Abstract

This article analyses Sandra Gómez’s Cuban documentary *El futuro es hoy*, which has won awards not only in Cuba but also in Europe. The article first studies in detail the content of this short film, whose main theme focuses upon the current situation in Cuba and, specifically, what the seven protagonists think about their future in the island. The article then situates Sandra’s work within the Hispanic cinematic context. The conclusion is that the film is derived from both film and literary influences and argues that it has a poetic character observed in her particular way of portraying the current state of affairs in Cuba. Finally, the article places her work within the so-called ‘Generation Y’ or ‘90’ in Cuba.

Keywords: documentary, Havana, Sandra Gómez, cinema, Cuba, ICAIC

*El futuro es hoy* (2009) is a short 35-minute documentary based on an idea, photography and direction of Sandra Gómez (1976–) shot in Havana between 2006 and 2008. It is the second documentary by this young director graduated from the International School of Film and Television in Havana (2004), who moved to Zurich (Switzerland), where she has been living since 2005. It is in Switzerland where, thanks to the producer Peacock Film, Sandra receives funding for her films. Therefore, this is a film that has not been financed by the Cuban government, but which has won awards in Cuba as well as receiving international awards.1 Significantly, Sandra’s cinema seems to be born with a vocation to highlight what Cuban and *cubanidad* mean in Cuba today.2

In her first documentary *Las camas solas* (14 minutes, 2006), her commitment is already evident, with its obvious sensitivity to the current reality of Havana, which is portrayed through a dismal episode in the recent history of the capital – the devastation of Hurricane Ivan in 2004. The catastrophe caused the Cuban government to shelter many families as a result of the damage, leaving dilapidated buildings and ‘single beds’, as the title poetically suggests. However, Mother Nature does not seem to be the only culprit in the state of deterioration that is Havana and Cuba in general. Starting, perhaps ironically, using a natural
accident, the beauty of this film lies in the ability of Gómez to introduce a sad and dilapidated city. The urban area of Havana is portrayed in a way that evokes tears not only because of the hurricane but unfortunately mostly, and here comes the political message, because of the evident need for an urban renewal that was claimed in the 1960s as one of the specific projects of the Cuban revolution, but is yet to come. Within this historical context, the attempt to enact a ruined city goes beyond the purely aesthetic: the poetics of Las camas solas contains a political message, albeit initially, ambiguous.

Using as a pretext the destructive effects of Hurricane Ivan, Las camas solas shows a social attitude committed to portraying the lack of new homes in Havana. However, Sandra’s commitment is in principle ambivalent. On one hand, it could be argued that Hurricane Ivan is read as not just an accident of nature but rather it symbolises a Cuban government that comes to act as a permanent cyclone, generating sorrow and distress. This position would be an example of the group of Cuban intellectuals, already mentioned by the scholar Linda Howe, who are not afraid to examine the ways in which government restrictions have distorted ‘our understanding of post-revolutionary Cuban cultural history’ (Howe 2004: 14).

However, the work of Sandra Gómez could also be interpreted through a Marxist prism: this is a documentary that represents another case of artistic freedom, coinciding with utopian values promoted by the Revolution and, in this particular case, by the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC founded in 1959 by the Cuban government). Since the 1960s, the ICAIC has been promoting films that include criticism of many aspects of the Revolution. As the critic John Hess has suggested, this would be the reason why many Cuban films continue to fascinate viewers both inside and outside Cuba (Hess 1999: 207).

This article will attempt to unravel the commitment seen in the work of Sandra Gómez. Specifically, it focuses on the analysis of the documentary El futuro es hoy, which, it is argued, is filmed with great poetic sensibility, in the sense that it shows us a harsh reality but is sensitive at the same time. The main conclusion drawn is that Sandra Gómez is confirmed as a Cuban filmmaker able to sensitise the audience to poetic truths through highly personal manner of filming, which is characterised by going beyond mere criticism, becoming a filmmaker–writer of her time.

El futuro es hoy begins with music that seems to scream for help, without explicitly saying so. A cry that soon becomes a topic during the screenings of this documentary that portrays the daily life of a Havana still anchored in the past and with an uncertain future, as seen through its seven protagonists. If La nada contidiana (1995) written by Cuban exile Zoé Valdés (1959–) reflected
that ‘lacunae in the discourse of the Castro regime’, as observed by scholar Lahr-Vivaz (2010: 304), here we find that the camera of Sandra Gómez seems again to investigate about the daily nothingness in Cuba.

