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## Sergio Giral: Filmmaking within & beyond Fidel's Cuba

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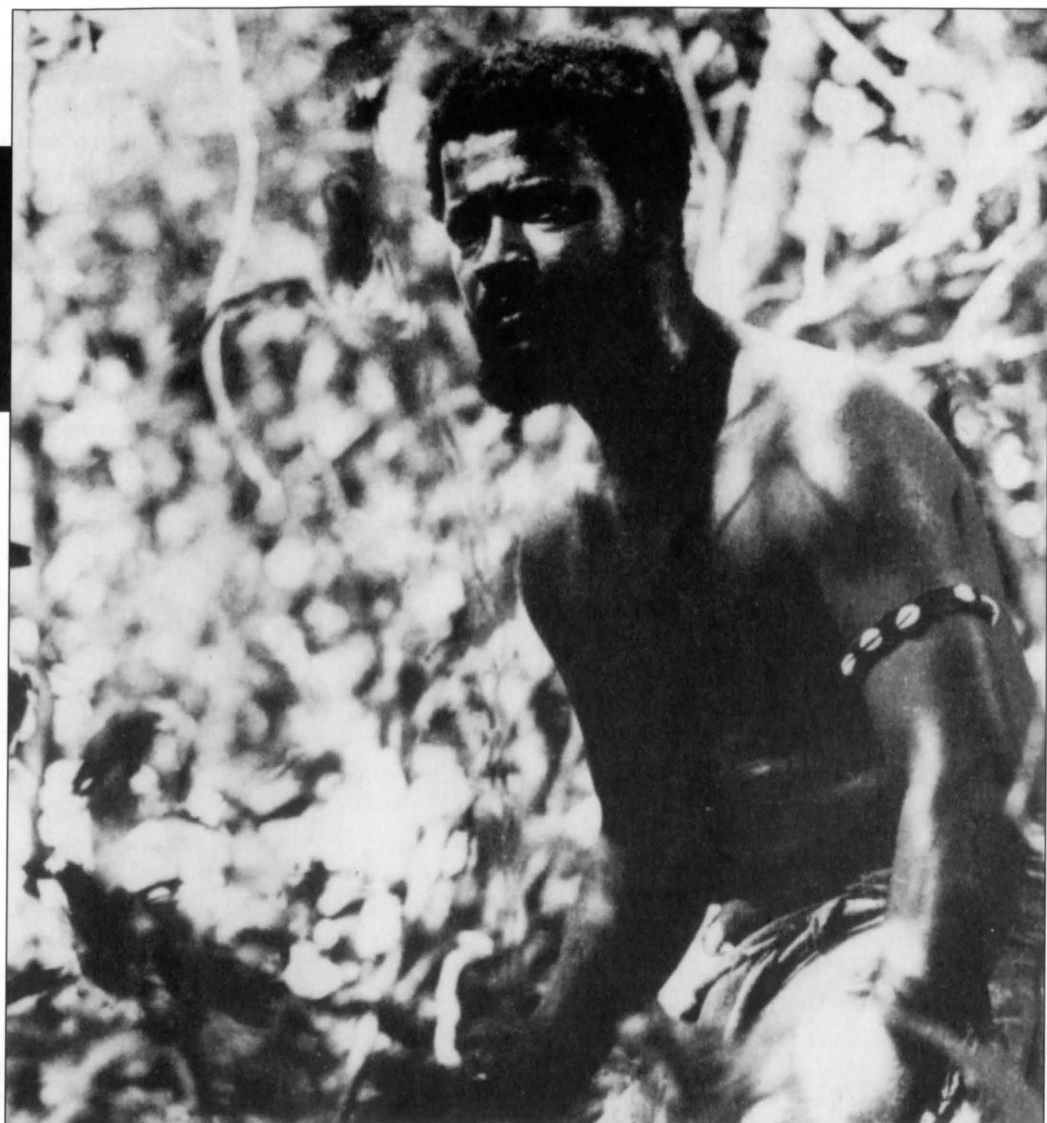
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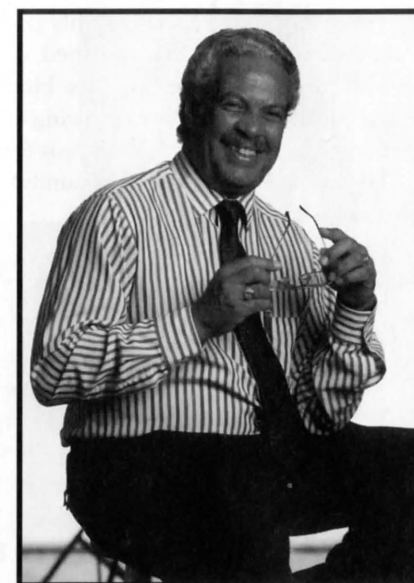


