

THE GRAPHIC GENERATION OF REVOLUTION

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Unlike the ubiquitous commercial advertisements found in the United States, the visual landscape in Cuba contains thousands of billboards, posters, and murals that deliver political and social messages to the public. These range from celebrating diplomatic collaboration with ally nations, to decrying Cuban antiterrorist agents held prisoner abroad, to eradicating the mosquitoes that carry dengue fever. The messages of the moment are often determined by the domestic and international sociopolitical contexts. Outdoor signage in Cuba is an extremely “ephemeral” medium whose content frequently changes to respond “to the particular need of the hour” (Stavans 2006; Kunzle 1975, 100–101). Cuban billboards (see Image 1) feature a wide variety of political, social, economic and cultural subjects. When he was a young insurrectionist, Fidel Castro wrote that “propaganda...is the soul of every struggle” (Nichols 1982).

This article presents a thematic analysis of outdoor messages about Cuba’s future targeted at younger generations of Cubans. The key finding is two-fold: first, recent political propaganda represents Cuban youth as a renewed incarnation of previous national leaders; and second, it presents the cultural products

of the Revolution as the very tools the youth need to continue the Revolution.²

Messages about the future aimed at youth are especially important because the continuation of the Revolution, upon the exit of the aging historical leaders, depends on maintaining the ideological allegiance and active participation of the younger generations. Furthermore, the code of “generation” has been perennially salient in the discourse of Cuban political culture since long before the Revolution of 1959.

Image 1. Sin Propaganda No Hay Movimiento de Masas [Without Propaganda, There is No Mass Movement]



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2. Revolution, when capitalized, refers to the political regime and attendant social projects that have been ascendant in Cuba since 1959. This is both how the regime refers to itself and the shorthand that scholars and lay observers often employ. A lower case spelling of revolution connotes the more general sociological concept of a complete upturn of political and social systems.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GENERATIONS IN CUBAN POLITICAL CULTURE

In his work on the ideological roots of the Cuban Revolution, Nelson Valdés (1978) has shown how Cuban politics, from as early as the 19th century through the 1950s insurrection and the consolidation of the Revolution, has played out, rhetorically and tactically, in generational terms. The Cuban sociologist María Isabel Domínguez (2000) has written on the challenges of achieving integration into the Revolution of the generation that came of age in the economically depressed Special Period (after the end of Soviet subsidization). Domínguez wrote:

In a general sense, the rise of a new generation is evident: the generation of the 1990s, protagonist of certain ruptures in relation with their elders, in some ways comparable with those produced at the root of the triumph of the Revolution in the sense of the search for more appropriate references to the concrete moments that they live in and with a larger space for self-definition for the youth themselves, that does not mean resign themselves to the goals of their predecessors, but to redefinitions tempered to the new national and international conditions that have materialized (2000, 15).

Cuba's future—by definition—requires a central role for youth. Subjective political thought in Cuba has always considered society's course to hinge on the younger generation. In 1952, a 25 year-old Fidel Castro wrote “the Revolutionary Party requires a revolutionary leadership, young and from the ranks of the people” (Castro Ruz 2007).

Empirically, too, the cohort effect thesis has borne out. The failed 1933 revolution and the repression and unemployment of the Batista years increased favorability toward the revolution in those political generations (Zeitlin 1966). Similarly, coming of age during the depressed socioeconomic circumstances of the 1990s has influenced the outlook of today's youth. María Isabel Domínguez has attributed as a defining characteristic of this “transitional generation,” “the search and adaptation to a different situation, not yet completely specified and delineated, full of contradictory tendencies, to which socializing institutions do not hold all the answers” (2000, 25).

Cubans coming of age at the dawn of the new millennium have been called “the Generation of Unbe-

lief” (Pedraza 2008) and “Pragmatists” versus “Disengaged” (Krull and Kobayashi 2009). Their life courses have not coincided with the high points of the Revolution, with moments of hope and inspiration. Many do not see a future in their beloved homeland—while others resign themselves to Revolutionary resistance (Pedraza 2008; Krull and Kobayashi 2009). Some Cuban youth are turned off by the lack of meritocratic advancement mechanisms in the overly politicized country (Ichikawa Morin 2003). Clearly, if there shall be any hope for continuation of the Revolution, a goal of Cuban propaganda would be to gain allegiance from this younger set, or at least to staunch disaffection.

This study mostly limits its focus to the manifest appearance of outdoor signage—not intended meaning of their designers or forms of perception and message reception at the level of the audience. In doing so, I follow one level of analysis laid out by Riessman (2008), in which “data are interpreted in light of the semantics developed by the investigator” (54). I forego a deep reading between the lines and exploration of textual silences, in favor of a literal take on the substantive data before me. The questions guiding my research are: How are signs about youth and the future composed? What messages do these signs contain?

PREVIOUS LITERATURE ON CUBAN PROPAGANDA

The phenomenon of an epoch's political ambience finding representation in public spaces has been most significantly developed for the Cuban case by Marial Iglesias Utset. Her book, *Las metáforas del cambio en la vida cotidiana*, depicts the symbolic contestation that took place in the public sphere during the interregnum between Spanish and U.S. imperial domination (2003). Geopolitical developments found local reflection in the display and displacement of metropolitan regalia; all the while an embryonic Cuban national identity first claimed its modes of expression.

The relationship between the sociopolitical and corresponding graphic representations has also been touched on for the early days of the Cuban Revolution. Jorge R. Bermúdez has described how “media intervened by the revolutionary government echoed

the many popular demonstrations,” and only after “another important political event” occurred would “a new communication cycle begin” (2000, 51–52).