The first sequence begins with a young man carrying a piece of wood, first from the top of a building and, later, through the streets to the seashore drive of the Malecón. Once there, we realise that the wood is actually a cork large enough to use as a floating seat. His words are the first voice of the film and are spoken with a smile that reminds us of the typical Cuban ‘choteo’ as a form of resistance, widely used in Cuban literature (Cooper 2006: 34–5). His speech is the testimony of a fisherman who is mocking the system knowing that you know, as he says, that ‘cork fishing has always been forbidden’ (all English translations are mine 00:02:50).3 After several shots where we see the young fisherman preparing himself to fish, the documentary goes to the next character that appears strolling along the Malecón:

Well, my name is José Armando Hernández. Right now we are here in the gallery, which is where I work. My job in the Tribune is to protect the Tribune as any other workplace. We normally do a tour, various tours observing the Tribune to make sure that nothing has happened to it. All that. (00:03:40)

Here, I cannot omit the Havana public reception. I had the great fortune of being in Havana during the Festival of New Filmmakers ICAIC February 2009, when Sandra Gómez was awarded the SIGNIS prize.4 This is a Cuban Catholic organisation for communication, and it is the second award that she received from them; the first one was given for her previous work with Las camas solas (2006). I vividly remember the laughter that this character caused every time he intervened. In fact, José Armando is the only character who is not marginal, in the sense that he is an official and, as such, does not criticise the system. Instead, he always praises it, causing heavy laughter from the audience. This reception is important because it testifies that Cuba seems to be changing. As we remember the essayist Sujatha Fernandes referring to the film by Humberto Solás (Miel para Oshun 2001), the Cuban audience often appropriate the films and then discuss them and talk about everyday problems and readings that make a movie often ‘go beyond what the filmmaker intends’ (Fernandes 2006: 43). The documentary El futuro es hoy oversees Cuban society and was awarded in Cuba, so at first you might think it follows the aesthetic-political patterns of the revolutionary cinema of the 1960s called in Cuba ‘imperfect cinema’. However, for the academic Catherine Davies, Cuban cinema in the 1980s had already lost its critical skill becoming ‘non-political Perfect Cinema’ (Davies 1997: 346), in the sense that cinema freed of ideology proved to be less critical and more aesthetic (Davies 1997: 347). So the question to answer is to what extent would
Sandra Gómez’s documentaries be (post) revolutionary? Are they in a tradition of critical realism?

This problem is the essence that lies poetically behind *El futuro es hoy*, since the question Gómez posed is ‘what is the future of Cuba?’ This is not categorically answered by the film, although at the same time it certifies that something is happening in Cuba. For this particular aesthetic, the ambiguity of Sandra Gómez attracts us. Despite not having an explicit political agenda, she was already very incisive towards the government, in her first documentary, portraying the lack of new homes. She is a committed voice who joins her compatriot Alina Rodríguez (1985–) with her documentary *Buscándote Havana* (25 minutes, 2006), since both filmmakers seem to express outrage, but also show that Cuba is being more open to criticism of its harsh social reality. We should also remember the documentary *Ex Generación* (32 minutes, 2009) by Aram Vidal Alejandro (1981–), who explores the lives of a group of young people, all under 35, and with a great cultural and emotional attachment to their country.

*El futuro es hoy* shows the daily routine of seven different people, two of them in favour of the Castro regime (the official and the old person) and five expressing uncertainty about a possible change of government. Each answers separately what they think about their personal future and how they see the future of Cuba as a nation. Two questions that are very relevant, especially for the transfer of power (July 2006) from brother to brother, that is, from Fidel Castro to Raúl Castro, which at the time the film was made was creating a great deal of speculation about Cuba’s political future. Against this background, after 50 years of revolution, it is not surprising to observe many Cuban artists already impatient with the perpetual official promise ‘of a better future’ (Howe 2004: 23).