Samuel Claxton in *Ranchedador*, dir. Sergio Giral, 1976.

**In** the last few years, Cuba has become a "hot" property. Hundreds of thousands of Canadian and European tourists visit each year for some fun in the sun and a feeling of engaging an "authentic" culture, as manufactured as that authenticity may now be. Through films like *I Am Cuba*, through the high-toned culture of cigars, through a renewal of sex tourism and through the cartoonish hawkishness of the Helms-Burton axis, Cuba seems to have re-entered popular consciousness as a nostalgia effect, as some sort of throwback pre-revolutionary playground. There is a sense that Cuba is a corpse being picked over by economic and cultural nostalgia vultures, and that countries like Canada, Italy and Spain are engaging in a new form of "social democratic imperialism," hoping to beat Miami to the punch for access to post-Fidel Cuba. One person who is in a position to help illuminate Cuba's complex history and present is Sergio Giral, acclaimed Cuban

# Sergio Giral

FILMMAKING WITHIN & BEYOND FIDEL'S CUBA



## INTERVIEW WITH DAVID MCINTOSH

filmmaker whose award-winning films *El Otro Francisco*, *Maluala* and *María Antonia* have recreated and reinterpreted Cuba from a committed artistic perspective. I first met Sergio in 1986 during the Toronto International Film Festival's "Winds of Change" series, a ninety-film retrospective of New Latin American Cinema programmed by Helga Stephenson and Piers Handling, which I managed the production of. Sergio and I were the only two men dancing alone at a party celebrating this series and soon we were dancing together. We've been friends ever since, spending time together when we could in either Toronto or Havana. Recently, I realized that there were many aspects of Sergio's very full and sometimes paradoxical personal and creative life that I wanted to know more about and I was also looking to him for some sort of orientation to recent events in Cuba. This interview, conducted by e-mail, by phone and in person, is the result.

**DAVID MCINTOSH:** You've spent a great deal of your life crossing borders and boundaries—personal, artistic and national. But perhaps one of the most dramatic transitions you experienced was the change from Batista's Cuba to revolutionary Cuba in the 1950s. What memories do you have of your life in pre-revolutionary Havana? How did your experiences growing up shape your later thematic concerns in your films? For example, how did you experience racism?

**SERGIO GIRAL:** I was born in Havana, an only child, and I lived there until I was ten. My father and his family were middle-class whites and I was raised in that environment and those traditions. Other than me, my mother was the only Black member of the family. She was born in New York, one of three daughters of a Hispanic American father and a Black Cuban mother. When she was young, my mother worked as a "prêt-à-porter" couturier, in Cuba and New York. She is an intelligent, practical woman and she now lives in Miami with me. My father was an artist, who worked as an accountant, but he really loved to paint, sculpt, and he loved politics and movies. I attended a Catholic elementary school, named LaSalle, run by a French order of Brothers. During my childhood I wasn't very aware of racial differences and their impact on society. I never felt any sort of direct discrimination, until I began to look at girls. Then, things changed. I couldn't aspire to those white girls that grew up next to me and were becoming my best friends, girlfriends. Also the private social clubs reserved for my social and economic class were also closed to my membership, even though my father and his family belonged. My religious education had told me that all men were equal in front of God, but never told me it didn't apply when it came to love and marriage. Both my parents took great pains to give me the best education and assure a good future for me. It is also important to know that Cuban racial culture, for lack of a better term, has three main categories—white, Black and mulatto. The mulatto category is a historical product of sexual relations between white masters and Black female slaves, starting over 300 years ago. People in this racial category achieved a better social and economic position starting in the colonial period and on through the Republican period, from 1920 to 1958. And having a white father as the head of the family meant even more. Mulatto was a privileged racial status in a racially prejudiced society. Yet, we have to understand that Cuban racism is mild compared to traditional U.S. racism. There were social and economic differences in Cuba, but never hate or scorn.