One of the most celebrated aspects of the early decades of the Cuban revolution was the “discriminatingly eclectic” cultural policy which shunned the austere social realism of the Soviet Union in favor of a self-styled “mulatto” dynamic that drew upon diverse visual languages from across the artistic globe (Kunzle 1975, 94; Craven 2002, 76). The most famous medium to emerge from Cuba’s state-sponsored cultural movement was the poster—the “golden age” of which has been rigorously examined in volumes of reproductions (Stermer 1970), museum exhibition companion essays (Kunzle 1997; Cushing 2003; Davidson 2006), and scholarly analyses (Kunzle 1975; Craven 2002).

The poster seems to have attracted Cuban artists and captivated critics precisely because it is a medium that so starkly and publicly (dare I say graphically) represents the shift in modes of production (and consumption). Originally devised to serve capitalism—by reducing public space to the targeting of individual consumers for private gain (Craven 2002, 95)—visual mass media in Cuba now “addresses an undifferentiated mass of people *on behalf* of something public” (Sontag 1970, xv [her italics]). In the struggle to create socialism in the face of capitalist aggression, “the use of the poster and the billboard in Cuba,” David Craven notes, “entailed a rupture with the hegemonic use of [capitalism’s] visual language” (2002, 95). Applying the analogy of Che Guevara’s guerrilla techniques, David Kunzle has remarked that Cuba “turn[ed] upon the enemy, the enemy’s own cultural weapons” (1975). In the view of these scholars, the “visually aggressive” poster has been a necessary tool in combating visible aggression (Sontag 1970, vii).

Another important facet of Cuba’s poster campaigns was their contribution to the revolutionary goal of “democratizing” culture (Craven 2002, 85). Mass distribution of posters sought to “expand and enrich aesthetic values and appreciation” and encourage critically engaged cultural production at a popular level (Romo 2006, 53).

In addressing visual mass media in Cuba, art historians and cultural critics have by and large concentrated their discussions on aesthetics, revolutionary ideals, and the socialist expropriation of capitalist communication channels—whereby the seizure of the medium changed the message. However, there have only been modest attempts at examining the role that the poster has played in ideological indoctrination and maintenance of state hegemony. Sontag writes that the Cuban state uses messaging in the public sphere for “ideological mobilization” in (perpetual) “periods of crisis”; and she also notes that posters exist as “an extremely literal means of creating values” (1970, xii, xvi). This is important in the Weberian sense that the legitimacy of a revolutionary regime rests on the public’s acceptance of the new set of values introduced by leaders (Goldstone 2002, 200). In the Cuban case, posters provided new codes, “stimulation (and simplification) of moral sentiments,” that endeavored to raise socialist consciousness and build allegiance to the sovereign nation in the shadow of imperialism (Sontag 1970, xii).

The broader subject of Cuban propaganda, as a domesticating rather than democratizing force, has been an overlooked aspect of the Cuban Revolution. However, there are a few relevant works that deal with propaganda as an instrument of social control. In his assessment of the Cuban mass media, John Spicer Nichols identified distinct control functions performed by the print and broadcast media: *distribution control*, which is the socialization of appropriate political norms; and *feedback control*, the corrective communication process between subsystems, such as between media agencies or from the public up to state-media administrators (1982). This work touches on the controlling/empowering dialectic of Cuban cultural policy, but does not incorporate outdoor signage.

Sociologist Benigno Aguirre also speaks about restraint and freedom in formal and informal social control systems in Cuba (2002). Aguirre argues—in contrast to the romantic conceptions endemic in studies of Cuban visual media—that the Cuban government employs “a language of reconstructed myths

and rituals” to hold sway over the population; that it concertedly maintains a monopoly on the recounting of national history in order to inhibit alternative interpretations and, thus, notions of alternative political futures (2002, 72). Aguirre also points out that role of Cuban propaganda remains “a topic on which scholarship is scant” (2002, 72).

METHOD

The universe of Cuban signs from which I sampled are all billboards, posters, murals, and other graphic propaganda publicly displayed throughout the island in the years 2007 to 2009. This period is important in terms of regime stability and continuance of the Revolution because a rare leadership transition occurred. In fall 2006, Cuban President Fidel Castro fell ill and temporarily ceded his authorities, and then in spring 2008 Raúl Castro officially took over as President of the Council of State.

The sample is non-random, but in my estimation has reached saturation; that is, it would be difficult to find a contemporaneous message that does not appear in my data set. While field research took place in every province, the vast majority of time was spent in and around Havana. I am confident that my data set contains nearly all possible national messages; however, my data set is not broadly representative of all regional and local messages.

I collected data by taking photographs of every sign that I came across in dozens of attempts to canvass a diverse number of locations such as highways, neighborhoods, shopping districts, tourist zones, and rural villages. Often times I would take public transportation to ensure that the images I encountered were representative of those Cubans are exposed to in their everyday life.

To analyze the collected images, I am relying on a qualitative interpretivist epistemology. Previous literature on Cuban propaganda has employed a similar method of interpretation (Gropa 2007; Ortega 2008).

The images of outdoor graphics cover a wide variety of topics. I sorted through nearly three thousand images and performed initial classification of images into broad topics such as the five heroes, energy revo-

lution, political unity, economic production, youth and the future, health care, the U.S. blockade, and many others. For the purposes of this paper, I chose to focus on the category of youth and the future because this topic is critical to the preservation of the Revolution—and thus the continued salience of the other topics.

Once I narrowed my focus to the category of youth and the future, I began coding the images according to their content. I focused on explicit text, graphic design, incorporated photographs, color scheme, and the overall gestalt of each observation. From this set of codes, I narrowed my focus further to two recurring themes: cultural repertoires and incarnation.

DISCUSSION OF SELECTED THEMES

Having chosen messages about generations of the future, I find that they are often communicated in terms of history. Although this may sound ironic on its face, it makes sense that a regime concerned with continuity would appeal to the population of Cuba’s future in terms of an allegiance to the past.

