). Towards the bottom is the typeface commonly seen on all OSPAAAL posters: the OSPAAAL logo, directly borrowed from the Tricontinental Conference, and a title in Arabic, French, English, and Spanish – in this case, “International Week of Solidarity With Vietnam (March 13-19)”. The posters were always a call for solidarity, using abstract images and texts that formed powerful political statements. Asela Pérez’s 1970 poster *Jornada Internacional de Solaridad con America Latina* combines the figure of a hand clasping a rifle with the geography of South America (Figure 5.7). In vibrant tropical hues, the simplicity of the image provides its dynamic force. Offset lithographic printing allowed the mass production of these evocative, popular images.

Secondly, the development of the exhibition space as an intermedia spectacle was a key venue for redefining cubanidad, one that highlighted Cuban ingenuity and a call for the Third World solidarity. Later in 1966, the Casa de las Américas hosted the Tricontinental del 12 al 19 marzo de 1966”. Dates here seem to be incorrect, as the conference took place in January, but here Jorge R. Bermúdez remarks on how the formation of OSPAAAL and its primary posters were specifically attuned to the U.S.-Vietnam conflict. *La Imagen Constante*, 179.

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First Exhibition of Cuban Culture at Pabellón Cuba, a collaborative project among writers, artists and designers. Unlike previous cultural displays at museums during the late Republican era (1950s), which had relied on traditional ethnographic displays of Cuban society, this exhibition used new formalities to depict Cuban culture. Graphic cubes dominated the Pabellón, as they floated along and with the pilotis of the front and back pavilions (Figure 5.8). Textual and graphic elements were immediately visible, as was the extensive use of black, white, and red. The back pavilion stretched into a world of cubes, with a box with a red dot rising above the others (Figure 5.9). One box below it stated: “Fantasy is order, imagine the activity of the revolutionary man”. The massive cubes oriented the viewer to displays on architecture, folklore, and other aspects of Cuban culture. The cubes were three dimensional surfaces to display images, informative texts, and cultural objects. In the above figure, an Afro-diasporic cosmogram appeared in white over the black surface of the cube. The communicative means of the graphic was an ideal stage to present new tropes of cubanidad.

The cube served again as a curatorial and architectonic mechanism of representation in the Cuba pavilion at the 1967 World Expo in Montreal, Quebec. Featured on the August 1967 cover of Cuba magazine, the building took the form of the cube and extended it into geometric corridors, into parallelepiped forms (Figure 5.10). Designed by two architects of Italian descent (Sergio Baroni and Vittorio Garrati of the National Arts Schools), the building comprised of rectangular corridors made up of
prefabricated aluminum, along with large, darkened round plastic windows. The innovative material created an economic solution for a financially strapped Cuba, while providing a futuristic skin (Figure 5.11). Roberto Segre comments:

In this case architecture is not conceived merely as the configuration of space, but about the application of graphic elements afterwards, to establish a communicative dialogue with visitors. The concept of integration between abstract form and pictorial images is applied brilliantly throughout the pavilion: in the chromatic elements contrasting the aluminum’s white surfaces, in the gigantic typography and the movie screens inserted into the ends of the parallelepipeds, establishing communication at all levels of spatial relation between the visitors and the pavilion, representing the communicative intensity of the urban environment, of the cities of Cuba.17

He elaborates that the exhibition provided a “chromatic interaction between exterior and interior space”.18 Here we see a cubanidad reconstructed through new technologies of representation, a spectacle of the technologies of propaganda and an embrace of new dimensionalities in the realm of presentation and construction.

The sleekness of economic, rational form was matched to an intermedia spectacle designed to capture a revolutionary yet pragmatic sentiment. The interior of the exhibition hall featured corridors befitting of the parallelepiped forms and serving as

17 “La arquitectura no es aquí concebida como pura configuración del espacio, sobre cual luego se aplicarán los elementos gráficos internos, para establecer el diálogo comunicativo con los visitantes. El concepto de integración visual entre forma abstracta e imágenes pictóricas ha sido aplicada brillamente en el pabellón: los elementos cromáticos contrastan con las blancas superficies de aluminio, la gigantesca tipografía y las pantallas cinematográficas colocadas en los extremos de los paralelepípedos, establecen la comunicación en todos los niveles de relación escalar entre los visitantes y el pabellón, representando la intensidad comunicativa del ámbito urbano, de las ciudades de Cuba”. Diez Años de Arquitectura en Cuba Revolucionaria, 171.
18 Ibid., 171.
exploratory spaces for considering the recent history of Cuba and the role of revolution in the Third World. In one interior photograph, taken by Mark Kauffman for *LIFE* magazine, a red light floods the space, as a wall of cubic and parallelepiped forms emerges with photographic reproductions and texts (Figure 5.12). A famous photo of Fidel Castro arriving triumphantly into Havana with Camilo Cienfuegos emerged diagonally from a grid of images. Some surfaces of the gridded, dimensional wall bore simple texts, such as one repeating “FREEDOM” twice. The large round window gives the space a futuristic, outerspace-like quality befitting to the broader objectives of the World Expo. The ciudad gráfica, or the dominance of graphic media throughout the city, was transposed to a transportable exhibition space. The gallery was a utopic vessel to transport the revolutionary zeal of a forward, ambient propaganda.

A multi-page spread in the magazine *Cuba* featured essays and photographs on Cuba’s participation in the World Expo, as though Cuba symbolized the might of a modern day David against a dominating, capitalistic Goliath. In an interview, the director of the pavilion project, José Fernández de Cossío, proclaimed that the pavilion “plastically expresses a conception of the revolutionary in the realm of culture”.

The realm of culture not only signified the communicative means of the visual, with the journal highlighting a “Fiesta Cubana”, a Cuban style carnival transformed by the

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graphic costumes of female performers – white dresses with thick black stripes and in some cases red circles. The photo spread was a showcase for the role of performance within these geometrically designed places – how human engagement and participation were integral to its futuristic dimensionality (Figure 5.13). The pavilion featured a restaurant, cinematic theaters, and graphic integration that extended from the walls to the ceilings. It provided an all-encompassing experience of space at a graphic and planar level. The concrete ambitions of the 1963 Pabellón Cuba was reconfigured into new forms of technology and representation, as architecture reflected advancements made within the realm of communication design.

The images presented at Cuba’s 1967 pavilion expressed ideas of globality – of Cuba’s place in the world – to express a Third World revolutionary aesthetic within the practices of contemporary cultural exhibitions. The ideas that were generated by these utopic and immersive visual displays translated to the role of graphic arts in Cuban diplomacy, as seen in the many congresses Havana hosted in the 1960s. The Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS) held its first conference that same summer, in early August. The OLAS conference drew upon the model of the Tricontinental Congress, politicizing Cuba’s revolutionary zeal as a call for guerrilla warfare throughout Latin America. Yet that armed revolution need not share the Leninist-Marxist ideology guiding the Cuban government at the time. As Edward González writes, the organizers of the OLAS conference “proclaimed that the revolution
would be made with or without the Communist party and that the status of revolutionary vanguard would be assigned to *any* group that took armed struggle. And it established a permanent OLAS executive committee, with its seat in Havana, to coordinate and extend support to the guerrilla movements – the intent was subversive to Moscow’s interests and politics in Latin America”.

Fidel Castro’s closing speech on August 11th touched on the role of the vanguard, guided by Che Guevara’s theories of revolution and guerrilla warfare, as dominating Cuba’s global relations, a deviance from the social realism and “manifestos” of a Soviet-proposed Marxism. This message was of course attached to the graphic: as Castro spoke, a massive, mural-like graphic banner unfurled, with the figure of Che Guevara at the center (Figure 5.14). Che himself was not in attendance; he was in Bolivia on what would be his final mission. The calamitous events of 1967, in particular the assassination of Che that October, brought a sea of change in Cuba’s visual culture. The photographic bust of the heroic leader was transformed into an iconic image of anti-imperialist martyrdom. Yet Che had been an icon before his assassination, as his image had long symbolized global armed revolution.

While the OLAS conference promoted revolutionary ideals, made tangible in Cuba’s economic and military support of guerrilla warfare abroad, those ideals became

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20 “Relationship with the Soviet Union,” 92.
21 In his elaborate talk, Castro is highly critical of the U.S. but sees a vanguard in its oppressed populations. Fidel argues that the vanguard is expressed in guerrilla warfare, claiming that “manifestos” often contain empty words not emblematic of the concrete reality, which can not be overcome by manifestos but by a violent rebellion against the bourgeoisie. Trans. by LANIC, Accessed March 1, 2015, http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1967/19670811.html.
fodder for intellectual debate by the next major international congress in Havana, the Cultural Congress of 1968. The official “Calling of Havana”, a collectively written manifesto that stated the ambitions of the varied intellectuals visiting from some 70 nations, asserted that “the imperative duty of intellectuals... [is] to support the struggle for national liberation, social emancipation and cultural decolonization of all peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the struggle of anti-imperialism...” The message of the Tricontinental Conference two years prior reverberated in the discussion of all participants. In many ways, however, the 1968 Cultural Congress also recalled Fidel Castro’s earlier 1961 speech “Words to the Intellectuals”, transferring the concerns of the revolutionary state to a more global platform, amid the Cold War and mass decolonization. The question was no longer what the role of intellectuals would be in the existing socialist state, but also in the greater global movement: creating socialist states and a Third World alliance.

In considering the role of intellectuals and culture at the frontier of revolution, the official exhibition of the congress – Del Tercer Mundo – visualized new ways of thinking and being. The exhibition was a collaboration between many parties, including designers Enrique Fuentes (curator of the Pabellón’s inaugural exhibition), writer Guillermo Rodríguez Rivera, and director of the exhibition project, a young art historian and filmmaker named Rebeca Chávez (who would later work extensively with

filmmaker Santiago Alvarez and whose scholarly interests explored the intersection of art and journalism). With a small, simple, pamphlet-like catalogue, the magic of the exhibition Del Tercer Mundo resided in the mythological aspirations of its display.

Unlike more conventional eye-level textual displays, the Del Tercer Mundo exhibition relied entirely on large superimposed graphics that created immersive experiences of the Third World and its sentiments. Visitors were greeted with a cubic grid of photographic images (Figure 5.15). The entryway featured a large-scale recreation of Michelangelo’s famous 16th century fresco, The Creation of Adam from the Sistine Chapel. The work mythologizes the creation of humanity, serving as a frontispiece amidst a plethora of images concerning the Third World images.