**MCINTOSH:** What role did santeria and Yoruba religion play in your life as a child?

**GIRAL:** I never had contact with any religion but Catholicism as a child. The Yoruba religion, or santeria, was considered back then as a low-class and profane cult. This religion brought by Black slaves to Cuba mixed with the

Catholic religion, becoming the most popular belief system among Blacks and the poor, although many whites who belonged to higher classes were firm believers in this cult as the solution to their earthly adversities. When I returned to Cuba in 1959, my urge to learn and experience everything about Cuban culture lead me to investigate santeria, and I discovered it was one of the highest cultural and spiritual expressions of the Cuban people. Yet I don't practise any religion. I'm an agnostic.

**MCINTOSH:** Despite its heritage as the primary intellectual and economic centre of the Caribbean, Batista's Havana is commonly considered to have been highly decadent and impoverished, overrun by U.S. Mafia and the '50s version of sex tourists. How does this image relate to your own experiences growing up then?

What was the actual effect of the Batista regime on you and your family?

**GIRAL:** As I said, my father was an artist and a politician. He belonged to the Cuban Democratic Party that was overthrown by Batista's coup d'état. My father's best friend was a Congressman who had to flee to the U.S., as did the rest of his friends in the Party. He felt alone and frustrated and decided to leave Cuba too. That was my first exile. By then Havana was a very fast city, enjoying all the privileges of being the U.S.'s back yard. The latest cars and fashion were rolling around the city streets. Nightlife was something incomparable to any other at that moment, gambling everywhere from the luxurious hotel casinos to the dark streets of Chinatown, live entertainment everywhere from exclusive cabarets to popular neighbourhood joints. Havana never slept, much as New York doesn't now. You could find in Havana whatever was prohibited in New York. Yes, there was prostitution and poverty, like in any other Latin American or underdeveloped Third World country, but there was light, music, dancing, hope.

**MCINTOSH:** Did you see a lot of movies then?

**GIRAL:** Because my father was a movie fan, I started going to movies with him when I was a baby. I've seen every picture shown in Havana during the '40s and '50s. Later in my life, when I've gone to an art cinema or a cinemathèque to see what is considered an old classic film, I've discovered images that bring back visual memories from my childhood. Hollywood gave me a basic education and Europe, especially the Italian neorealists and the French realists, became my inspiration to become a filmmaker.

**MCINTOSH:** What was it like moving from Havana to New York? Was it a shock? How did you adapt?

**GIRAL:** Moving to New York was a wonderful experience. My parents began to work immediately and I had to learn

English with a private teacher so I could go to school. We lived in the Bronx in the beginning and then moved to Manhattan. As a teenager I felt very comfortable in New York. I dropped out of high school to take painting classes at the Art Student League. Going to movies on Times Square was my favourite thing to do, until I met another young guy who invited me to Greenwich Village. I was seventeen then. Every dream and fantasy I had nursed in my mind became possible and real in that small town.