Within the overall category of *the future in terms of history*, this paper focuses on two tactical means by which authorities target youth. First, is the notion of *cultural repertoire*—broadly interpreted as education, enlightened cultivation, the political culture, social goods and ideals that the Revolution has provided. Cuba’s cultural repertoire is both a key nationalist antecedent to the Revolution and a product of the Revolution. This dialectical depiction of the past and future history of the Revolution suggests that the 19th and early 20th century political and cultural contributions to the success of the Revolution serve as a model for how the Revolution contributes to future generations, that is, to the Revolution’s very continuance. Other sociologists have remarked on “the dialectical relationship between...identity in Cuban history and the ways in which [generations] have utilized concepts of self-identity, popular participation, and resistance to develop the capacity to make decisions in their own interests” (Krull and Kobayashi 2009).

Such a dialectical conceptualization of cultural repertoires being both determinants and products of the Revolution follows sociologist Ann Swidler’s theory

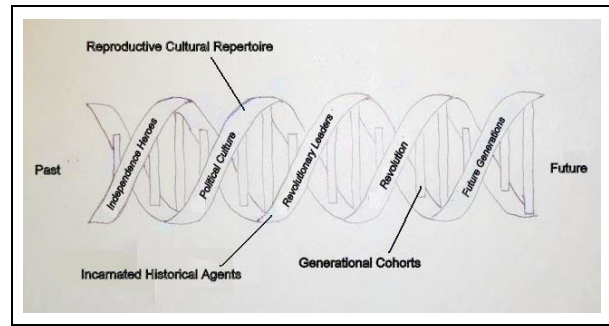
that in “unsettled periods” cultural repertoires—habits, skills, ideas—determine ideological regimes that “survive in the long run”; and in “settled periods” culture provides people resources and thus “influences action” (1986, 273). Cuban signage seems to suggest that culture is both an input and an important product of the Revolution; and the cultural legacy provided by the Revolution will inform the youth’s ability and desire to sustain it. Propaganda providing “official validation” to the younger generation can keep the “pragmatists” on board, and recruit the “disengaged” to the road to being “Fidelist” Revolutionaries and not “Oppositionalists” (Krull and Kobayashi 2009).

The second tactical means of representing history as a map for the future is what I am calling *incarnation*. This concept refers to the graphic device of depicting historic leaders as embodying the nation—or future generations embodying past national heroes. Again, a dialectical process is at work: leaders of the Revolution, above all Fidel Castro, embody the actions and ideals of figures from Cuba’s history such as José Martí; and young people are depicted as personifying the revolutionary leadership as they continue the historic path and deepen the Revolution. There are also frequent anthropomorphic representations of the island as having a human form—the country as youth in the flesh. The extension of the past into the future is viewed through this phenomenon of embodiment: the Revolution’s leaders such as Fidel Castro embody the previous national heroes; and the youth, in turn, embody Fidel Castro.

Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the general model of the strategic narrative conveyed by Cuban propaganda. At the broadest level, these messages draw from the nation’s history to provide ideological direction for the future.

As propaganda relates to or addresses the younger generations, a dialectical relationship is put forth: the Revolution has provided the cultural repertoire—the means and ideas—for young people to continue to advance the Revolution. This current transition from one generation to the next is just the latest in a sequence of torch passing. The revolutionary generation of 1959 inherited their ideas of national inde-

Figure 1. Strategic Narrative Model



pendence and Latin American unity from previous revolutionary and independence movements. Thus, the message to today’s crop of young people is that they have a duty rooted in history to continue the path begun by their antecedents.

As seen in Figure 1, the revolutionary leadership is just one of two interacting components of the model. Besides the embodied personalities involved in this narrative, there are the conditions and creations of Revolution, that is, both the political environments and cultural ingredients that produced the Revolution, and the political and social products of the Revolution. In short, the cultural repertoire that fueled and is fueled by Revolution. If a steadfast belief in sovereignty and strains of socialism characterized the situation from which the Revolution arose, then the fruits of the Revolution include education, cultural elevation, and dogged independence in the face of imperial aggression. These are the cultural repertoire handed down to the next generation.

This model of Cuban propaganda as regenerating Revolution bears resemblance to Althusser’s conception of ideology as the “ultimate condition of production,” the *sine qua non* of a regime reproducing itself in subsequent generations. Althusser (1970) wrote that:

in order to exist, every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce. It must therefore reproduce: 1. the productive forces, 2. the existing relations of production.

Therefore the messages found in Cuban signage expressly assert—through the codes of incarnation and cultural repertoire—the reproductive nature of the Cuban Revolution.

Supporting my overall interpretation, the mural below (Image 2) speaks to the dialectical path of official Cuban history. When it says that Cuba “will not return to the past,” it means that it will not return to the dependent neo-colonial pseudo-republic past. Hence, it will remain on the nationalist socialist “dialectic path.”

Image 2. Cuba seguirá su rumbo dialéctico...No regresará jamás al pasado! [Cuba will continue its dialectic path...It will never return to the past!]



It might be helpful to conceive of the dynamic double helix in Figure 1 as an interaction between cultural structure and agency. The past heralds the future via figures acting in an environment conditioned by Revolution. Cultural repertoires and embodying heroes zip together at each generational cohort, thereby—continuing the DNA metaphor—replicating Revolution. In the following sections, I focus on each thematic subset and provide illustrative examples.

INCARNATION

Unity has long been a ruling political exigency in Cuba, enunciated both in José Martí’s creating a sense of Cuban national identity in a united front against Spanish colonial masters and in Fidel Castro’s time of avoiding political factions in the face of US imperialism. Image 3 is a poster that reads “We Are One.” It features a mobilized crowd of young Cubans marching inside Fidel Castro’s silhouette. This image has several interconnected meanings: (1) We

are all part of Fidel; (2) We are united as one; (3) Fidel represents all of us. If the Cuban term for political rally is *manifestación*, then this poster portrays the maximum leader made manifest by the younger generation of flag-waving Cubans. The use of the silhouette hints that Fidel Castro is fading away—we only see the outline of his profile—but he is composed of the young people that succeed him. This graphic representation of embodiment shows the way ahead for the Revolution: young people remaining united in the political image of their iconic precursor.