In many ways, Del Tercer Mundo built upon previous exhibitions in the Pabellón Cuba, as well as the technological spectacle of the World Expo from the previous year. It provided a visual spectacle more subdued in tone, in the sense that the images were spread more openly throughout the exhibition space. Cubic scaffolding transformed the exhibition space into a massive grid network, and this scaffolding reflected the exhibition’s cube-based logo while complementing the pavilion’s palatial spatiality. Images floated throughout the scaffolding, indicative of the multidimensionality of the cube rather than the flatness of the plane or surface of the grid. At the same time, the exhibition was incredibly immersive, implicating the viewer in the call for protest. At one point viewers encountered the repeating cut-out photograph of a near life-size man
protesting while holding a sign stating “La lucha será a muerte”, or “Will fight to the death”. The grid acted as a dominating and orienting form via signs and displays throughout the exhibition (such as in the repeating image of Che); it also represented a new dimensionality for the Third World, where optically dynamic geometric forms provided a means of revolutionary expression.

The display of rectilinear and three-dimensional rational forms was matched by other dynamic, immersive forms. One image from the magazine Cuba shows a political summit at a round table complemented by silhouettes of human figures and walls of text recalling protest signs (Figure 5.16). The juxtaposition resembles the eye of a hurricane, formally recalling the swirl at the front of the First Exhibition of Cuban Culture as well as the swirl determining the grid of the Mural Cuba Colectiva. The swirl symbolizes the ongoing action of revolution, a sense of perpetual motion into new dimensions and temporalities. Its multidimensionality, like the cube’s, is symbolic of reality. The form of the cube itself advertised the activities of the Congreso Cultural de la Habana. The cover of the January 1966 issue of Cuba featured a cube-based advertisement for the Congress – the top side of the cube featuring a globe, the right side the official title of the Congress, and on the left the figure of the gun from the Tricontinental Conference is replaced with the standing tips of pens, a pencil and a brush (Figure 5.17). The call for revolution in the intellectual forum is presented as a scholarly engagement with a multidimensional reality, with totality implied in the form
of the cube, and the cube serving as a mechanism for expressing revolutionary ideals. The exhibition Del Tercer Mundo presented new visual horizons, propagating images of struggle and solidarity as Cuba solidified its role as a leader in Third World politics.

**Salon de Mai**

In 1966 the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes invited artist Wifredo Lam for a retrospective exhibition of his oil paintings, many of which had been confiscated from private collections and nationalized shortly following the Cuban Revolution. Lam’s ambiguous relationship with the Cuban Revolution is evinced, to some extent, by his decision to live in exile while occasionally returning to Cuba to promote the ascendancy of socialism in the island. In 1959 Lam dedicated his painting *La Sierra Maestra*, named after the mountain range where the Cuban Revolution began, to Fidel Castro. Upon returning for his retrospective at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Lam contributed another painting commissioned for the Presidential Palace. Titled *El Tercer Mundo* (*The Third World*), the massive painting aesthetically expressed the dynamism and spirit of the Revolution (Figure 5.18). *El Tercer Mundo* offers a sharp contrast to Lam’s 1942 masterpiece *La Jungla*, which features five anthropomorphized figures emerging from,

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and yet embedded within, their vibrant sugar cane environment. Instead, the figures of El Tercer Mundo soar across a dark, muddy background. The mysterious characters, inspired from the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería, seem defiant, despite being disjointed. The chaotic composition is created by figures that use their own limbs and bodies to hold one another aloft; there is a collective effort among the entities to maintain the painting’s aesthetic rhythm. While Lam’s homage to the Cuban Revolution contains a somber tone – perhaps an analogy to the economic hardships experienced by the new regime – the chaotic composition of figures dance across the canvas united provides a sense of cohesion and exhilaration.

Like its predecessor Sierra Maestra, the painting El Tercer Mundo expresses the spirit of the Cuban Revolution through painting. Unlike many of its socialist counterparts, Cuba officially supported modernism and abstraction, drawing from previous generations of artists to create a progressive narrative regarding the development of fine arts of Cuba into the Revolution. Lam was the most prominent modern artist from Cuba, and is better identified with the European avant-garde than the Cuban Vanguardia based in Havana from the 1920s into the 1950s. In the 1960s, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes began exhibiting art of the Vanguardia throughout the museum’s newly formed permanent gallery, with Lam recognized as the seminal figure

24 See Chapter 2. While several scholars have argued that Lam was directly influenced by Picasso’s Les Desmoiselles d’Avignon, the two paintings have never been considered together in exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. See John Yau, “Please Wait by the Cloakroom,” Arts Magazine (December 1988), 58.
in Cuban modern art. He became the nexus for transatlantic and intellectual exchanges and, through him, the Cuban government was able to extend its image as a socialist satellite that embraced abstraction and new trends in art.

*El Tercer Mundo* made its premier in Havana in January 1966 for the retrospective exhibition *Lam, óleos y aguafuertes*, an exhibition at the Palacio de Bellas Artes that coincided with the Tricontinental Conference. The painting briefly returned to Paris for the 22nd Salon de Mai exhibition, before becoming part of the museum’s permanent collection. Founded in 1943, the Salon de Mai was a group of established artists largely based in Paris and concerned with the politics of post-World War II Europe, as evidenced in their anti-fascist ethos. After its first annual exhibition organized in 1945 by art critic and historian Gaston Diehl, the Salon de Mai went on to display new currents in contemporary art as well as modern art from the previous generation. As an established artist in the post-World War II Parisian art scene and a member of the Salon de Mai, Lam advocated for and later organized the Salon de Mai’s exhibition in Cuba. After meeting with Castro in 1966, Lam was given a green light, with the Cuban government offering to host a collective of 39 artists from France.25 Unlike Pabellón

25 While I was unable to find extensive documentation on the costs of bringing all the artists from France – a touchy subject in a Cuba encountering economic hardship – the government’s investment is made clear in the manner in which these artists were hosted, many staying at the Hotel Habana Libre. In her thesis on the Salon de Mai in Havana Agnes de Poortere interviews one of the artist participants: “Dans un entretien, Bernard Rancillac évoque leur arrivée à l’aéroport avec la fanfare, les voitures américaines avec chauffeur en gants blancs mises à leur disposition, l’Hôtel National, palace de la Havane et la débauche de nourriture. ‘...J’imagine que pas mal de Cubains protestaient devant le faste et le luxe avec lesquels nous étion reçus, mais cela se passé souvent ainsi dans les voyages officiels organizes par les pays communists’. “Entretien
Cuba’s inaugural exhibition, which contained an overtly nationalistic message, the Salon de Mai became an opportunity for Cuba to emphasize its cosmopolitanism and importance on the international stage.

While previous Salon de Mai exhibitions had traveled to other politically contentious countries, such as Vietnam and Yugoslavia, the Salon de Mai’s first appearance in the Americas was the first to incorporate a collective art happening such as the *Mural Cuba Colectiva*. Cuba’s proclamation of anti-imperialist policy and its pivotal role on the international political stage at the height of the Cold War gave it a certain caché among the artistic and intellectual left, who often romanticized the Cuban Revolution and its leaders. This is most apparent in the writing of Jean-Paul Sartre, who visited the island with Simone de Beauvoir in 1961 as guests of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Sartre’s account, titled *Sartre on Cuba*, published in English in 1961, provides an idealistic account of the Cuban Revolution, in which the protagonists of the Revolution are essentially good-willed arbiters of a new society. Sartre writes: “the revolution is inventing its architecture, which will be beautiful; it is raising its own cities out of soil. Meanwhile, it fights Americanization by opposing to it the colonial heritage”.

Pabellón Cuba was the obvious site for hosting the Salon de Mai in Havana, 

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*Sartre on Cuba*, 8.
as it was an idealistic monument to Cuba’s architectural modernism, a modernism adapted to the values of collectivism and technological innovation.

Unlike previous exhibitions at Pabellón Cuba that filled the expanse of its back portico with intermedia installations, the Salon de Mai was a more traditional exhibition requiring the construction of temporary gallery walls within the back pavilion. Less focused on utopic, futuristic approaches to exhibition design in promotion of the Cuban Revolution, the Salon de Mai exhibition instead demonstrated the Cuban government’s embrace and appreciation of modern art. The selection of major modern artists such as Miró and Picasso, whose paintings were exhibited alongside the work of contemporary French and Cuban artists, showed Cuba’s appreciation of European modern art. It also demonstrated that artists of the socialist island remained in vogue with current trends of the West, rather than embracing the social realism promoted by the Soviet state. Günter Schütz writes: “It is important to note that in addition to classic modernism, all the significant currents of contemporary art were represented, Surrealism as much as New Figuration, Lettrism, Situationists such as the COBRA group, Neo-Realists and Pop Art, Op Art and Action Painting – only Socialist Realism was not represented. More than 200,000 Cubans visited the exhibition.”27 The broad appeal of the exhibition, and the Cuban governments serious investment in the exhibition, highlight the role modern art played in the Cuban imaginary.

27 Cuba Art and History 1868 to Present, 279.
The *Mural Cuba Colectiva* was the ideal stage where artists attempted to express revolution and solidarity, invoking the spirit of the era in a communal act of creation. The *Mural Cuba Colectiva* was thought to express the “Revolutionary”, an anti-imperialist message that was both fiercely nationalist but also communualistic and international in orientation. Raúl Roa, Minister of External Relations for the Cuban government, described the exhibition as containing “the universal expression of the revolution in painting” in the exhibition’s newspaper catalogue. Much like the display of the back pavilion in the Pabellón’s inaugural exhibition *History and Architecture of Cuba*, the *Mural Cuba Colectiva* provided a teleological terminus for the narrative of modernity expressed in the Salon de Mai’s exhibition. In the case of the mural, however, the aesthetic was hodge-podge, with individuals and small collectives of artists each claiming a small portioning of the canvas. Hence what was most important in its creation was the production itself, rather than the unknowable final product. Nonetheless the center swirl of the grid redefines the classical model of the grid, and visually recalls the infamous and never built *The Monument to the Third International* by Vladimir Tatlin.

On the night of July 17, 1967, nearly one hundred artists began working on the fifty-five square foot mural. The spectacle lasted until the following morning. Günter Schütz writes: “The production of the group painting was a big celebration that went on

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28 “[Es] la expression universal de la revolúcion en la pintura”. Personal translation, quoted in “Palabras de Apertura del Salon de Mayo,” *Salon de Mayo* (Granma: July 1967).
through the night well into the early morning. There was rum and Cuban music, and
the dancers of the famed Tropicana cabaret were largely responsible for the high spirits
of the Cubans who thronged in the streets in the thousands to watch the show." The
front porch of the Pabellón Cuba opened up towards a transformed La Rampa that
resembled Havana at the height of Carnaval (Figure 5.19). The street was closed for
revelry and celebration, as cabaret performers from the famed Tropicana were joined by
Afro-Cuban dancers recalling the carnival tradition. The artists took turns painting from
the scaffolding onto the multi-piece canvas, highly visible from the street. Although in
some ways the Salon de Mai was a more traditional exhibition than others at the
Pabellón, the highlight of the exhibition was the very public creation of the Mural Cuba
Colectiva. The Pabellón Cuba literally became a stage to the street, where the public
could witness the Revolutionary aesthetic being painted live, in action.