**MCINTOSH:** Who did you hang out with? Who were your friends?

**GIRAL:** Although I was still straight, I really enjoyed the gay scene. Many of my friends turned out to be homosexuals and I immersed myself in their world until it became my own private Village. I had a couple of girlfriends. Rachel was a Jewish girl from a wealthy family who used to hang around the Village and was fascinated with my paintings. We were lovers and used to hang out in bohemian jazz joints. Then came Corine, a Black American girl who was a model, and then Jerry, my first male lover and intellectual guru. I am writing a novel about my days in the Village, all the constant emotion and discovery. My real friends were bohemians, masters of illusion, alcoholics, nymphomaniacs, poets and dreamers. All crazy. I used to wait tables in the Playhouse Café and in an Italian café named Toni, just across from the San Remo Café. We used to meet every night and talk and drink till dawn. I remember the day Allen Ginsberg read his poems at the San Remo and he really enjoyed my paintings that were being shown there. We became friends and he got to know about Cuba through me. Years later he visited Cuba and was thrown out of the island by Castro's police. At some point I met Bob, who was my second male lover. Bob was my age, eighteen, an Irish American kid who was living in a rehabilitation house for dysfunctional youth, but he only lived there because it was free and secure. We moved in together and that was my first time living a completely gay life. After two years, the love affair ended and I made a U-turn. Nicole, a French model, used to visit the Playhouse Café. I met her there, we fell in love and married. We went to Cuba, but she didn't like it and returned to New York. We had a son, Michel, who I finally met twenty years later during the New York Film Festival. Michel died three years ago, and I still love him with all my heart.

**MCINTOSH:** What made you decide to stay in Cuba and work with the revolution in 1959 when Fidel toppled Batista. What were your hopes or expectations of the revolution?

**GIRAL:** As I mentioned, my wife Nicole had a bad experience in Havana because Cubans were not used to seeing a blonde, blue-eyed woman walking around with a "coloured" guy. She didn't like that and went home. Then the Revolution happened. My father was expecting, like the rest of the Cuban people, a change in the country's fate. The revolution seemed to be offering salvation and he decided to stay. I went back to New York looking for Nicole but I



Miguel Benavides in *El Otro Francisco*, dir. Sergio Giral, 1974.

couldn't find her, and I returned to Cuba in 1959. My son Michel was born that year. To talk about the revolutionary experience is very contradictory. In the beginning, there was a lot of hope, founded on new laws and a new order. A revolution, French, Russian or Cuban, is a historical accident that in the beginning affects minorities and suits the majority, and turns around to be the opposite in the end. It is a paradoxical matter of convenience and dreams. In my case the revolution meant a change of life, a fascinating adventure. Like everyone else, I fell in love with the revolution. People in Havana, "The Last Flesh Spot in the Western World" as *Post Magazine* called it in the '50s, were immersed in joy and fiestas, unaware of what was about to unfold.

**MCINTOSH:** One of the first acts of the new Castro government was to create ICAIC, the Cuban Film Institute, and a film industry where previously there had been virtually no production. You began working there in 1961. How exactly did you start working at ICAIC and what was the mood there in those early days?

**GIRAL:** When I was waiting tables at the Playhouse Café in New York, I'd met a young Spanish Cuban man waiting on tables like me, who loved films as much as I did. His name was Nestor Almendros and he was as gay as me. Back in Havana I ran into him. Nestor was a director of photography

and a film director at the newborn ICAIC and he invited me to work with him there. Although I considered myself a painter I was tempted by the offer and followed him. What started as a love infatuation became a great friendship until he decided to leave Cuba and go into exile. I had to make new friends and companions at ICAIC.

**MCINTOSH:** What kind of training did you undergo? Who did you work with?

**GIRAL:** Sara Gómez, Nicolás Guillén and I were the only Blacks working there. I was basically self-taught. We had a few advisors like Chris Marker, Theodore Christensen and Joris Ivens, and the possibility to meet and interact with international filmmakers from the so-called "Western world." We were full of dreams and trying to make the most personal films. The creative atmosphere was positive. Everything seemed to be OK until there was a shift in the policies of the USSR toward its allies. Day by day freedom of expression was more and more limited by strange new government ordinances.

**MCINTOSH:** You experimented with a range of film forms in your early short films, from Godardian drama told from multiple viewpoints in *La Jaula* ('64) and constructivist anti-Vietnam War agitprop montage in *La muerte de J.J. Jones* ('66) to popular documentary in your homage to the great Cuban singer Benny Moré, *Que buena canta Vd* ('73). What kinds of institutional or intellectual processes did you go through in making these films?