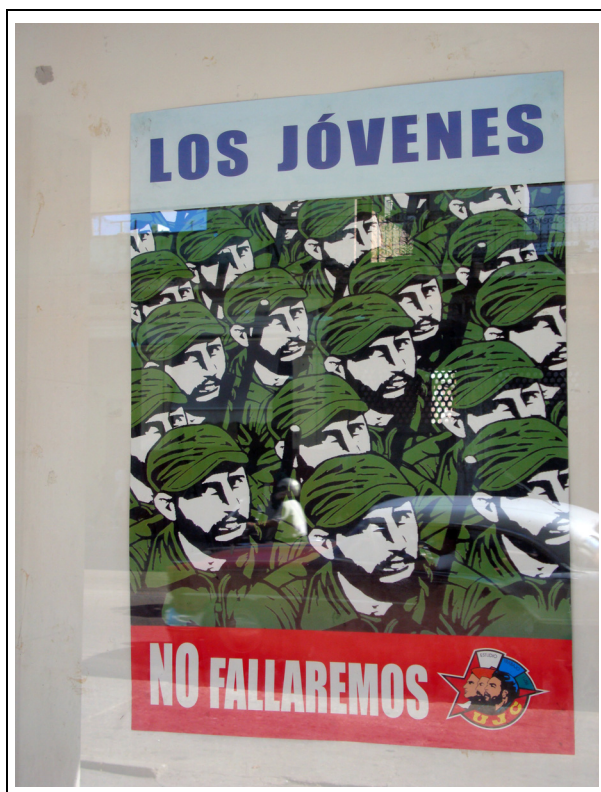
Image 3. Somos Uno [We Are One]



Incarnation also functions in the opposite direction. If, as in the previous observation, Fidel Castro can contain the young multitudes, then so too can the young people resemble Fidel Castro. In Image 4, we see a militant rank and file of young Cubans, each of whom bears the likeness of Fidel Castro. The clear message is two-fold: that the revolutionary leadership is a role model to emulate; and that the younger generation has a responsibility to follow the *históricos*’ example.

Image 5, a famous rendition of Fidel Castro in fatigues holding a rifle, comes from the very first poster of the Cuban Revolution, created in the predawn hours of January 1, 1959, by the graphic designer Eladio Rivadulla. So not only do young people take on the political identity of historic figures in their determination to “not fail,” but the poster itself employs historic imagery from a previous generation of poster. Both the latest cultural production and the young people take their cues from the past.

Image 4. Los Jóvenes...No Fallaremos
[The Youth...We Shall Not Fail]



The theme of incarnation also appears in not so literal or graphic senses. One series of billboards (Images 6 and 7) reads: “*Fidel es un país.*” The first (Image 6) features six smiling young boys and the famed rebel vessel, the *Granma*. The second (Image 7) shows three older teenagers in military uniforms. Juxtaposing these two groups of young people alongside the boat that brought the rebels to fight the Batista dictatorship helps analogize youth as the motor of history. Side by side, these billboards show that the youth is not a monolithic social category—but it comes in

Image 5. 26 de Julio [26th of July]



graduations: *pioneros* [the Cuban communist version of Boy Scouts] in school uniforms, and young men enlisted in their mandatory service in the armed forces. While not monolithic, based on these representations it appears that the youth does not include females—an unfortunate message, but also in line with the theme of repeating history.

Image 6 & 7. Fidel es un País [Fidel is a Country/The Country is Loyal]



I must point out that “Fidel” not only refers to Fidel Castro, but also has linguistic connotations to faithfulness. So the message reads “Fidel Castro is the country” or, alternatively, “The country is faithful.”

Thus, the message contains at least three distinct yet related meanings: (1) The country is loyal (to its revolutionary history, particularly Fidel Castro); (2) Fidel Castro is a country (he is monumentally important and contains multitudes); and (3) The entire country (including these boys) is like Fidel Castro.

This multiplicity of meanings gets at some of the various ways that the theme of incarnation can appear across the data. I find various permutations of incarnation: the youth are analogous to the Revolutionary generation; the youth are the country; the historic leadership of the Revolution represents the youth; the historic leaders are the country; and political leaders embody the historical heroes from before the Revolution.

The idea of current leaders such as Fidel Castro embodying 19th century heroes is exemplified by the billboard in Image 8. This thematic iteration occurs with Martí appearing in the silhouette (in the mind) of Fidel Castro, and Simon Bolivar, the liberator of Venezuela, appearing in the silhouette of Hugo Chávez, Cuba's closest present-day ally. This poster was coded as pertaining to youth because it contains the word "hijo" from a famous José Martí quote. The young Martí's 1881 quote of being "a child of America" is superimposed onto the 21st century. Contemporary Cubans are the offspring of these founding fathers, and as such they are "indebted" to the actions and ideals of that past. While Martí and Bolivar delivered independence, the unrequited dimension of their political project was the unification of the continent's peoples into a grand cause called "Our America." This regional integration is once again on the agenda in alliances such as "the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas" [ALBA], an alternative to U.S.-led free trade models (such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas [ALCA]). Cuba and the eight other ALBA countries hope for a new and cooperative dawn [*alba*] for Latin America.

Thus, the message in Image 8 can be summarized as: The older heroes and the Revolutionary leaders are one and the same. These great heroes bestowed to today's generations both a vision and the independence from colonialism needed to fulfill that vision; now today's youth are duty bound to pursue the ideals of

Image 8. De América soy hijo: a ella me debo... Por la Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas en la lucha contra el ALCA [I am a son of America: to her I am indebted]



regional integration. As the Revolutionary leaders of the 20th and 21st centuries (Fidel Castro and Chávez) follow in the footsteps of the 19th century Latin American independence heroes—the "children" of the 21st century inherit the debt to the ideal of America. In concatenations like this example, the past is linked through the present to the future, mandating the time-tested path that the younger generation should pursue.