At the center of the Mural Cuba Colectiva is a round painting by Lam (Figure
5.20). The painting contains three shields, one red, one blue, and one transparent
displaying the background color. Reminiscent of the colors of the Cuban flag, the
diamond edged rhomboid shapes stand in front of a muddy background similar to that
of El Tercer Mundo. Two small heads of the Santería deity Eleggua peek out from
rhomboid shapes as horizontal axes cutting across like sharp knives. Lam’s image
appears simple and direct. The shield-like rhomboid shapes can represent patrimony,

29 Cuba Art and History 1868 to Present, 278.
the desire to defend Cuba’s sovereignty. Lowery Stokes Sims has traced various interpretations of Lam’s frequent use of a trio of rhomboid shapes, especially typical of Lam’s oeuvre of the 1950s, most prominently in his 1950 painting Umbral [Seuil]. Sims cites art historian Robert Farris Thompson’s study of Abakua visual culture in her analysis of the painting, writing that the “three large elongated rhomboid figures would also guard the point of entry/exit between realms of existence”. This reading of the formal quality of rhomboid shapes in West African religious traditions – expressed in Cuba’s Abakua religion – resonates with the role of the Eleggua, the deity whom Santería worshippers believe stands at the crossroads the material realm into the spiritual. Lam’s invocation of Afro-Cuban traditions in the Mural Cuba Colectiva is defiant and transformative in that its forms and figures symbolize a spiritual crossroads. Like a graphic logo in the center of the massive mural, Lam uses abstraction to express a “Revolutionary” sentiment. Such an act is a spiritual defense of Cuba’s African heritage, reaching well beyond the materialist emphasis of Marxist ideology.

Lam’s central round panel also evokes a formalist aesthetic, invoking contemporary developments in Abstract Expressionism, which Lam closely followed. Lam’s formal compositions of the 1960s contain an incredible energy, with figures and lines stretching across canvases. These dynamic compositions are apparent in Lam’s other contributions to the Salon de Mai, such as the promotional poster for the previous

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30 Wifredo Lam and the International Avante-Garde, 58.
Salon de Mai in Paris and the cover of the newspaper catalogue for the Havana Salon de Mai. The promotional poster features a depiction of Eleggua-like and horse-like figures cutting crossing each other at dynamic diagonal angles, forming an irregular ‘X’ (Figure 5.21). Made for the previous Salon de Mai from the same year in Paris, this image was a precursor to the imagery of the summer’s upcoming endeavors.

In the catalogue for the Salon de Mai in Cuba, the government-controlled newspaper Granma produced a catalogue with a collection of writings and illustrations by artists and intellectuals from Cuba and abroad (Figure 5.22). The catalogue reflected the sentiments of the artistic left of the 1960s, with a particular focus on their anti-imperialist ethos. The didactic nature of the catalogue as a whole is reflected in the two quotations that make up the bottom of the front cover. Boxed in at the left is a fairly straightforward quotation by Fidel Castro, who comments on the recent 26th of July holiday and the relation between artists in Europe and the revolutionary fervor in Cuba. Castro’s very pointed political statement, intended for a Cuban audience, is paired with a more general statement by Pablo Picasso comparing art to warfare: “No, the artist does not paint to decorate rooms. Art is an instrument of War, of attack and defense against the enemy. The enemy, as I have said on several occasions, is the man motivated by self-interest and profit in his exploitation of others”.  

\[31\] Translated by author. The full quotation states: “¿Qué creen ustedes que es un artista? ¿Alguien que solo tiene sus ojos si es un pintor sus oídos si es un músico, una lira en cualquier nivel de su corazón si es un poeta o, aun si es un boxeador, solo sus músculos? Al contrario, es al mismo tiempo un ser político,
featuring the signature of all the participating artists. Swaths of red, black and yellow take up the center, while anthropomorphic figures stretch between the signatures and dominate the composition. The use of red and black recalls the official flag for the 26th of July Movement – colors often associated with the Cuban Revolution and guerrilla warfare. As a whole, the catalogue connects utopic ideals regarding the role of art in society to the specific contexts of the Cuban Revolution.

The mural conveys the connections between universal expressions of resistance and anti-imperialism, and that of a nationalist presentation of cubanidad. While the various paintings in the mural reflect diverse aesthetics, from a COBRA-like primitivism to abstraction and painted poetry, many rely on imagery drawn from the Cuban Vanguardia. One example is the panel by Raúl Martínez, who came to prominence in the 1960s and became the iconic painter and graphic artist of the Revolution in the following decade. In a photograph of Martínez painting his portion of the mural, he kneels over the iconic Alberto Korda photograph of Che Guevara, basing his image of the revolutionary leader on what would become one of the 20th century’s most recognizable images (Figure 5.23). Martínez’s painting takes the stern, defiant image of

constantemente atento a los sucesos desgarradores, atroces o felices, ante los que recojona de todas las maneras. ¿Cómo sería posible no interesarse en los demás y, por virtud de una indiferencia de marfil, desasirse de la vida que tan copiosamente nos procuran? No, no se hace pintura para decorar habitaciones. Es un instrumento de Guerra, de ataque y defensa frente al enemigo. El enemigo, como lo he declarado en diversas ocasiones, es el hombre que explota a sus semejantes movido por el interés egoísta y el lucro.” Salón De Mayo, Pabellón Cuba, La Habana, 30 De Julio De 1967, front cover.
Che and transforms it through an engaging pop aesthetic. Standing in front of three microphones, Che appears in a scenario commonly seen throughout Cuban media. The painting captures a romantic notion of Che as a fierce, approachable orator, with the viewer becoming his audience.

His painting for the *Mural Cuba Colectiva* resembles Martínez’s other paintings of Cuban leaders, such as those of national hero José Martí. The Salon de Mai exhibition also included his painting *Six Portraits of José Martí* (c. 1967), a grid embedded with six colorful, somewhat repetitive images of the leader. Agnes de Poorteere comments on Martínez’s playing between pop art and propaganda, commenting that his painting for the mural “has the same firmness of line [as his Martí portraits], providing a synthetic image that strays from the thinking of the propaganda poster”. The placement of the microphones in his panel for the *Mural Cuba Colectiva* resembles the grid of his grander paintings, providing a subversive effect to otherwise heroic portrayals.

As a formal exhibition of painting and sculpture, the Salón de Mai was transformed by the painting of the *Mural Cuba Colectiva* as well as its publicity, using the propagandistic means and communicative spectacle of exhibitions such as *Del Tercer Mundo*. Martínez was one of several artists who drew inspiration from contemporary art trends abroad, and he took the communal spirit of a project such as the *Mural Cuba*...
Colectiva to a new artistic means. His work defined a new cubanidad in the fine arts, where the projection of a Third World and global modernity would claim center stage.

¡Cubani-Pop!

Raúl Martínez’s use of a global pop aesthetic reveals two notable, seemingly contradictory trends in Cuban painting: that of the influence of mass visual media as a form of propaganda by the Cuban state and its varied cultural institutions, and the continuing influence from the United States amid growing tensions and an economic blockade or embargo against Cuba. Many Cuban artists began to engage in printmaking and mass media, with Raúl Martínez leaving the most indelible mark on the 1960s. As David Craven wrote: “The Cuban variation of Pop Art developed by Raúl Martínez and others was built on the perceptually sophisticated aspect of [Andy] Warhol’s work – including a measured antiauthoritarian tendency to view the ‘heroic’ in nonhierarchical terms”. Craven explains that the work of Cuban pop does not contain the ideological cynicism, or the insipid embrace and spectacle of commodified form and popular imagery, evident in the work of Warhol and U.S. pop, nor does it contain the austerity of social realism. Rather, it decentralizes the notion of power evident in these dominant

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trends in art, or perhaps still contains the aura that Walter Benjamin discusses as lacking in mechanically reproduced works of art.\textsuperscript{34}

Craven argues that Cuban pop functions as a sophisticated form of communication, rather than as an object of desire – a key consideration in thinking about the role of an artist outside the traditional art markets of capitalism. The tropicality in Cuban pop, however, symbolizes desire. Vibrant hues and culturally specific themes and subjects disassociate desire from consumerism and the commodity, with which it is so often associated in capitalist contexts. In Cuba, desire is instead imagined in the portrayal of male leaders and in claims of solidarity and liberation. In this section, I examine the impact of practices of media or propaganda on the work of visual artists, particularly in the realm of painting. Cuban pop art formally presents a revolutionary ethos, conjuring organizational forms of the state and media in its romantic portrayals of revolutionary leaders or ideals. These juxtapositions can be direct, effective forms of communication, but also subversive by drawing attention to the way media (e.g. television screens, neon lights, photographs and posters) dominate the politics of the island.

U.S. influences and international trends in painting shaped Raúl Martínez’s early years as an artist. In 1951, at the age of 23, he spent a year at the Art Institute of Chicago,
which left an indelible mark on the artist. He later became a prominent member of Los Once, a collective of Cuban artists engaging with abstract expressionism and geometric abstraction, often outside the dominating fixtures of cubanidad. The Abstract Expressionism of Martínez’s early work was transformed by the 1960s, while he continued to experiment with avant-garde artistic trends. For example, before committing to his popular series of portraits, Martínez experimented with collage-like mixed media pieces reminiscent of the work of U.S. artist Robert Rauschenberg. His 1964 mixed-media painting 26 de julio uses a variety of found objects to construct a composition commemorating the attacks on Moncada, an important precursor to the Cuban revolution (Figure 5.24). Most legible is the image of Fidel Castro towards the center left, in which he appears engaged in the act of speaking with a placard identifying him as Dr. Fidel Castro. The number 26 is painted broadly and aggressively in white, and again in red, though more subtly. Though the work resembles the mixed-media collages of Rauschenberg (i.e., a mélange of images and painterly expressionism), it shows Martínez’s growing engagement with representations of leadership and the use of text in art.

Martínez’s experimentation with different artistic styles and his evolution throughout the 1960s show his concerns with portraying and engaging with his environs – of working through a mythology of the revolutionary. In his memoirs the artist writes:

The conversations and polemics on art and social reality were essential for my formation as an artist. The helped me define concepts and dispel
doubts. I became conscientious about the problems that shifted with my artistic duties and that affected and influenced the world in which I lived. This brought me, not only in seeing the people, but also the houses. During that time, the best-trained creators possessed an expressive, constant, and stable language. I only managed to articulate isolated words and too often followed tangents. I needed to find the language with which I could form complete and coherent discourses.\(^3\)

Martínez articulates his desire to better communicate through art, and refers to his formation as an artist experimenting with various trends in painting. He writes of his engagement with debates on social reality and art, a polemic which helped him find his voice as the quintessential purveyor of the revolutionary subject in the visual arts. By 1965, his grid-based portraits had already gained renown, not only for portraying revolutionary heroes, as in his 1967 painting, 15 repeticiones de Martí (see Figure 1.5), but also for portraying everyday Cubans.