**GIRAL:** Despite new government restrictions, at ICAIC we were still in contact with the best work coming from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, as well as the directors. I found in their films a free space to move inside the narrow limits of expression in a totalitarian regime. That didn't last for too long. In 1968 the Soviet tanks entered Prague and killed the illusion. I, like the others, had to learn how to move in quicksand. Because I cared a lot about African heritage in Cuban culture and society, I took that road that led me to most of my films' themes. Yet, I would have liked to venture into more universal subjects, as I did with my first fiction film, *La Jaula*, which was never released. I had to re-invent my passion for filmmaking, and so I made *The Death of J.J. Jones* and dedicated it to my son

Michel, fearing that someday, as a young American boy, he would face the same soldier's fate. I always focused on emotional subjects where the individual took the main role, not society, as the rules then demanded. I managed to select themes that gave me the opportunity to depict human dramas in the most universal form I could imagine, successfully or not. My encounter with "History" was born out of personal need, and a professional one in order to survive as an artist. But the unexplored, dark side of human beings is the one that seduced me the most, and the one I always have wanted to reflect in my films. In Cuba, that was impossible. I had great ambitions of directing feature films but didn't get the chance until 1974, when Titón (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea) proposed that I write and direct the film that came to be *The Other Francisco*. Why it took me so long to arrive at my final goal, I don't know. Ask the wind.

**MCINTOSH:** Another aspect of life in Cuba in the 1960s was documented by Nestor Almendros in his film *Improper Conduct*. Considered dissidents, many gays were arrested and placed in work camps, or umaps. What impact did this state repression have on your life? How were you treated as a gay man?

**GIRAL:** *Improper Conduct* was and is a film banned in

Cuba. When I saw it I was shocked, because I wasn't prepared to face the truth the way Nestor had. In Castro's system you develop a form of self-censorship that is also a form of self-protection. The film is striking and truthful. Since the late '60s the Castro government systematically persecuted homosexuals, creating an entire system of detention and incarceration, the UMAs. In my story *Los hijos de Lot*, I describe the methods and consequences of the UMAs, the humiliating destruction of human beings for their sexual orientation. I felt betrayed, scorned and defrauded. I thought of leaving the country, but I had married again in 1962, this time to a Cuban American government translator. We had a child, Sergio Jr., but our marriage was tormented. Finally she left, leaving me with the child, sort of like *Kramer vs. Kramer*. My parents and I took good care of him and Sergio grew up as a happy and well-loved boy. He's an artist now. When the UMAs were established my son was three years old. I couldn't leave him behind and I couldn't take him with me. So I decided to live out my fate. Alfredo Guevara was director of ICAIC and despite his narrow personal links with the Castro brothers, he knew how to protect his institution from the gay pogrom. Because I was



Above: Still from *María Antonia*, 1990, 111 min.



working at ICAIC and I wasn't "overtly" homosexual I didn't suffer persecution, but I had to watch valued friends and artistic personalities go to forced labour camps and stay there for years, until international public opinion pushed Castro to try to cover his mistake. *Improper Conduct* was an invaluable factor in destroying the UMAPs. Such a sad and almost unbelievable story.

**MCINTOSH:** The 1960s saw a virtual explosion in formally innovative and politically committed cinema throughout Latin America—directors like Glauber Rocha, Ruy Guerra and Carlos Diegues in Brazil, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in Argentina, Jorge Sanjinés in Bolivia, Miguel Littín in Chile. In Cuba, Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* ('68) and Humberto Solas' *Lucia* ('68) established ICAIC as a major force in new Latin American cinema. It seems as though Che's vision of a continental revolution was becoming a reality at least in cinematic terms. What impact did this explosion have on you?