Incarnation is not only a stylistic technique of superimposition. It also is seen in language from Fidel Castro's most famous speech, *History Will Absolve Me*, given when he was a young rebel on trial and reproduced in modern-day public space. Image 9 quotes Fidel Castro: "I take to heart the doctrines of the teacher." With Martí superimposed over him, Fidel Castro alludes to incorporating into himself Martí's ideas—and because he leads on the basis of these "doctrines," he will be proven right. That is, through this incorporation, the future will absolve his historic acts. In this choice of language, history is the future.

The theme of incarnation is also carried out by the graphic design technique of making heroes' countenances take on the shape of the landmass of Latin America. In Image 10, Che Guevara's face doubles as the map of South America—his Argentine homeland

Image 9. “...Traigo en el corazón las doctrinas del maestro...” [“...I take to heart the doctrines of the teacher...”]



and Bolivian place of death. Che embodied Latin America, and “instilled faith” in the continent that “always carries that faith on.” This technique is also applied to José Martí’s facial features, which resemble South America in Image 11. I coded this as applying to youth and the future because the quote mentions “born” and “eternal.” The message here is both a declaration that José Martí’s ideas should forever live on, and an appeal to youth to strive to act in that model so that they too might have eternal importance.

An exemplary case of youth making up the country is found on a billboard (Image 12) that appeared for the “113th Anniversary of the Re-initiation of the War of Independence.” It features a quote from José Martí: “The homeland is made by the merit of its children.” This billboard claims that the nation de-

Image 10. **llevaremos siempre la fe que nos inculcaste...Aniversario 42 de la caída de Ernesto Che Guevara** [we will always carry the faith that you instilled in us...42nd anniversary of the fall of Ernesto Che Guevara]



Image 11. **Hay hombres que nacen para ser eternos...Aniversario 106 of the birth of José Martí** [There are men born to be eternal...106th anniversary of the birth of José Martí]



pends on its offspring, that Cuba’s fate is in the hands of youth—yet the dictum about the future ironically hails from over a century prior. The context for Martí’s quote was in the 1893 run-up to the “reinitiation” of the failed 10-Year Independence War (1868–78). The analogy of continuity cannot be missed: the Martí-masterminded War of Indepen-

dence (1895–98) is to the previous 10–Year War as Cuba’s near future is to Cuba’s revolutionary history (which entails—at least according to the state—the entire period of struggle from 1868 to 1959). To summarize: 1868 is to 1898, as 1959 is to 2009. The rest of the quote (which does not appear on the billboard, but may be familiar to many Cubans and thus implicit) says that “the wealth of a nation derives from a child that beats the same path as his predecessors, leading to a more useful and complete result.” Just as the second generation of independence fighters followed triumphantly in the steps of the first unsuccessful generation, this billboard (Image 12) suggests that today’s youth continue the revolutionary path to greater national goals.

Image 12. La patria está hecha del mérito de sus hijos...Aniversario 113 del Reinicio de la Guerra de Independencia [The homeland is made by the merit of its children...113th Anniversary of the Recommencement of the War of Independence]



It is important to note that the nation does not produce its offspring. Rather, “a nation is made” from the valuable contributions of “its children.” Just as Martí and Maceo and Gómez generated the independent nation of Cuba, the current crop of children will make their historic homeland by way of “merit.” In the propagandistic drive to incorporate youth into the Revolutionary project, the focus is on how the youth make up the country.

The visual graphics of the billboard in Image 12 features the figure of a late 19th century Cuban independence fighter on horseback, sword raised. There are three iterations of this image. The smallest and faintest one appears in the bottom left corner. Ascending is a larger and bolder iteration. Then finally the boldest and grandest rendition occupies the central space of the billboard. This image is the graphic representation of early precursors in struggle begetting later generations that ride along the same route, growing stronger and bolder. The strongest and boldest is today’s generation—the *independentistas* incarnate. From this single example we see how a simple quote and minimalist graphics can conjure up history towards impelling the future.

The ambidexterity of the incarnation code means that not only can symbolic landmass be features of heroes’ faces and children make-up the country, but also the physical depiction of the country can take on the character of the youth. A mural (Image 13) in celebration of the Federation of University Students shows a cartoon island of Cuba with three hands. One holds a book, another a rifle, and the third a machete. These symbolically allude to the pithy motto of the Union of Young Communists: “Study, Work, Rifle.” The island of Cuba itself, then, has physically taken on the duties of the youth. Clearly, incarnation works in all directions between historic heroes, the homeland, and the youth.

Image 13. FEU...Cuba sí [Federation of University Students...Cuba yes]



This youthful incarnation of the soil is also seen in a mural by the Union of Young Communists. In Image 14, rows of cartoon hearts, all the colors of the flag, sprout from the earth and ripple across the land. It proclaims “Hearts Grow Together.” In this painting, young Cuban hearts both derive (the stems) from the country and make up a unified patriotism (the blossoming hearts). Again, one of the goals of illustrative incarnation is to depict unity—an unwavering populace of young people growing into the future together, yet rooted in the firmament of the past. Another mural (Image 15) quotes a 2007 letter from Fidel Castro to the Union of Young Communists: “If the youth fail, everything fails...I believe in you all.” This bluntly shows the historic leadership’s understanding that the continuation of the Revolution depends on the comportment of the youth. Although there is no imagery of incarnation, I applied that code to the text because the message is that the youth embody “everything,” the entire country, the whole Revolutionary project. A rhetorical technique common to Cuban signs, this message combines both a declarative statement and an encouraging phrase.