Martínez’s 1965 painting Todos Somos Hijos de la Patria, for example, also features 15 portraits in a 5x3 grid format, but presents the everyday “new man” in 15 different guises (Figure 5.25). The format, with text incorporated into the image, recalls the vallas, or painted billboards, that were common throughout the Cuban countryside. None of the portraits are individualized, all appear male

\(^{35}\) “Para mi formación fueron esenciales las conversaciones o las polémicas relativas al arte y la realidad social. Me ayudaron a definir conceptos y aclarar dudas. Tomé conciencia de los problemas que alternaban con mi quehacer artístico y que afectaban o influían en el mundo en que vivía. Esto me llevó, no solo a ver el pueblo, sino también a conocer las casas. En aquellos momentos los creadores más formados poseían un lenguaje expresivo consistente y estable. Yo solamente lograba articular palabras aisladas y tomaba por demasiados caminos con frecuencia. Necesitaba encontrar el verbo con el cual poder formar oraciones completas y coherentes”. Translated by Lorien Olive. Yo Pueblo, 278.
(with the bottom left portrait being the only possible exception) and all have a similar Caucasian or mestizo appearance. This suggests that the notion of being a “revolutionary” still meant conforming to race- and gender-based norms of respectability, despite advancements on both fronts by the Cuban revolution.

Perhaps Martínez is being intentionally subversive and ironic, as the title of the text appears on the lower portion of the painting – “We are all children of the Fatherland” – while the “all” is represented by a strict demographic that itself recalls the leaders of the Cuban revolution.36

Martínez’s almost cartoonish and engaging portraits had become his signature by the close of the decade, synonymous with Cuban pop. During this same period, Martínez also started making mass-produced works such as posters and works for publications. Among the most popular is his poster for the Humberto Solas film Lucía (Figure 5.26). The black-and-white drama tells the story of three women named Lucía each living in a different era – that of the wars for independence in the 1890s, in the 1930s during the first revolution, and in the 1960s.37 Martínez’s poster presents the three generations of women in a vivid, colorful format, nearly indistinguishable from one another with the

36 While Martínez became an iconic in his portrayal of a revolutionary aesthetic, his stature within the Cuban art scene did come with a sense of ambivalence given his homosexuality. However, his hidden identity was not interrogated given his prominence as an artist of the revolution, though such an identity can be read to complicate his popular works regarding national identity. Raúl Martínez, Yo Público, 283.
37 Lucía, directed by Humberto Solas (1968; Brighton: Mr Bongo Films, 2010), DVD.
exception of their period hats and their orange, pink, or brown skin. The star to the lower right presents the ubiquitous symbol of the republic, while the flowers and colorful tones draw the viewer in and evoke the heroines’ femininity. Each Lucía stares intently at the viewer, in a contemplative, fierce countenance. The poster resembles a cover Martínez completed for *Cuba* magazine on the role of youth in the revolution, which proclaimed Cuba’s special province Isla de la Juventud, formerly Isla de Pinos, as the “youngest island in the world” ([Figure 5.27](#)). In that work, Martínez created a youthful grid, a true diversity of figures ranging in complexion and demeanor. The birds and a boat in the lower band of the 4x3 grid project playfulness, as a central square in the middle band contains text proclaiming “me you him her”. This work is emblematic of the participatory role of revolution, of its hopes for a new generation trained in “vanguardist” thought.

Pop art in Cuba often communicated specific ideals in a context where artistic style was not wholly associated with the politics of a given work. The specter of cubanidad, however, remained ever present as a nationalist ideological undercurrent. As Gerardo Mosquera writes: “On a larger scale, pop art, hyperrealism, the movement called New Figuration, and other trends originating

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38 The Isla de la Juventud is a special province in Cuba located on a prominent island south of the nation. The island was re-imagined as a educational powerhouse, as the island sought to make the island a significant example of its educational ideals, particularly as a university island for the Third World.
from developed capitalist countries were ‘nationalized’ during the revolutionary period, in order for such works to function within our social consciousness. At the same time, given the creative nature of this ‘nationalization’, such expressions have extended their aesthetic possibilities.” Mosquera remarks on how the government’s expectations of the artist to further the nationalist agenda (for everything to be “within the Revolution”) still allowed for new aesthetic possibilities, as way clear in the state-encouraged relationship between propaganda and art. As Martínez began to do more commercial work – for example, mass produced pieces advertising movies and communist ideals – his painting took a new form, combining aspects of Cuban pop with the Cuban vanguardist tradition and the growing role of the media arts in his milieu.

While this chapter focuses on this particular trend, it should be noted that notable exceptions. For example, Antonia Eirez, another artist from the Los Once generation, produced works largely critical of the new regime. Her large scale 1968 painting *A Tribute for Democratic Peace* possesses a more somber, almost horrifying tone, depicting an empty podium with five microphones (Figure 5.28). The viewer becomes the vacant orator, as they face a background composed of a sea of faceless, dark gray and white bodies. Originally intended as an

39 “En mayor escala, el arte pop, el hiperrealismo, la llamada nueva figuración y otras tendencias originadas en los países capitalistas desarrollados han sido ‘nacionalizadas’ durante la etapa revolucionaria para ponerlas en función de nuestra conciencia social. A la vez, como se trata de una ‘nacionalización’ creadora, estas expresiones han visto alargadas sus posibilidades estéticas.” In *Exploraciones en la Plástica Cubana*, 358.
installation with two lawn chairs in front of the large painting, this piece
summons a different aspect of the participatory role of the revolutionary citizen.

In many ways, the dark and somber works of Eirez run counter to the
bright, vivid proclamations that have come to define the era. Propaganda as a
concept was embraced and arguably humanized by the government, which
called for Third World solidarity and armed warfare in their visual campaigns.

International trends in pop art had a huge impact on graphic design in Cuba,
among designers and artists working in publishing. Cuban artist Umberto Peña,
for example, worked as a design editor for the Casa de las Américas journal,
imbuing the literary and cultural publication with inventive and engaging art.

His cover for the January-February 1968 edition, an issue dedicated to the fallen
Che Guevara, references trends in pop and op art (Figure 5.29). The front cover
features the three dimensionally drafted barrel of a gun protruding from the
upper right, an axonometric projection in bright vivid colors that makes up the
majority of the image. Slightly protruding from the flattened surface of this
drawing is a star emerging leftward and the name “CHE” extending rightwards.
The image is simple, illustrating both the dimensionality of cube forms and the
flatness and brightness of graphic design within the realm of advertising. Its
readability and engagement through color and simplified, dynamic (spatial)
form directly mirrors the works of Roy Lichtenstein. Within the same issue,
images of stars as motifs appeared throughout the texts, as did stills of Che Guevara from various films of the leader (Figure 5.30). In a seven-page spread the leader is seen speaking passionately into three microphones, his fist raised in the first three. The simple, black and white images read as television screen shots presenting the communicative veracity of the honored revolutionary. The combination of popular media and contemporary art trends impacted publication design throughout Cuba.

The image of the revolutionary leader and armed warfare as symbols of a revolutionary cubanidad remained prevalent throughout the 1960s. The July 1968 cover for the magazine Cuba also features an axonometric projection of the barrel of a gun, this time with a bullet propelled from the gun (Figure 5.31). Meant to celebrate the 26th of July Movement that year, the cover plays with cartoonish illusionism, in the block-like numbers “26” and in the simple red and blue background. The bullet flying forward creates an exciting dynamism that evokes the power of armed struggle, and proclaims the totalizing nature of a revolutionary mythology.

The influence of pop art on graphic design had different implications for artists, who combined the directness of communication design with the messiness of painting. Umberto Peña’s work is a superb example of this, as it often combines the vibrant declarations of propaganda with images of bodily
appendages and discord. In his 1967 painting Con el Rayo, for example, the title runs across the center of the composition in a bright, flesh-like pink, reminiscent of a comic strip (Figure 5.32). The text divides the toilet or sink-like structure in the painting’s lower register from the figure above: the interior of a mouth with gritted teeth and cords of flesh extending to the plumbing below. The clenched mouth evokes restraint and pain, while the vibrant, cartoonish text enliven the exclamation. The work of another major painter of the revolution, Servando Cabrera Moreno, also transformed over the 1960s. While at the start of the decade he became known for his luscious paintings of guerrilla fighters in the countryside, at the close of the decade he became more obsessed with the body, fixated on corporeal pain and dismemberment.

One artist who successfully blended graphic media with painting was Alfredo Sosabravo, whose mixed media paintings presented abstract figures in front of highly stylized settings. His 1967 painting Napalm, with its disarmingly playful background of stripes in bright primary and secondary colors, takes on the sordid topic of weapons of war (Figure 5.33). The painting features an abstracted figure standing in profile, painted brown on cloth-like material above the canvas, resembling rusted metal. The severity of the image of the figure with its small eye and mouth is contrasted by the background, comprised of horizontal stripes and words such as “Profile,” “Man?” and “Napalm”. The
existential disjuncture of the painting reflects the political concerns of the era, when questions of justice and humanity revolved around the role of U.S. imperialism. As Gerardo Mosquera describes, Sosabrovo’s work presents a syncretism in stylistic forms and content, providing a freshness and humor while broaching difficult topics.\textsuperscript{40}

By the end of the 1960s, a revolutionary ideology had come to dominate communication and propaganda, providing a means of expression and experimentation for visual artists. At the same time, painters and other artists were not limited to a revolutionary subject matter and, in some instances, chose instead to critique of the state. Painters were not expected to produce work solely for communicative purposes, though they often practiced both in the realm of fine art and propaganda. Artists who openly critiqued the state, however, were subject to censorship and worse, creating an incentive for artists produce images for state propaganda. Nonetheless, as in the case of Sasobravo and Peña, certain artists thrived in both realms, creating an oeuvre where the relationship of art and propaganda remained constant.