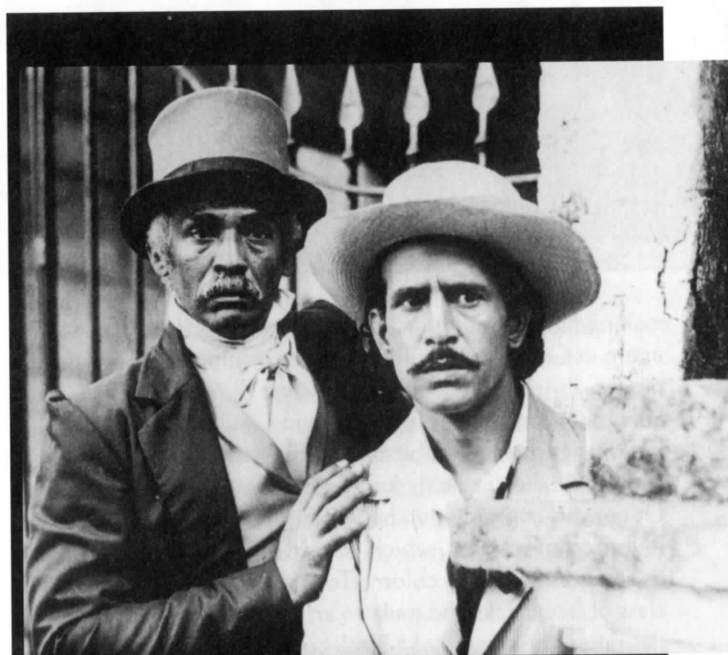
**GIRAL:** This explosion of Latin American films and filmmakers was basically inspired by the Cuban revolution and was politically supported by Castro's regime. ICAIC offered the infrastructure and facilities of a professional film industry to poor and anonymous filmmakers. Many directors finished their work at ICAIC or started new projects and achieved international recognition thanks to this political link. Of course, this has nothing to do with the Brazilian *Cinema Nuovo*. That current was authentically nationalist and existed outside of the Brazilian Military Junta and the Cuban Revolution. *Cinema Nuovo do Brasil* is one of the most important and seductive Latin American film currents. Argentina and Peru also brought their work and artists to Cuba, and after the Chilean coup d'état, many Chilean filmmakers came to Cuba as political refugees and finished or began projects. I've seen all those films. The best and the worst of them. And I've met all the directors. Some of them are my personal friends, others I haven't heard from since I came back to the States. Some don't care about me anymore because I've chosen to live under the Imperialist Eagle's wing.

**MCINTOSH:** After the initial burst of successful films in Cuba in 1968, it seems another wave occurred in the early 1970s, which you played a critical role in creating. In 1974 you directed *El Otro Francisco*, your first feature film and the first film in a trilogy of historical reconsiderations of slavery in Cuba in the 1800s. This trilogy, which includes *Ranchedor* ('76) and *Maluala* ('79), was a massive undertaking that goes far beyond historical recreation. The films are innovative structurally and conceptually, they deconstruct global economic processes in complex but clear ways. They are such a welcome tonic to the cloying melodrama of American period films like *Gone with the Wind*. What were your objectives in delving into the historical conditions of slavery and presenting a critical view of this history to a contemporary Cuban public?

**GIRAL:** Race relations and Black Cuban culture were not only my themes, but life experiences. The Cuban government proclaimed equality of rights among races in 1959, and in practice it seemed to happen. Black Cubans were free to enter any place deemed "private" before the revolution, and there was no discrimination in housing or the workplace. But Black Cubans were not as well prepared as whites to claim a place in the new system of opportunism. Blacks stayed back, kept a well understood position of reserve. History had taught them to be suspicious and distrustful. As slaves, Blacks were an essential, determining factor in the accumulation of wealth in the nineteenth century, under the most degrading conditions for human beings. Masters freed their slaves and turned them into soldiers, and without these Black soldiers there would have been no independence from Spain. All of that was systematically forgotten and erased from collective memory. My trilogy vindicates that part of Black Cuban history that was marginalized for so long.

**MCINTOSH:** Another key filmmaker of this second wave of Cuban films in the mid-1970s was Sara Gómez, another Black director, whose only feature *One Way or Another* ('74) deals with many of the themes you have addressed, but in very different terms. What kind of relationship did you have with her?

**GIRAL:** Sara Gómez was a good friend of mine. She was anxious to interpret the role of Blacks in Cuban society. Because she was a woman and coming from a working middle-class family, her points of view were different than mine. I cared about the essence, she cared about the facts. In *One Way or Another*, Sara was the first to place contemporary



Still from *Plácido*.