Image 14. Los Corazones Juntos, Crecen
[Hearts Grow Together]



Yet another piece of Fidel Castro quoting positive propaganda from the Union of Young Communists is the rural billboard (Image 16) that reads: “...on the shoulders of the youth, many great tasks can be placed.” This contemporary application of a 1962

Image 15. Si los jóvenes fallan todo fallará...Creo en ustedes [If the youth fail, everything will fail]



quote shows how history informs the present, especially concern with the critical position of the youth in maintaining the Revolution. I code it as incarnation because it speaks in corporeal terms about the youth, loading their shoulders with important duties.

Image 16. ...sobre los hombros de la juventud se pueden depositar grandes tareas
[...on the shoulders of the youth, many great tasks can be placed.]



Fidel Castro has warned that the state alone cannot be responsible for society’s job of educating young people. He has called on parents to take seriously their part of developing their children into good citizens. “We must multiply our battle in a multifaceted way, if we want to advance.” Although this phrase has been used in provincial production campaigns, Fidel Castro most notably employed it in reference to

raising young people properly. It appears on a sign (Image 17) juxtaposed with Che Guevara carrying a child (further rationale for classifying it as concerning youth). Multiplying efforts means all homes share in the task of educating; but it also means that through that very process of parental rearing, society will multiply its number of upstanding revolutionaries. Pursuing the sequence, increased numbers of prepared young people equates to multiplying battles (i.e., social development).

Image 17. Multipliquemos Nuestra Batalla [We Shall Multiply Our Battle]



If other posters show that Fidel Castro embodies all Cubans, then this *supergráfica* (Image 18) shows that each Cuban—including, first among equals, Fidel Castro—contains an entire revolutionary armed force within.³ Each and every Cuban carries on the preparedness for struggle first displayed by the rebels in the 1950s. Indeed, this photograph of the elderly Fidel Castro recreates physiognomically the iconic arms-raised photograph of the young rebels celebrating victory that appears every morning along the banner of the daily newspaper, *Granma* (Image 19). The modern color photograph in Image 18 semiotically resurrects a younger Fidel Castro, while placing the responsibility of combat on each Cuban. Certainly this message could also allude to the defensive/ideological strategy known as *guerra de todo el pueblo*, in

3. Reminiscent of the U.S. Army's tagline: "An Army of One."

which the nation's plans for repelling a foreign invasion or occupation entail mobilizing all citizens, either as conscripts or civilian insurgents. However, I classified it as pertaining to youth because the aged Fidel Castro seems to be consciously trying to recreate the iconic image of the young and triumphant Fidel Castro—possibly a parallel to the attempt to resurrect historical figures in the young masses. The banner (Image 19) that reproduces the famous print of the youthful Castro brothers proclaims "50 and more," using historical achievements as an impetus for future continuation.

Image 18. Cada Cubano Un Ejército [Each Cuban An Army]



Based on these exemplary images, it is clear that the regime views the Cuban youth as critical to the maintenance of the Revolution. The recognition of youth's historical importance, the assignment of duty, and encouraging words for the future are frequently conveyed in terms of incarnation. Through-

Image 19. 50 y Más [50 and More]



out this sample of images, the youth, the country, the Revolution, the historic leaders, and the precursors to Revolution all take turns embodying each other in ways significant for the future.

The incorporation of youth into the Revolution is a figurative tactic and a literal message. Complimenting incarnation is the emphasis on cultural repertoires, the other major theme found in messages geared towards youth and the future.

CULTURAL REPERTOIRES

The rhetoric of the Revolution casts the pre-Revolutionary past as a long struggle that created the nationalist Cuban mindset, the tenacious desire for self-determination, and a political culture of unity and esteem for education and cultivation. In turn, the Revolution boasts of having delivered true independence, democratized culture, and socialized education. This dialectic chain of historic causality arrives at the present moment, in which the cultural gains of the Revolution are supposed to feedback into the youth, providing the repertoires necessary to continue the Revolution. The following are examples of

propaganda about the youth and the future which suggest the reproductive role of cultural repertoires.

The basic logic of the present Revolution nurturing a more intense future Revolution is spelled out in the Cuban labor union sign (Image 20) that declares: “The Present, Revolution; the Future, More Revolution.” The flag and the emblem of the union are parts of the cultural repertoires that strive to ensure sustained Revolution.

Image 20. El Presente Revolución, El Futuro Mas Revolución [The Present Revolution, The Future More Revolution]



The sign (Image 21) above a preschool features a cartoon 19th century freedom fighter and gives the name of the school as “*Retoños de Baraguá*.” Baraguá is the town where independence general Antonio Maceo rejected the Spanish offer of a ceasefire—and remains a symbol of resistance. *Retoños* means vernacularly “kids,” but has the literal meaning of sprouts or organic shoots. I interpret this to mean that the schoolchildren sprout out of the legacy of 19th century resis-

tance. Baraguá informed the Revolution, which created the school, which produces future freedom fighters. This concatenation illustrates how cultural repertoires can be both inputs to and products of Revolution.

Image 21. Círculo Infantil...Retoños de Baraguá
[Preschool...Sprouts of Baraguá]



Image 22. Un Pueblo Instruido Será Siempre Fuerte Y Libre [An Educated People Will Always Be Strong and Free]



Educational dictates were an important part of the cultural contribution of José Martí. A sign (Image 22) in the central plaza of the provincial town of Las Tunas quotes Martí: “An educated people will always be strong and free.” Such a belief has underwritten much of the Revolution’s projects, ever since the

1961 nation-wide literacy campaign. This idea from Martí motivated the Revolution’s educational provisions and reassures the youth that education is the way forward. Fidel Castro reiterated this Martian concept when he said that “without culture, no freedom is possible” (Image 23). This billboard features paper boats sailing along on a sea of words. This underscores the Revolutionary conception of liberty as freedom from ignorance, rather than the bourgeois procedural democratic conception of freedom to select between a delimited set of political choices.