\textsuperscript{40} As Gerardo Mosquera writes, Sasobravo’s work has a “síntesis de elementos tomados del pop, de la llamada nueva figuración y del arte popular; humor, espontaneidad y frescura; presencia de una dialéctica de lo bello y lo monstruoso; fusión de formas orgánicas con otras tomadas de los mecanismos construidos por el hombre; alto oficio e invención inagotable; la manera como dentro de estos mismos recursos, y con entera naturalidad, consigue expresar un mensaje político convincente.” In Exploraciones en la Plástica Cubana, 191-192.
While graphic design and the Cuban propensity towards propaganda influenced painting, graphic media also had an impact on artists who worked primarily in the realm of non-commercial printmaking. Conversely, one can see the influence of painting in the graphic arts – a tradition that can be traced back to printmaking in Mexico, as discussed in the previous chapter. Lesbia Vent Dumois was known for her elaborate etchings, combining traditional arts and new forms of image making to create powerful, emotive compositions. Other artists took printmaking to a more propagandistic level. José Gómez Fresquet, commonly referred to as Frémez, used high contrast, photo-based compositions in his 1969 series *Song of the Americas* to create sleek, yet charged, images (Figure 5.34). In the two examples provided, *Untitled* and *Children and Machine Gun* below, Frémez coupled images of commercial fashion and beauty with images of the horrors of war. In *Untitled* the face of the woman to the left shows her putting on bright red lipstick in profile, while an image of an Asian woman to the right bleeds from her nose. Using the strategies of graphic design in Cuba, Frémez exhibited a polished presentation with disturbing, global referents.

Established artists also began to engage with the mass production of graphic images – for example, René Portocarrero, who was renowned in the 1950s for his dense, rich paintings of female subjects and cityscapes. During the 1960s he completed many urbanscapes of Havana, utilizing vivid colors and
thick lines to conjure the city’s architectural heritage in a manner reminiscent of Alejo Carpentier’s romantic ruminations on Havana’s urbanity. A sense of the urban and the architectural were also articulated in his portraits, often of women, as seen in his poster promoting the film Soy Cuba, discussed above (Figure 5.35). In this case the gender of the figure is ambiguous, and the poster resembles a portrait framed by a divided blue and green background. Only a small portion of the face is rendered clearly, as the majority of the figure’s face and body is comprised of abstract details drawn in red and black, with much of it floating above the head like a heavy headpiece or hair. These details resemble Portocarrero’s urbanscapes, depicting a cubanidad where the decorative architectural details of the city predominate and where individuals are decorated by their national and cultural setting.

The poster was a means for artists to enter the public space, and for their imagery to have a much more populist appeal than in previous generations. As David Craven writes: “Public space as a locus for political debate involving provocative images about the general welfare or international solidarity was as common in Cuba as it was uncommon in the United States. Thus, the use of the poster and the billboard in Cuba entailed a rupture with the hegemonic use of this visual language in Western
societies.” In this context, posters not only communicated ideology, but were also works of art for contemplation, allowing the construction of cubanidad in the visual arts to extend beyond the confines of the gallery. In discussing the role of posters as advertisements in the developed capitalist countries, Craven suggests that the poster and billboard assumed a “passive spectator”, with the purpose of enticing the viewer in a neutral, seemingly non-ideological manner. He further suggests that in capitalist contexts the implicit ideological value – that of corporate capitalism – is often disguised, or indirect. The Cuban poster aims at the opposite: “Instead, the Cuban poster overtly contested the ideology of mere personal gain by the very way it refused to present ideas and images as if they were outside a system of values mediated by ideology on various levels and intimately linked to an individual choice free of serious implications for others.” The poster came to be both a form of art and communication that also transformed the entire terrain of the fine arts, a motif of a revolutionary modernity amid a city awash in the nostalgia of past architectures.

1968, or Cien Años

In 1967 the Chilean artist Roberto Matta visited the National Arts Schools to meet with students and share work with them. A personal friend of Wifredo Lam, Roberto

\[41\text{ Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990, 95.}\]
\[42\text{ Ibid., 96.}\]
Matta had visited Cuba several times during the 1960s, working with students and establishing a close connection with the Casa de las Américas, where he painted a large mural for its auditorium in 1963. During a visit to work with students at the National Arts Schools in 1967, Matta created a series of drawings influenced by events in 1960s Cuba. Titled *The Disasters of Imperialism*, an homage to Francisco Goya’s famed series *Disasters of War*, Matta used abstraction to invoke the militaristic overreach, violence and surveillance inherent to the project of political and economic empire (Figure 5.36). There is some irony in the critique of militaristic action and surveillance in the context of a revolutionary Cuba, where both were prevalent, but it is nonetheless meaningful that Cuba became a place to dream, imagine and visualize anti-imperialism in a decade that reach its politically chaotic climax in the year of 1968.

The abstracted formal mechanisms drawn throughout Matta’s oeuvre echo the visuality of a fraught era of war and decolonization. At a visual and spatial level, Matta’s works present an uncanny sense of time and space – a new dimensionality in a globalizing world. In an interview with Adelaida de Juan, Roberto Matta explained:

> At first, the image of the six sides of a cube as an extension of our consciousness seems more or less like a naïve and elemental proposition. I propose to use the six sides of the cube, its inner walls, as an image that extends to infinity, and that is perceived from the cube’s geometric center. Therefore I propose a placement at this center for understanding, for consciousness, for hallucinations, for all mediations possible at the center of the cube, so that the center of the cube coincides with our organ of perception, an organ that is no longer the pupil nor the eye, but, as it were, the eye of our consciousness… I do this when I paint. When I make a work, I paint around me; I try to make it as if I was in the center...
of a cube and the canvas, rather than being like a window in front of me, becomes the six sides of the cube.\textsuperscript{43}

Here, the analogy of the cube suggests a dimensionality not only in representational form, but also a means of thinking about the world around us. Matta suggests that artists, as rational beings, must be aware of their surroundings, of the realities of the oppressed. The cube functions as a totality, capturing the full range of vision from within its conceptualized center.

Early in the dissertation I suggested that the grid persisted as a dominating form of rationality, coloniality, and modernity. Its extension to a cube form maintains this tradition of the \textit{letrado} class, but does so with a greater embeddedness and understanding of the world. As a contained totality, the three-dimensional symbol of infinite perception may also be applicable within a revolutionary ideology and its progressivist embrace of technology. By the close of the decade, the cube had become a form symbolic of Cuba and its ambitions, be it in the displays of the \textit{First Exhibition of Cuban Culture}, in public graphic arts that took advantage of the cube’s multiple surfaces, in the architectural form of

\textsuperscript{43} “Dar la imagen de la extensión de la conciencia en la forma de los seis lados de un cubo es una proposición ingenua y elemental, más en un comienzo. Me propongo usar esos seis lados del cubo, las paredes internas del cubo, como la imagen que se extiende al infinito, y que percibidos desde el centro geométrico de ese cubo. Propongo, pues, colocarse por el entendimiento, por la conciencia, por la alucinación, por todos los medios posibles en el centro del cubo, para hacer coincidir ese centro con nuestro órgano de percepción que no es ya ni la pupila ni el ojo mismo, sino, por así decir, el ojo de conciencia... Yo lo hago así cuando pinto. Cuando hago un cuadro, pinto alrededor de mí; he tratado de hacer como si estuviera situado en el centro del cubo y el cuadro, en vez de ser una ventana delante de mí, es los seis lados de un cubo.” Adelaida de Juan, “El sol para quien sabe reunir”, \textit{Casa de las Américas}, 42 (May-June 1967), 142.
new projects, including the embrace of parallelepiped forms in the World Expo pavilions for Montreal in 1967 and Osaka in 1970. I close this chapter by briefly examining the cube as a form that encapsulated a new, revolutionary cubanidad by the end of the 1960s, presenting a history and mythology both contained within space but also full of seemingly endless possibilities.

In 1968, that year marked by upheaval and worldwide student protests, the Cuban government celebrated the centennial of Cuba’s first major independence movement. The popular magazine Cuba dedicated its entire October issue that year to the history of revolutionary struggle dating back to the 19th century, a topic highlighted throughout the city in museum and public displays. The design of the issue evoked the cube to represent the mythology of Revolutionary Cuba, accounting for its history and legitimacy. Lead by designer Rafael Morante, the issue was a pedagogical tool for portraying a teleological history leading to revolutionary triumph. Its visual narrative of this history is both impressive and engaging.

Several artists collaborated on the project, including Antonia Eirez, Umberto Peña and Juan Eduardo David Posada. They contributed many graphics throughout the magazine, but most arresting were the full-page graphics serving frontispieces to each article. In pages designed by Umberto Peña, the background contained a consistent graphic pattern, such as small
pointillist-like dots evenly distributed throughout the page or horizontal stripes (Figure 5.37). These dense backgrounds contribute to the optical illusion created by the whole and spliced cubes protruding in the foreground. These cubes contain texts and images related to the 1959 revolution, both on their surface and emerging outward into the textured plane. For the article “El Primer Día de Enero,” images of leaders extend from the cube on the left while an image of Fidel stands to the right in a diagonally spliced box. For the article “Che Comunista,” images of Che giving a speech take up the primary surfaces of the cube. These images are identical to the ones used by Peña used in the January-February edition of Casa de las Américas (see Figure 5.30). Cubes were a dominant archetype present throughout the magazine, a placeholder for texts and images of revolutionary leaders.

Using the cube to represent history dynamically had limitations as far as telling the narrative of the revolution, as done in the textual narratives of the articles. Rather than telling a linear the story, the cubes evoked a mythological sentiment, one of futurity and containment. The entire magazine was divided into events defined by years – “El 68” for 1868 and the Ten Years War, “El 95” for the Cuban War of Independence, “El 33” for the first revolution that led to the rise of Batista, “El 59” for the most recent revolution, and again “El 68”, to provide reflections on a near decade of revolution and “Los 100 Años”, or one
hundred years, of revolutionary struggle. Each section included a story board chart that conveyed through images a progressive history of revolutionary struggle (Figure 5.38). The storyboard resembles Martínez’s portraits and the comic arts – or perhaps the colonial era notion of the grid as a mechanism of readability. It combined this concept of the grid with a new dimensionality – with visual resemblances of a society redefined by propaganda and the wonders of construction technology amid an attempt to create a “Third World” modernity.

Wifredo Lam famously claimed: “My painting is an act of decolonization, not physical but mental”.44 Here Lam suggests that art provides a means for decolonizing the mind. In many ways, Lam’s work from the 1940s into the 1960s presented a defiant understanding of space, in the ways figures traveled within the flat plane of the canvas. A new dimensionality came to fruition in 1960s Cuban media and art, one that went beyond the grid and the swirl of the Mural Cuba Colectiva, optimizing its visual occupation of physical space conceptually in the form of the cube. This trend is not unique to Cuba, as artists elsewhere were utilizing new means of technology and drawing from their own popular culture.

44 “Mi pintura es un acto de decolonización, no física pero sí mental”. In Mosquera, Exploraciones en la Plástica Cubana, 184.
But the trend took on a particular meaning in Cuba, given Cuba’s status as a symbol of anti-imperialism and as a cultural powerhouse.