Black characters in Cuban films and to focus on their social and cultural traditions, such as santería, machismo and social exclusion. She was sensitive and extraordinarily intelligent, a loving mother of three children, but she was a chronic asthmatic and died of a respiratory arrest. I think she couldn't take it anymore and the suffocation of the regime killed her.

**MCINTOSH:** In the 1980s you made films that were never released, like *Techo de Vidrio*. What happened to it? Was it suppressed?

**GIRAL:** In 1981 I felt the need to leave history and deal with the present, so I made *Techo de Vidrio* (Glass Roof), which dealt with bureaucracy and corruption. The film was made under police surveillance and finally banned by Fidel Castro himself. That was a real blow below the belt. It took me a long time to recover, and only five years later did they allow me to continue my film career. I had to go back into history in order to protect my personal security and keep on

(The Staircase) because the Blacks suspected of being involved were tied to a staircase and whipped to death. Because Plácido was a poet and part of a political current, he was scapegoated and accused of leading the conspiracy. He was tried, tortured, condemned to death and executed by firing squad. During his torture, the colonial authorities tried to get him to denounce those involved in the conspiracy, mostly the white aristocrats who were betraying Spain and the free mulattos who were creating a new economic class. As far as history tells this story, Plácido denounced others to escape death and then later retracted his statements. I empathized with his psychology and his fate. In my research I realized that Plácido was consigned to being an obscure historical figure because he was very contradictory. Some consider him a traitor and others a martyr. I decided to give my own artistic view of Plácido, and again the film wasn't well received by Cuban officials. One more contradiction to fill my bucket. Out of boredom and despair I decided to face consequences and I proposed the film *María Antonia*, an obscure and damned story about love, betrayal and death.

**MCINTOSH:** *María Antonia* was made in the economically restricted context of the "Special Period" that Fidel declared after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of Russian support and imports to Cuba. This is your most conventionally narrative work, a very sensual story set in pre-revolutionary working-class Havana. One of the unusual aspects of this film is that while it is obviously set in the 1950s, it captures the tone and ambience of life in contemporary Cuba, as if the two periods separated by almost forty years slide back and forth between each other. Can you explain this phenomenon?

**GIRAL:** *María Antonia* is based on a stage play, written by Eugenio Hernández Espinosa. The play premiered in 1965, and it was a popular hit, attracting a wide general audience. Those were years of dogmatism and intolerance in Cuba though. The most outstanding artists and writers suffered persecution and ostracism, and because the play portrayed the marginal sector, dealt with santería, and the characters were Blacks and mulattos, state censors shelved it for years. Year after year I proposed this project and was always turned down. When the worst of the "dogmatic" era had passed the play was released again, and I moved forward with the film. But so many things had happened since the play premiered, that the story seemed to be set at the wrong moment. Armando Dorrego wrote



*Homophobia = Dictatorship*, community-based project, 1997.  
Billboard in Miami to promote "Equal Rights Ordinance."

making films. That's how I came to make *Plácido*. A tragic figure in Cuban history, Plácido was the nineteenth-century poet, Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés. Born of an illicit affair between a Spanish woman and a mulatto man, he was left in an orphanage at birth and registered racially as "looks white." He didn't exactly know which world he belonged to. Out of this contradiction he became a member of the Reformist movement, which wanted Cuba to move beyond its status as a Spanish colony. To undermine the growing class of free Blacks and mulatto artisans, the colonial authorities raised the spectre of a Black conspiracy against whites, the spectre of the Haitian revolution. This apocryphal conspiracy of Blacks against whites was known as *La Escalera*

the script. He belongs to the post-revolutionary generation and he's less compromised with the past. He updated the story and situations to the present, but to avoid censorship I placed it in a period context, the '50s. The result is ambiguous, because the present and the past are mixed, much like in Cuba today. The characters' passions and despairs are very similar to those trapped in actual Cuban circumstances.

**MCINTOSH:** You and your partner Armando Dorrego decided to emigrate from Cuba to Miami in 1992, where you've lived since. How did you decide to move back to the U.S., almost forty years after first having left?