Image 23. Sin cultura no hay libertad posible
[Without culture, no freedom is possible]



Image 24. Esta Revolución es Hija de la Cultura y las Ideas [This Revolution is the Daughter of Culture and Ideas.]



The message in Image 24 is the Revolution is the daughter of culture, knowledge and ideas. A national symbol of a palm tree turns into a pencil which serves as a flagpole for the proud revered flag. Nationalism abounds. Nebulous oceanic forms run into the pencil-palm-flagpole, converting into well defined sheets of paper—more symbols of learning—and more abstractly representing the institutionalization of an organic and spontaneous sociopolitical process. If the revolution is the child of culture and ideas, then culture and ideas are also the products of revolution. The revolution/education dynamic is portrayed as a dialectical process. It feeds back into the very forces that created it, providing more education and culture to the young.

In Image 25, Fidel Castro recognizes that the Revolution “must continue the task of fostering healthy, educational, and useful recreation for our youth.” This reminder of the provision of health and schooling is paired with the logos of the chain of state-run campgrounds and the Union of Young Communists. This construction completes the dialogical circuit from Culture to Revolution to Culture. The next logical step is that “our youth” continue the Revolution. The concept of Revolutionary culture producing further Revolution is again seen in the use of José Martí’s cultural legacy. Mounted on a wall alongside his bust and the Cuban flag (Image 26), an excerpt from one of his poems reads “whoever sows schools will reap men.” This pithy (if gender-biased) statement gets at the strategic logic behind the Revolution’s education projects. Only by educating the masses will the country, in turn, be able to become self-sufficient.

In the Revolution, culture is more than just education. It also includes the democratization of the arts to the entire populace. A billboard (Image 27) celebrates the 45th anniversary of the Union of Young Communists. It reads “Happy in the Vanguard” and has a dynamic and colorful design that intimates happiness, rejuvenation, and growth. The key figure is a young ballerina who dances among the flowing splashes of color. The motto of “45 Aprils” refers to the historic founding of the Union of Young Communists and the flowering of spring. I interpret this

juxtaposition of history and the future as a portrayal of history as a springboard for continued cultural flourishing of the youth. The Revolution and the founding of the Union of Young Communists provided the cultural resources for artistic fulfillment; and this component of cultural repertoires serves as a resource for continued political fulfillment. Cultural achievements are to keep the youth “happy in the vanguard.”

Image 25. “Urge proseguir la tarea de propiciar una recreación sana culta y útil para nuestros jóvenes...”
 [“We must continue to the task of fostering healthy, educational, and useful recreation for our youth...”]



Image 28 is of a mural in a rural town. It contrasts Fidel Castro with George W. Bush by saying that Fidel Castro “gives children back their eyesight” while Bush “kills them.” This focus on youth and Revolutionary benefits such as medical care implicitly argues for the continuation of the Revolution instead of deviating onto the evil U.S. path. Although most signs

Image 26. Hombres recogerá quien siembre escuelas [Those who sow schools will reap men]

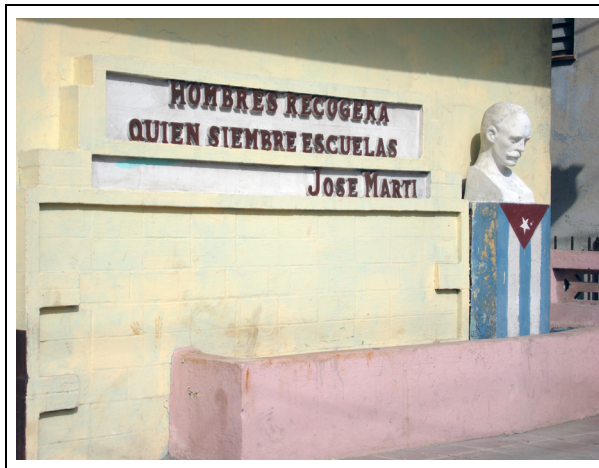
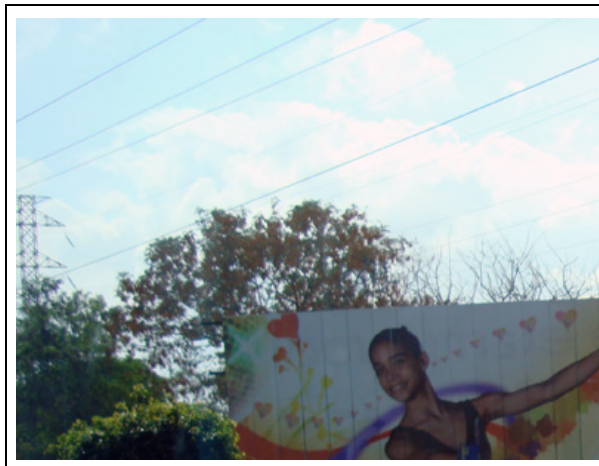


Image 27. 45 abril...Alegres en la Vanguardia [45 Aprils...Happy in the Vanguard]



related to the U.S. and geopolitics I do not classify as relating to youth and the future, I coded this one as such because it invokes children and puts the spotlight on the reproductive and restorative repertoires of the Revolution.

The mural (Image 29) celebrating 20 years of the youth computer clubs shows that the regime strives to depict cultural repertoires that keep up with the times. The celebration of a historical milestone combines with the idea of “digitizing hope”—a 21st century method of reproducing Revolution. The use of the computer clubs are restricted to young people, so

Image 28. *Nuestro comandante es millonario porque le devuelve la vista a los niños mientras que Bush los ametralla y los mata de hambre.* [Our commander is a millionaire because he gives sight back to children, while Bush shoots them and kills them with hunger]



this is a particularly pertinent cultural repertoire to highlight.