Rafael Morante’s frontispiece for the article “Mal Tiempo: Las Canillas, Los Brazos, Las Cabezas,” by Miguel Barnet, features two guns shooting towards one another and emitting the term “Bam!” (Figure 5.39). This homage to Roy Lichenstein takes on an entirely different meaning in the context of Cuba’s October 1968 journal. It references the dominant images of a Third World modernity, of guerrilla warfare and decolonization, as much as it references comic books and popular movies. Its invocation of U.S. pop art is also a tongue-in-cheek reference U.S.-Cuba relations, as it is placed next to an article discussing the start of the war for Cuban independence in 1895. The image playfully presents the violence of war and the eventual U.S. takeover of Cuba’s fight for sovereignty against Spain.

While Cuba was printed entirely in black ink, its inner and outer front and back covers featured colorful, patriotic visualizations of Cuba’s prominent heroes. The inner and outer back cover features portraits of Che Guevara and José Martí on cubic and rectangular prism structures, resembling the displays along major boulevards of Havana and within the Pabellón Cuba (Figure 5.40). The image of Martí has a rectangular prism toward the bottom with the Cuban flag on its surface, while other cubic forms lay on top of this base, conforming to
the shape of Martí’s silhouette. The image of Che appears on the surfaces of a towering prism in the back, while another prismatic form towards the front depicts revolutionaries on horseback. The signature of Che is featured on the surfaces both prismatic structures, while the one towards the front also includes stars and block of text. The solidity of the Cube, its universality, represents their heroism. The cube appears as a gendered concept in its totalizing gesture and angularity, something underscored by the lack of women in these graphic histories. The mythology of the revolution took many forms, from the celebration of national figures as martyrs, to their placement on rational, dynamic and engaging structures.

While this chapter has focused on dominant trends throughout Cuban art and design at the close of the 1960s, the diversity of artistic Cuba in practice often belies its politicization. Nonetheless, those images that came to popularly evoke a notion of cubanidad in the 1960s had a much broader global impact than previous figurations. This impact reflects the government’s open embrace of media as a form of self-realization and education for the masses, something that superseded the often saint-like portrayals of national heros. This embrace of media coincided with Cuba’s new role as an arbiter of a Third World modernity in which Cuba served as model and friend to other states. For their November 1968-January 1969 issue, Casa de las America’s decided to celebrate 10 years of
revolution, immediately following an issue dedicated to the centennial of the Ten Years War. The cover featured the numbers one to ten, and the word revolution in front of a photograph-based color print of masses cheering (Figure 5.41). This image captures the aesthetic of graphics campaigns common in Cuba at the end of the decade. Upbeat and direct, it calls for a celebration of Revolution in a time of economic hardship and growing Soviet influence. The cover’s bright colors and graphic impulse encapsulates an era where the visual was rethought, and where new paradigms became imaginable.
Conclusion(s) – ¡Diez!:
The Zafra and Meditations Regarding the Postmodern Plantation

“They [specialists of the Caribbean] propose the Plantation as the parameter for analyzing the Caribbean, while at the same time speaking of the contradictory effects (or voids) that its proliferation has imposed upon the whole area. Thus, if we may venture a leap of the imagination, the Caribbean could be seen as well as a loosely bounded figure combining straight lines and curves, let’s say, a spiral galaxy tending outward – to the universe – that bends and folds over its own history, its own inwardness.”
– Antonio Benítez Rojo¹

“Marx insists on the transformation of brute nature through human work, through technology and inventions, through labour and consciousness. Yet he doesn’t discover rhythms…”
– Henri Lefebvre²

The 1969 graphic campaign for the year’s following zafra, or second harvest of sugar cane, contained a bedazzling counting of numbers. Each poster uniquely spelled out the progress of the harvest in vivid hues – un millón, y van 2, 3°, ya son 4, la mitad, seis, el 7°, ya van 8, falta uno – protruding from their backgrounds in multiple and differing perspectives, like minimalist fireworks (Figure 6.1). Until it finally reached ¡diez! – a sign of the new goal of the revolution to produce 10 million tons of sugar, largely for the

² Henri Lefebvre, Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life, 17.
Soviet Union. Presenting simulacra in an idealized form, the campaign made brilliant the economic imperative under which the back-breaking labor of the sugar harvest took place. The zafra had a history that dated to Cuba’s colonial era, where a plantation slave-based economy brought the island great wealth and misery. The drama of the plantation, once realized by the capitalist exploits of the past, became recreated in a communist context.

For the workers returning from the field each evening during the harvest, billboards and graphic signs exclaimed their progress in brilliant, tropical colors. This characterizes a process highlighted by Walter Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”: “The progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert”. Designed by Olivio Martínez under the auspices of the COR (Commission for Revolutionary Orientation), the graphic prints were applicable beyond the 1970 harvest, providing permanent signposts for the annual harvest and ten years of revolution. As Jorge Bermúdez writes, “The designer corresponded the design of graphic prints and billboards for continuity, whose major achievement was to reconcile the informational with the persuasive... the media assumed the message with a design providing an antecedent: by the drawing and projection of contrasting color treatment for both digital

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Thought to follow the time-based rhythm of the massive production of sugar, the vibrant images anticipated, predicted, and defiantly announced the progress of the sugar harvest by the phrasing of its numerical accumulation of sugar in tons. In these posters, we see the role of visual culture in obfuscating reality, or rather making it seemingly more opaque, in presenting a revolutionary message that was incongruous with the political, social or economic realities. An image of a billboard from the 1970 *zafras* recalls an advertisement that combines a vibrant graphic appeal with a familiar message as a form of branding (*Figure 6.2*). We see the power of propaganda and advertising in impacting the psyche at a communal or societal level with an emphasis on the revolutionary goal and making opaque the labor-based means.

My dissertation looks at how the spatial and visual are employed in a mediatic manner, thereby allowing art, visual culture and architecture to hold a certain sway within Havana and abroad. As I state in my Introduction, I aim to demythologize the revolutionary. This is not to discredit the revolution or even disempower its symbolic rigor, but rather to understand the logic that becomes dominant by the close of the decade. The *zafras* graphic campaign in many ways represents a graphic pinnacle of

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4 “A esta diseñador le correspondió el diseño de continuidad para cartel y valla, cuyo mayor logro fue conciliar lo informativo con lo persuasivo… Con una regularidad que oscilaba entre 25 días y un mes – según el ritmo de producción de la industria azucarera–, los medios citados asumían el mensaje, según la línea de diseño seguida en los anteriores: dibujo en proyección y tratamiento cromático contrastado tanto para la imagen numérica como para el texto, que sólo atendió al verbo de la consigna popular de *los diez millones van*”. (Translation by author) Jorge R. Bermúdez. *La Imagen Constante: El Cartel Cubano de Siglo XX*, 167.
post-1959 revolutionary visual culture. As seen in its most iconic iteration of the number diez (ten) placed in between exclamation marks, the campaign communicates a directness and dynamism initially devoid of political content. Nonetheless, it elicits a revolutionary sentiment in its abstract signage.

The utopic ambitions of the sugar harvest are made apparent in another print for the COR by Eufemia Álvarez, Convertir el revés en victoria (1970), which implants within the Zafra the notion of a dynamic thrust and optimism (Figure 6.3). The word revés, or setbacks, is written on the lower left of the flat background, with its V emerging outwards and enlarged towards the upper right. The letter V refers to victory, presenting the optimism for the Zafra campaign to solve Cuba’s economic hardships. The simplicity of the print succeeds in implanting a notion of dreams and sovereignty within the communicative impact of the letter or integer. The graphic impact of the revolution became undeniable. Utilizing the alphabetic and the photographic, the media campaigns and initiatives of the Cuban revolution are one of its great aesthetic achievements, especially when considering the social realist impulse of the Soviet Union, which was Cuba’s foremost political and economic partner.

The close of the first decade of the Cuban revolution led to the solidification of a revolutionary aesthetic that embraced the abstract visually with citations of the

“concrete” socially, both contributing to a communicative means. The role of art within society fell within these guide posts, but also served as a means to expand upon and subvert a dominant revolutionary ideology. As this project has traced, the 1960s was a period in which a “revolutionary ideology” formed in Cuba, drawing from a Soviet-influenced Marxism-Leninism, the anti-imperialist writings of Che Guevara and others, and Cuba’s own grappling with nationalism and modernity throughout its history, idealized in the evocation of the national hero José Martí and his writings. The impact of the graphic and its communicable functionality comes to influence both art and architecture as they adapt to a revolutionary ideology, both reflecting the technological, triumphalist impulse and its macrosocial concerns. The graphic also provides a means to subvert (in visual art) and live beyond (in architecture) such ideological constraints. As Jesus Martin-Barbero writes: “From the mix of communicationism and recrimination that resulted was a kind of schizophrenia that was converted into an instrumentalist conception of the media. This conception deprived it of its cultural and material density and turned them into mere tools of ideological action.” Reviving the cultural and

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6 See Chapter 3. As Jose A. Portuondo writes: “Lo que es posible afirmar, desde ahora, es que, así como el abstraccionismo se produjo como negación, como antithesis, frente a lo concreto sensible, la nueva expresión estética de la nación para sí, verdadera ‘negación de la negación’, se ha de oponer al abstraccionismo e integrar con las mejores conquistas de éste y con lo más logrado de lo concreto sensible una síntesis…” For Portuondo, the art of the revolution is both communicative and concrete, considering its engagement with the abstract. *Estética y Revolución*, 59.

7 Translated by Lorien Olive. “De la amalgama entre comunicacionismo y denuncia lo que resultó fue una esquizofrenia, que se tradujo en una con, concepción instrumentalista de los medios de comunicación, concepción que privó a estos de espesor cultural y materialidad institucional convirtiéndolos en meras
material density of the mediatic, or understanding propaganda next to its broader visual and spatial worlds, allows one to deconstruct and better understand the ideologies that underpin it. It allows the *zafra* campaign to be viewed beyond the economic blunders and hardships of the attempted Ten Million Ton Sugar Harvest, to reach beyond the *zafra*’s ideological and economic ambitions. The graphic campaign can help construct an image of the schizophrenic ethos of a revolutionary ideology, from which we can attempt to trace its legacy.

**Salon 70**

In 1970, the Palacio de Bellas Artes hosted the Salón 70, a large-scale exhibition dedicated to highlighting the achievement of Cuban art. Recalling exhibitions of the past decade that highlighted contemporary art since the 1959 revolution, Salón 70 was a hallmark of nationally themed salons. Its sleek pamphlet-like catalogue recalled the minimalist aesthetics of Cuba’s various campaigns, while the exhibition spanned the tropes of cubanidad reminiscent of the Batista era, redefining national identity within and for the revolution. Raúl Martínez’s contribution for the exhibition – a massive 1970 oil on canvas painting titled *Isla 70* – is particularly epic, and is reminiscent of his earlier

herramientas de acción ideológica.” Jesús Martín-Barbero, *De los medios a las mediaciones: Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*, 221.