**GIRAL:** My son Sergio had married a French filmmaker and moved to Paris. During a trip to attend a film festival there I decided to apply for my American passport and it was granted. I was free at last and I came back to the USA. Since then I've been living in Miami, sharing an apartment with Armando, my best companion, and I've learned how to live in the Cuban exile community. I worked as an art and film critic for five years in a weekly local magazine, and I've started my own film and video company, producing my own shorts and documentaries, like *The Broken Image*, which deals with Cuban filmmakers in exile, and *Hope & Pride*, which documents the Miami gay community's struggle to achieve a human rights ordinance against discrimination in housing and the workplace. As you can see, I keep on being involved with minority struggles.

**MCINTOSH:** One of the few Cuban films to achieve wide international success in the last few years was Gutiérrez Alea's *Strawberry and Chocolate*, the story of the relationship between a homosexual and a Communist party militant, set in the 1970s. After you and other gay directors in ICAIC had presented film projects over the years with homosexual themes, only to be rejected, what impact did the making of this film have on your sense of a place in ICAIC? How do you see that film?

**GIRAL:** *Strawberry and Chocolate* is the story of an emotional and intellectual but not a physical relationship between a homosexual and a Communist party militant, and this is exactly what I resent about the film. The homosexual character is shown as an "effeminate" gay, in the most conservative homophobic sense. As opposed to the Communist boy, this character is refined, cultured and prejudiced. He can't stand the Cuban hot season and the streets full of Blacks. He's a perfect role model for how Castro's regime pictures "gusanos." As a human being he is effective enough to gain the confidence of a young Communist party militant, but not seductive enough to drag him into bed. Homosexual sex is condemned once again. I don't think that Gutiérrez Alea necessarily wanted to convey this message, but maybe he had to sweeten the plot in order to pass censorship. There was a need to rehabilitate the national image of the treatment of

homosexuals and *Strawberry and Chocolate* offered the perfect opportunity. The young Communist remains immaculate and untouched, the gay man leaves the island. The film is well acted and stylish, as it should be coming from Titón, the most outstanding Cuban film director, but its effectiveness is just a mirage in the middle of the desert.

**MCINTOSH:** You are currently working as the director of Miami's Festival of the Americas, so you see a lot of work in the course of your programming. The movement that captured the world's attention in the 1960s and '70s has come and gone, has effectively become a part of film history, and new themes and approaches have emerged. What directions do you see work by young film and video artists taking?

**GIRAL:** I started the *Festival de las Americas, Cine Independiente de Latino America y el Caribe* (Festival of the Americas, Independent Film of Latin America and the Caribbean) in 1997 with "Made in USA," a festival of films and videos made by Cubans in exile. The second edition had a Pan American program and some work from the USA. It is sponsored by Alliance for Media Arts, the only non-profit film and video society in Florida. I show all sorts of work in any language, as long as they are independent and have something to do with Latin America or the Caribbean, yet local independent filmmakers are welcome too. It is a free space where filmmakers from all over the Americas can show their films, no matter the format or length. Most of the films we show are not mainstream, and don't necessarily respond to market demands. Most are based on personal points of view about life and human behaviour, and the social and political situation in their region. Last year I had a special Puerto Rican program and I also showed Ela Troyano's films for the first time in Miami. We also had films from Argentina, Martinique, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Curacao, Mexico, and the premiere of three documentaries about Cuba including *La Patria es de Todos*, a deeply moving documentary shot in Cuba about the most significant voices of the dissident movement.

**MCINTOSH:** Is life good for you now?

**GIRAL:** I am happy enough to call myself a happy man. I don't do everything I want to, neither does anybody else. I would like to make another film, and I am writing a script now. For an artist to create, there is a unique sense of life required, yet most of my fellow Cuban directors remain on the island and sacrifice the best part of their life in hopes of making a film. I respect their decision but I don't share it. I am loved by my mother, my son, grandchildren and lover. What else can I ask for?

*David McIntosh is a Toronto-based critic and curator who teaches Queer Theory at the Ontario College of Art and Design. He is currently writing a book on contemporary Canadian cinema.*