Image 29. *20 años Joven Club...Informatizando la Esperanza* [20 Years Youth Club...Digitizing Hope]



School children depicted in uniforms and waving flags will be “consistent” in their beliefs, and thus “happy in the vanguard” (Image 30). The way that youth know the right path to take is because they

Image 30. *Alegres en la Vanguardia... Definir es Salvar* [Happy in the Vanguard... To define is to Save]



have been educated. José Martí's quote "*definir es salvar*" alludes to the fact that if you are educated, then you can call things as they are, which in turn allows you to survive and succeed. The only way youth are to know that the path of the future should follow the historical path is because their education provides them the enlightened capacity to see that nationalist socialism corresponds favorably to the true correlation of forces and beneficial possibilities.

Image 31. *...lo Esperamos... leer es crecer..17 Feria Internacional del Libro* [We await you... To read is to grow... 17th International Book Fair]



The process by which the future flows forth gloriously from the cultural provisions of the Revolution is evidenced in a billboard (Image 31) announcing the annual international book fair. Beside a gloomy dripping cloud, a rainbow flows out of an opened book, the cover of which is a door with key. Hence, reading is the key "to grow." There is nothing explicitly political about this graphic, but the context in which the legitimacy-seeking regime plays up cultural democratization and the state media gush with hubbub in the run up to the book fair leads me to interpret the message as justification for staying on the set political path to a glowing Revolutionary future.

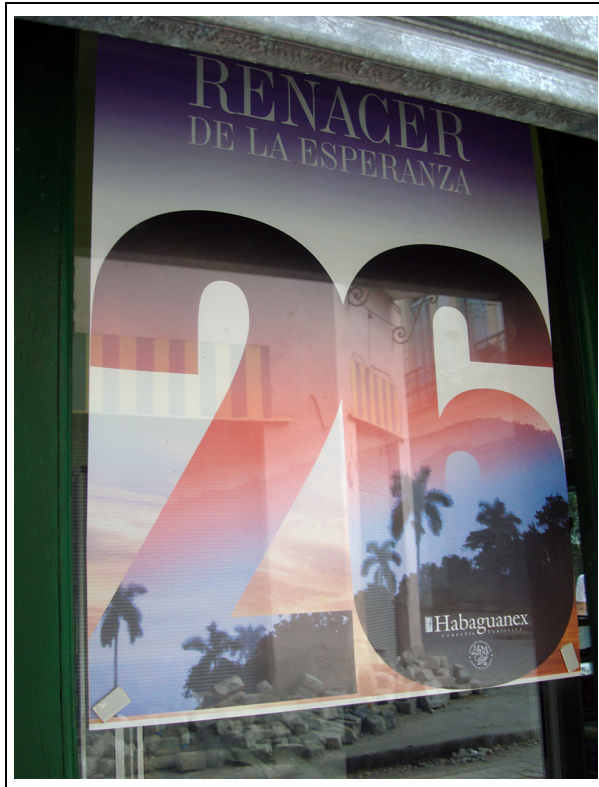
Image 32. *La FEEM 35 Años Junto a Fidel y La Revolución* [The Federation of High School Students...35 Years with Fidel and the Revolution...Making Future]



The billboard depicted in Image 32 notes that the federation of high school students has been with Fidel Castro and the Revolution, making a future. Illustrative of my overall model, this example evokes past allegiance as impetus for the future. Unwavering adherence to the Revolution is underscored by playing with the acronym for the federation, coloring the first two letters so that it reads "faith". As previously viewed in Image 10, faith is one of the ingredients in the cultural repertoire that allows the Revolution to reproduce itself.

In addition to faith, "hope is reborn," springing the Revolution eternal. The poster depicted in Image 33

Image 33. *Renacer de la Esperanza...26*
[Rebirth of Hope]



juxtaposes nationalist symbols (palm trees), with political symbols (26th of July), and an evocation of the future (“renacer”). It is a simple yet powerful combination that in a minimalist fashion illustrates the model I have tried to put forth: the future as a continuation of Revolutionary history, fueled by the cultural repertoires that the Revolution has bequeathed.

NEGATIVE CASES

I do not include in my discussion cases of billboard topics that are completely unrelated to the future and the youth. As examples, billboards on the Five Heroes or energy efficiency do not make explicit references to the younger generations. However, there are cases that I did code as about youth or the future, but which do not entail the codes of incarnation or cultural repertoire. I coded Image 34 as about youth because it talks about schools, but the main focus is on a textual recrimination of the U.S. blockade, and there do not appear any representation of reproducing Revolution. Image 35 is also about the blockade, and it features a diagram of generational cohorts, so

Image 34. *3 Días de bloqueo equivalen a los lápices, libretas y demás materiales de un curso escolar* [3 Days of the blockade equal to all the pencils, notebooks and other school supplies for an entire school year]



Image 35. *70% de cubanos nacidos bajo el bloqueo* [70% of Cubans were born under the blockade]



it could be indirectly and implicitly about the future; but I do not code it for incarnation or cultural repertoire because it does not give the sense of the dynamic dialectical model of Revolutionary replication.

CONCLUSION

In the autumn of the Brothers Castro and the spring of the younger generation who came of age in the Special Period, Cuban propaganda strives to play a

role in reproducing Revolution. Billboards, murals and posters about the future and targeting Cuban youth, use two graphic tactics to accomplish this DNA-like replication of Revolution: incarnation and cultural repertoires. Incarnation involves the intentional graphic resemblance between 19th century leaders, the Revolutionary leaders, and the newest cohorts of Cubans. Important figures are used as emblematic exemplars that seek to build legitimacy in

the present and provide guidance for the future. Cultural repertoires are social goods such as education, political and artistic culture, and Revolutionary faith that both impelled the Revolution in the first place and derive from the Revolution. Cultural repertoires fuel once and future Revolution. This qualitative interpretivist analysis of Cuban signage has tried to demonstrate how the strategy of reproducing Revolution is carried out by these twin graphic tactics.

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