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grid paintings (see Chapter 5) (Figure 6.4). The painting is both alluring and casual, with its brilliant colors drawing the viewer in. It can be seen as a visual icon of the new decade, expressing a related aesthetic to that of the *zafraped* campaign in its use of color, but focusing particularly on the question of Cuban identity a decade past the 1959 revolution.

Painted in a style that recalls poster and billboard art, *Isla 70* reconsiders the concrete sociability of the print and subverts it through painted form. The work actually consists of three attached canvases – a triptych. Within these three canvas are the implication of a grid, barely visible as the green-faced characters emerge from, overlap and seemingly defy its Cartesian logic (a notable comparison to Martínez’s representations of Cuban political heroes). The banal is situated next to the iconic. To the upper left is the noticeable face of José Martí emerging from a Cuban flag. Not far from the center of the right panel is Fidel Castro with five microphones, recalling Martí’s gridded, screen-like portrait of the leader. Across the canvas are other prominent, recognizable figures such as Ho Chi Minh and Lenin, interspersed with everyday citizens. While a socialist ethos is given prominence throughout the canvas and a *cubanidad* is expressed through the unusual tropical hues, the painting seems dually dominated by the banal and the absurd.

The banal makes itself apparent throughout the busy composition. To the lower left of the triptych is a child enjoying ice cream while another seems to shout or cry to
his left. To the left of Lenin is an older, unidentified man resting his chin on his hand, either bored or in contemplation. Towards the lower center above the communist party logo, a young man eats a sandwich. Sugar cane appears throughout the background, recalling the ever-present *zafría*. While other works of Martínez play with and present structures of power in their representation of political leaders, *Island 70* seems to resemble a new *La Jungla* where those with political might are on the same plane as the greater public, and where the defiance of the Santería spirits is overtaken by the expressive cordiality of the graphic. The *guajiro* to the upper right may even recall the anthropomorphic figure that holds the scissors in Lam’s masterpiece, a symbol of decolonization reconfigured in the new psychedelic plantation.

Upon closer inspection one notices the absurd, and even the subversive. Two embracing women stand behind a vibrant red orange cat and green monkey. The background transforms, from a graphic image of Ché on the left panel to a series of yellow colonial era decorations recalling penises running along a band in the lower half of the center and right panels. The casual, the erotic and the heroic are placed alongside one another in an uncanny manner. At the same time, one can argue that there is a homoerotic air to the painting. In his memoir *Yo Publio*, Martínez reflects on the struggles of being gay during this era, while at the same time recognizing his privileges

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8 See chapter 1.
as a prominent figure in Havana’s cultural scene.\textsuperscript{10} Recalling the size and tenor of the 1967 \textit{Mural Cuba Colectiva} he had participated in, Martínez’s \textit{Isla 70} expands well beyond his engaging and subversive representations of revolutionary leaders.\textsuperscript{11} Here he approaches representing the socialist ethos of late modern Cuba with a sense of ambiguity and complexity.

Such a complexity was also presented by the participation of a young artist, Manuel Mendive, in the \textit{Salón 70}. Immersed in the portrayal of various Yoruba based deities, the works of Mendive show a growing concern with African-derived traditions within the modern Cuban context. They visualize a world beyond the graphic of Martínez’s pop art. A later painting of Mendive, \textit{Barco negrero} presents a pointillist slave ship, recalling the aesthetic of folk art from throughout the Caribbean (\textbf{Figure 6.5}). The dynamic painting includes snakes drawing out ocean waves and jelly fish scattered throughout the background. While based on a horrific story of a transatlantic voyage of black slaves, the painting provides a sense of allure and mystery. The Spanish ship with its many flags becomes transformed by an utterly African atmosphere, the ethos of those entrapped within the ship is revalorized by their vibrancy as well as they carry traditions across oceans.

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{10} Raúl Martínez González, \textit{Yo Publio: Confesiones}, 377-378.
\textsuperscript{11} See chapter 3.
\end{quote}
In April 1971, Habana Libre Hotel hosted the First National Congress of Education and Culture, whose proceedings set the tone for the following decade. In a declaration akin to the cultural and political congresses of the past decade, this assembly recommended proposals that impacted society at large, inaugurating what is commonly known today as the Quinquinio Gris, or the gray period. In the declaration, political education was proposed as a means to better police the non-revolutionary behavior, with a focus on religious subversiveness, homosexuality, and inappropriate dress.

Much like Fidel’s 1961 Palabras a los Intellectuales, the document sought to highlight the role of culture within the revolution, stating: “The ideological formation of young writers and artists is a task of most importance to the Revolution. Educating them in Marxist-Leninism, equipping with the ideas of the Revolution and their technical training is our duty.”¹² Inaugurating a period of censorship and repression, the 1971 Congress is commonly referred to as a period when Soviet orthodoxy began to take over Cuban education and cultural policing began to affect everyday life. The political education and ideological impetus of the government became characterized as didactic.

As Ambrosio Fornet suggests, however, the period was also full of artistic richness beyond the choke-hold of moral policing and censorship.¹³ This is especially seen in the exploration of the African diaspora and the history of slavery by artists like Mendive, or

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the deliberate exploration of Cuba’s history of slavery, made apparent in films such as
*La Ultima Cena* by Tomas Guittierre. Like apparitions of the past, such works
complicate the narrative of 1970s Cuba, wedged between economic blockade and
dependency.

**Plantation Reconfigured**

The 1970 *zafr* campaign, if anything, shows how the logic of the plantation
persists and transforms in the face of Cold War modernity. There remained a continued
reliance on foreign power in exporting natural resources alongside a growing
investment in technological and industrial development for an agrarian-focused
economy. At the same time, relations between members of society were reconfigured at
the macro-social level, and the proletariat was represented alongside the guerrilla Hero
as an image of Cuban hyper-modernity (as is the case in *Isla 70*). The cultural
production of the 1970s, however, complicates notions of the plantation as a hallmark of
Caribbean modernity. No longer a mechanism of Spanish imperialism or U.S. influence,
the economic imperatives of the Cuban state transformed with regards to new
international pressures and internal needs. The logic of the plantation was made
apparent in 1970s Cuba in two predominant manners. First, the introduction of labor
camps as a revolutionary action and as punishment (or reorientation) for citizens who
did not fit within the revolutionary ideology (be it through appearance or actions)
constitutes labor as an oppressive or vindictive force. Second, the shift of economic
dependence from one world power to another recalls the greater economic imperatives
that determine an individual’s place within a greater machination. The productive force
of labor, however, also came to be seen as a means of liberation, conceived of as labor by
the people for the people. In the realm of architecture no better example exists than the
microbrigades, where workers built communal, prefabricated housing for themselves
and others. It contributed to the needs of the people – in this case housing – to an
economy that recalled the order and ethos of the plantation but entirely reconfigured it.

The largest and most significant microbrigade project to date, Alamar, in many
ways is an icon of post-revolutionary architecture (Figure 6.6). Initiated in December
1970, the Habana del Este neighborhood was the first major endeavor to employ
microbrigades on a large scale, attempting to alleviate Havana’s continual housing
shortage as well as the limited availability of materials.\(^{14}\) Akin to the nearby Unidad
Vecinal project of the previous decade, Alamar expanded upon the use of prefabricated
architecture to create a massive community, with a population totaling over 100,000.
Participants took a paid break from their state-based jobs, building housing for
themselves and others, the housing distributed to people based on the decisions of
communal assemblies.\(^{15}\) The microbrigade presented a reconfiguration of previous labor

\(^{15}\) This is expertly highlighted in interviews with architects Mario Coyula and Daniel Bejerano in the film
and social relations to one that emphasized the communal. While the logic of the plantation economy remained in the dominance and reliance of the sugar economy, its broader impact on society is mitigated and altered by the state’s supposed “decolonization” efforts. Nonetheless, revolutionary ideology continued and built upon the spatial politics that stemmed from the history and presence of Cuba’s plantation economy, in spite of attempts to create an equitable society at the social and symbolic level.

Invoking the plantation within the spatial politics of 1960s and 1970s Cuba requires two considerations. First, a point highlighted in Chapter 1, is that the spatiality of the plantation – its logic and its impetus – extends beyond the physical plantation, providing wealth for both private and public development. The 1959 Cuban Revolution eliminated the notion of private space as previously understood – in relation to property – but invested heavily in infrastructure and construction projects throughout the island. The spatiality of these projects resembled developments of the previous Batista dictatorship’s Ministro de Obras Públicas in both scale and symbolic outreach, though they reached towards entirely differing socio-political and ideological means.

Second, the role of the graphic makes itself apparent in the construction of new buildings and the broader urban visual culture. The plastic integration of architecture contributed to a given architecture’s cubanidad, and became noticeably more graphic in the 1960s, incorporating advancements in poster and publication design. Architecture and its plastic integration likewise embraced the abstract to a communicative means, often expressing a political perspective and the socio-cultural imaginaries that developed within their broader political milieu. The ability of architecture to provide a surface for visual signs reflective of a political expression is seen in the example of the draping of the iconic image of Che Guevara over the Ministry of the Interior for his 1967 eulogy, or the placement of Lenin on the Cinema Yara on La Rampa (Figure 6.7). The iconic, heroic figure of Che became a dominating trope of cubanidad, while the image of Lenin reflected the changing politics of Cuba in regards to its relationship with the Soviet Union. The abstract in visual culture, however, reveals itself in more subtle ways, revealing patterns and rhythms outside the scope of figureheads.

A myriad of examples exist that highlight the graphic impulse – the influence of 1960s visual culture on the architectonic environment of the 1970s. For example, the Conjunto de Vivienda from Havana’s Vedado neighborhood shows how prefabricated methods of construction – in this case the Losa Hueca Spiroll system imported from Canada in 1972 – provided a surface for painting to give the buildings a graphic,
aesthetic appeal (Figure 6.8).\textsuperscript{16} Even in the floor plans for a Cuban based design and construction – the Multiflex System by Fernando Salinas – the simple use of colors helps orient space, to graphically envision its organization (Figure 6.9). The graphic possibilities of prefabricated architecture are also seen throughout edifices of Alamar, which differ in construction type and orientation. In one example a white star remains between two blue stripes, referencing a symbol of the republic (Figure 6.10). The graphic aesthetic of the 1960s – the creation of ciudad gráfica alongside the ciudad de las columnas – became temporarily fixed on the surfaces of prefabricated buildings, interrupting the logic of the scientific and technological with that of the symbolic and experiential.\textsuperscript{17}

In his famed book Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar, anthropologist and leading Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz theorizes Cuban culture through the history of the sugar and tobacco commodities. The account goes beyond the dictates of economy and society, where sugar is defined “as a question of power”.\textsuperscript{18} Ortiz attempts to understand how structures of economic and political power form cultural imaginaries, extending his analysis to the visual worlds around his given commodities. His theory of transculturation, described in Chapter 1, presents a hybridization that

\textsuperscript{16} Juan de las Cuevas Toraya, 500 Años de Construcciones en Cuba, 321.
\textsuperscript{17} See chapter 4, where I draw from Alejo Carpentier’s photo essay “Ciudad de las Columnas” to theorize the ciudad gráfica, defined as the point by which the graphic and reproducible image begins to redefine Havana’s dominant urban imaginary and contribute to its many rhythms.
\textsuperscript{18} Fernando Ortiz, Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar, 56.
accounts for the loss of culture and the creation of a new culture within deafening political and economic contexts. “The real history of Cuba is the history of its intermeshed transculturations,” Ortiz claims.\textsuperscript{19} This dissertation has traced a series of transculturations that developed with the onset of the 1959 revolution, arguing that projections of utopia and modernity from Cuba’s revolutionary era draw from the past and continue to impact the future. This is especially seen in the burgeoning field of research regarding art and culture following the fall of the Soviet Union, where many began to explore the legacy of utopia and revolutionary ideals in the face of economic hardship and globalization.

My brief account of the 1970s shows the influence of a revolutionary aesthetic developed from the 1960s, rather than account for the complexity of the era. While I demythologize the revolutionary and invocations of revolution across historical time, the invocation of the revolutionary becomes a concretized practice by the close of the 1960s, expected to confine itself to the realm of ideology. Recent and forthcoming scholarship regarding the history and legacy of the quinquenio gris will complicate our understanding of such a concretization, as well as Cuban–Soviet relations and Cuba’s role in the broader world, most notably Africa.

The disconnect between the ideological imperatives of the Cuban Revolution, its economic hardships and dependence on the Soviet Union, the varied lived experiences

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 98.
across Cuban society and its cultural production suggest an era where utopia had reached its final point, or become hollowed. Frederic Jameson cites postmodernity as being associated with the demise of the utopic, a rupture from high modernity. In many ways 1971 can be seen as a turning point where ideology reaches its pinnacle manifestation, where the ideals of the revolution become overwhelmed by political repression and economic realities. A transculturation occurs, however, between the modernist gestures of revolutionary ideology and the broader economic and political forces within Cuba. New research by Erica Morawski highlights contradictions between the ideological imperatives of the Revolution and the development of tourism economies from the 1970s into the Special Period. The tourist resort serves of a dominant contemporary example of the inherited plantation logic across the Caribbean, a racial economy itself apparent in the division of labor seen within Cuba’s tourist economy today. The plantation remains, nonetheless, a site of cultural exchange and lived experience, a spatiality whose power relations do not account for the lived experience of its inhabitants.

20 As Katherine McKittrick writes: “The plantation thesis uncovers the interlocking workings of modernity and blackness, which culminate in long-standing, uneven racial geographies while also centralizing that the idea of the plantation is migratory. Thus, in agriculture, banking, and mining, in trade and tourism, and across other colonial and postcolonial spaces—the prison, the city, the resort—a plantation logic characteristic of (but not identical to) slavery emerges in the present both ideologically and materially. With this, differential modes of survival emerge—creolization, the blues, maroonage, revolution, and more—revealing that the plantation, in both slave and postslave contexts, must be understood alongside complex negotiations of time, space, and terror.” Cited from “Plantation Futures”, 3.
**Revolutionary Rhythms/Beyond the Grid**

In his book *The Repeating Island* Cuban writer Antonio Benítez-Rojo defines the plantation as a site of “complex polyrhythmic orchestration… [that] now lies in the memory of the people of the Caribbean” (Balutansky 58). For Benítez-Rojo, a rhythm, or more specifically an aesthetic, was formed in the plantation and translates to a collective understanding and expression of Caribbean identity (or Caribbeanness) among artists and writers; an understanding and expression rooted in the very unequal foundations of the Caribbean colonial system. Rhythm serves as a friendly analogy for resistance, constantly working within a beat while trying to revise that beat and make it one’s own. For Edouard Glissant, Caribbeanness is reflected through an acknowledgment of historical patterns, which Benítez-Rojo locates at the site of the plantation: the site of forced labor, inequality, rhythmic complexity, and displacement. Both Glissant and Benitez-Rojo provide a model to think about Cuba up to today, one that explores the rhythms – the adaptions and use of space next to the spatial forms of power in which they inhabit – be it the sugar cane fields or the mass gatherings at Plaza de la Revolución.

As highlighted in my discussion of the National Arts Schools (see Chapter 3), I want to suggest that spatial and visual form can recall the (poly-)rhythmic as well as the symbolic. The musical nature of form can be seen in the graphic implementation of architecture, particularly in the architecture of Fernando Salinas. His 1977 *Monumento a*
la caída del General Antonio Maceo pays homage to the famous 19th century black revolutionary through a hollowed concrete shooting star (Figure 6.11). The repeating sharp bands of black, white and red redefine the symmetry of the star, creating sense of movement like a blaring horn. Likewise, his design for the Cuban embassy in Mexico City uses plastic integration in a manner that recalls the tropicality of Cuban rumba (Figure 6.12). The sense of visual movement and the playfulness of abstract form not only provide a synesthesha, they go as far as to recall the Cuban tradition of the carnival, to suggest a usage of space well beyond the rectilinear, Cartesian models of prefabricated architecture and urban design. I’d like to close my dissertation – largely focused on representations and spaces in relation to political power – with a reflection on the rhythmic.

For theorists such as Glissant and Benítez-Rojo, the art of carnival provides an ideal non-literary example of the role of historical patterns in Caribbean space. Carnival is a collective cultural expression that captures these breakages, these subterranean and multiple converging paths through costume, dance, performance, and music. Traditional readings of the carnival have incorporated Soviet literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin’s seminal work *Rabelais and His World*, which describes carnival as a temporary, comical degradation of the social hierarchy that simultaneously maintains order. While this arguably may have been the function of carnival for the emancipated blacks throughout the Caribbean and particularly in Trinidad and Tobago, carnival is redefined
by the given social contexts of the Caribbean. Benítez-Rojo notes that Bahktin represents carnival as a “paradoxical practice” – or literally, an inversion of the common order. Benítez-Rojo writes:

Notice that the carnival symbolizes a double sacrifice that is paradoxical in itself; through it – I repeat – the groups in power channel the violence of the oppressed groups in order to maintain yesterday’s order, while the latter channel the former’s violence so that it will not recur tomorrow. Culturally speaking, the complexity of the Caribbean cannot be reduced to binary concepts. It is one thing and the other at the same time – like the crab canon’s center – since it serves the purpose of unifying through its performance that which cannot be unified (the impossible desire to reach social and cultural unity – socio-cultural synthesis – that runs within the system). In this sense, and only partially in the Bakhtian sense, we can say Caribbeanness functions in a carnivalesque manner.21

Benítez-Rojo notes that carnival functions not as a mere inversion of the social order for the sake of order, but rather as a play or exaggeration of a dichotomy that in reality is irrelevant to the ethnically diverse Caribbean context, tainted by a racist history of colonialism and slavery. Hence, the Caribbean carnival manipulates and plays with the very binary on which it depends to the point that the binaries are brought into question. Rather than a complete inversion of the dominant space, we are offered an “other” space, where a cacophony of influences and histories is incorporated with given contexts while at the same time remaining resistant to them.22 We have not escaped the

22 Stuart Hall provides a convenient model for thinking about an “other” or “third” space within the politics of hybridity and transculturation, given the Caribbean’s complex history and diverse cultural influences.
field of power but have found a space within it to interact with those power forces more adequately.

The Cuban Revolution represents both a break with the past along with persistent, if not at times heightened, rhythms. The visual worlds of Cuban art and architecture show the persistent patterns in spatial logic and representational politics. At the same time, Cuba’s unique position at the height of the Cold War allowed its modernity to reach a crescendo, to have international impact. Revolutionary modernities themselves present structures of power that are confining and rhythms that are exhilarating. As seen in the case of Heriberto Duverger’s 1977 Escuela Primaria Volodia (Figure 6.13), the graphic and the spatial come together to present an ambition rooted in the ethos of revolution and its mythologized stature. Such a mythology is implicated in Cuba today as well as in revolutionary movements across the globe, where Cuba remains a peculiar example of anti-imperialism and 20th century revolution. The visual and spatial worlds help document the rhythms that have transculturated across epochs, and allow the rhythms of revolution and resistance to persist regardless of ideology and propaganda.

He writes: “This process of ‘transculturation occurs in such a way as to produce, as it were, a ‘third space’ – a ‘native’ or indigenous vernacular space, marked by the fusion of cultural elements drawn from all originating cultures, but resulting in a configuration in which these elements, though never equal, can no longer be disaggregated or restored to their originary forms…,” in “Creolité and the Process of Creolization,” 30-31.
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Biography
Fredo Rivera was born on December 1, 1983 in Hialeah, Florida, and raised in Miami, Florida. After specializing in architecture at Design & Architecture Senior High School in Miami, he attended Grinnell College in Iowa, where he graduated with honors in 2006. Majoring in Art History with a concentration in Africana studies, Rivera completed a senior thesis focusing on the relation of African American artists and Haiti in the early-to-mid 20th century. Starting a Ph.D. program at Duke University, Rivera specializes in Caribbean art and visual culture, architecture and urbanism, and modern Latin America. Rivera was formerly a Research Affiliate at the University of Miami’s School of Architecture (Spring-Fall 2011) and the Andrew W. Mellon Predoctoral Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts (2011-2013).
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*Cuban Rebel Is Visited in Hideout*

*Castro Is Still Alive and Still Fighting in Mountains*

This is the first of three articles by a correspondent of The New York Times who has just returned from a visit to Cuba.

By HERBERT L. MATTHEWS

Fidel Castro, the rebel leader of Cuba’s youth, is alive and fighting hard and successfully in the rugged, almost impenetrable fastnesses of the Sierra Maestra, on the southern tip of the island.

President Fulgencio Batista has the crown of his Army around the area, but the Army men are fighting a three-cornered battle to destroy the most dangerous enemy. General Batista has put in a long and adventurous career at a Cuban leader and dictator.

This is the first news that Fidel Castro is still alive and still in Cuba. He was not connected with the outside world, but in the press, he has been silent Castro, except this writer. He was in Havana, not even at the United States Embassy with all the resources for getting information, will have until this report is published that Fidel Castro is really in the Sierra Maestra.

This account, among other things, will break the greatest censorship in U.S. history of the Cuban Republic. The Province of Cuba, with its 1,900,000 inhabitants, is flourishing cities such as Santiago, Holguin and Matanzas, is shut off from Jiracuva as surely as if it were another country. Havana does

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The Habana Hilton
ARCHITECTS: Welton Becket and Associates
ASSOCIATE ARCHITECTS: Nicasio Arroyo and Gabriela Menendez
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Frederick Snares Corporation
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![Firmes junto a Fidel](image)

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