Within this historical-political context, the scene with the official is even more telling, when we see José sorting the keys and looking through the window, giving the impression that it is a terribly boring job, but the most important is that it constitutes an evidence that the life of a Cuban official is very different from the rest of the Cubans. He gets a basic official salary (200 pesos equivalent to $8) while for the fisherman to fish illegally means to obtain a few more pesos to eat a little better, or simply eat. The significance of this scene is to imply that the official does an empty and often useless job caring for the ideals and values of the Revolution, which is represented by black flagpoles and a deserted square both of which are primarily appearances, because almost no one believes in them. So when the officer looks through the window, it is half faded with a big sign that says, ‘Patria o Muerte’ (00:13:10). The fact that is shown blurred through a glass, half illegible, but still recognisable, is also a metaphor.
This use of symbolism is emphasised in the next shot, which is the first interior scene where a man is typing on his computer in a bedroom. The camera shows us posters of The Beatles and, perhaps sarcastically, the cover of the album Life after Death by Iron Maiden (00:05:17). This inner tinted portrait of life and death in allusion to the bedroom also echoes the space which Cubans call between life and death. This particular way of using the camera brings to mind the words of the artist Coco Fusco (1960–),

I have often heard Cubans in the throes of despair speak of their existence as being buried alive. There are many there and here who have been forced at one time or another to inhabit a luminal space between existing and living. (Fusco 2001: 166)

In addition to showing different images of music and comics, this sequence reveals an intimate space. Specifically, we have a 40-year artist (1969–), whose first words count as an irony of his life as a writer in Cuba:

Some of my books have been censored. I have been censored phrases and other publications have been simply unnoticed, due to an edition of only 1,000 copies for a country of eleven million people with a million or so readers surveyed, it is a drop in the ocean. (00:05:25)

This author, whose name is not mentioned, perhaps to protect his identity, sees the future as immediate future, since there is no room for dreams medium to long term: ‘Think what you do in four or five years is a utopia. Difficult is to think what you will do in four or five days, and a normal worry is what I will cook tomorrow morning’ (00:06:04). This reflection matches the aforementioned upset of many Cuban intellectuals who see a semi-moribund Cuba.

As the short film progresses, we realise that there is no future for many people in Cuba, because their main concern is simply to survive. As the writer says, ‘Everyone is waiting to see what happens. Everyone is in a stand-by, in a holding pattern to see how the game is decided’ (00:08:43). This agrees with the daily struggle of many other Cuban writers who will describe precisely in their works hunger and despair during the so-called ‘Special Period’ (due to the severe crisis of the 1990s). This is seen, for instance, in Cien botellas en una pared (2002), a novel written by Ena Lucía Portela (1972–), who belongs to what is known as the ‘Generation Y’, like the filmmaker and even if we stretch the parameters, the writer who appears in the documentary. For Ana Serra, Portela’s narrative ‘displays an opaque, difficult-to-understand style, challenging all conventions and morals and criticizing intellectual institutions in Cuba’ (Serra 2011: 269).

Under a Cuban context, Yoani Sánchez is without doubt the most representative figure of the so-called Generation Y, who describes them in her awarded website as ‘born in Cuba in the ’70s and ’80s, marked by schools in the countryside,
Russian cartoons, illegal emigration and frustration’ (Sánchez n.d.). Other distinctive attributes of this particular Generation in Cuba is the fact that they challenge social taboos and abject poverty, two themes that can also be observed in Gómez’s cinematography.

The situation of impasse in Cuba is portrayed by Gómez when she shows us the Malecón with many people sitting, as if waiting for something to happen: a cinema style that in this article we define as poetic, due to her acute sensitivity but also because of her ambiguity. On one hand, the writer provides us with an interesting reflection on this long wait:

I always compare socialism and capitalism with two rooms. Socialism is a room with a safe floor, no cheating, no holes or false areas or ruins or quicksand, but the roof is one meter tall. You cannot lift your head further. Capitalism would be like the same room with a floor full of alligators, poisonous snakes, tarantulas, mines, holes, traps ... but just no walls, no roof. You can go up as high as you want and/or can, always remembering that you can fall and sink forever. The long paternalistic state of Cuba has been protecting us from the fall, but also disabling us to climb. (00:18:15)

The writer’s voice is quite lucid. Apart from adding a note of clarity and humour, also his speech constitutes a testimony by the Cuban intelligentsia of what it means living in Cuba today. His political thinking goes against the revolutionary government, which is dismissed as ‘nanny state’, and later he speaks of an ‘authoritarian leader’ who directs the destinies of Cubans. Inserting his provocative comments immediately incites a public debate, which again characterises the particular method of Gómez. By introducing the writer in this scene, one could argue that the director is defending a type of cinema with no major function other than to make the viewer think and, even more clearly, a type of film that does not serve as propaganda to legitimize the regime. In this sense, we can relate her film style with the Cuban branch of hyperrealism, whose aesthetic ‘documentary emphasized direct contact with reality’ (Sosa-Velasco 2010: 276). When asked about the future of Cuba, the writer’s reply is worth noting:

What the Cubans could win is freedom of choice. I think that Cubans are not used to choosing. At first one would notice a high percentage of absenteeism, but maybe just the opposite occurs. And after so many years of an authoritarian leader directing the destinies of this nation, Cubans accept that they are adults and may decide it is time to decide for themselves what they want to do. (00:19:11)

Furthermore, the possibility of change that the writer contrasts predicts with the view of the official, who sets the tone of counterpoint: ‘We currently continue a normal life. Continue as usual’ (00:08:56), which provoked another moment of laughter in the audience. This contrast between potential change and continuous
stalemate reflects the situation where Cuba is, according to some, in the process of change but, according to others, without the possibility of future changes. By doing this, the camera tilts Gómez towards a cinema of ‘development’, which encourages or at least suggests a forward-looking perspective. This way of filming which combines participatory techniques, particularly where we see how different characters express their own ideas, is reminiscent of the concept of the ‘active spectator’ promulgated by the ICAIC, where the state and all institutions of art and film had the main task of promoting the role of active debate. However, we also believe that her cinema technique is more tied to the notion of ‘artistic public spheres’ developed by Fernandes (2006: 14), in the sense that her film, like the essayist, also tries to capture the dynamics of contemporary cultural production in Cuban society, which are both within and outside the limits of state power and cultural markets.

Another character who is sincere to the lens is the father who has been living at the same address for 37.5 years (Malecón between Belascoaín and Gervasio). His main concern is his children: what they will have when they start a family and what can he do from now on for the future of his children? He also foresees the chance now more than ever of a possible change in Cuba when he tells us,

Note that this is the first time in the history of this country where suddenly the main figure promoter of this whole project of revolution is not present and because it’s actually something curious, and half the people are already accustomed to the idea that he is not here, or that he is like in the movies, a voiceover. (00:08:10)

This character is also interesting because he looks like one out of the film Barrio Cuba (2005) by Humberto Solás (1941–2008), where a number of people try to work on despite their circumstances and whose characters embody ‘the loneliness, abandonment and existential shipwreck’ (Presas 2010: 306). After several viewings of different streets, all sad due to their deteriorating condition, the camera pulls back to the first character, the fisherman with a cork chair who has caught several crabs and observes the city from his clandestine vantage point, distanced from the capital, but not as far as the ocean liner that appears in the distance. He confesses that his life remains one of fishing illegally:

Well, there is a prohibition and inspectors tell you that you cannot fish because you are violating article such and such. They scold you the first time and the second time they fine you for 1,500 or 2,000 pesos. That is my concern, because I live from the sea. (00:09:39)

The future for this fisherman is just fish. For the writer, to be able to eat every day; for the father, to think that his children have a better future, and the discordant note is given by the official, who does not aspire to any future because
we continue as always’ (00:08:56). Another scene that generated laughter was the intervention by the official, stating that

The Cuban people are people that do not support repression, that do not admit impositions, and because of that I can say that here there is not going to be any change, because we will still be revolutionaries and always fighting for a better future for the people. (00:15:58)

At this point of the documentary, Cuban society is perceived as divided between those who support the regime and those who criticise it. This evidence of a frustrated society and the palpable damage in Havana reminds us of the documentary Suite Habana (2003) which, apart from being a trustworthy document of poverty in both levels – material and spiritual, the film of Fernando Pérez (1944–) accommodates the ‘rage and pain, bitterness and hope, and also joy’ (Sancristóbal 2010: 329), all descriptors which can be also applied to Gómez’s documentary.

After the scene of the official for whom ‘change here will not happen’ (00:16:15), there is a group of people who set up a tent in the rocks of the Malecón. Upbeat music starts to play and everyone brings food.

This tent is set up for shelter and to enjoy the sea. It is a safe haven for friends and neighbors; we put on music, bring drinks and we enjoy it. When you come here [tent], all your worries go away, because this is refreshing. You sit here and everything is gone from your mind, and you feel free. (00:12:21)

This tent could be interpreted as a symbol of the arrival of democracy that seems to becoming stronger in Cuba today. Perhaps the beginning of a new space in which it is allowed to express different social relations. However, this semi-clandestine tent contrasts with the obsolete dreams of a revolution manifested by an old woman who appears on screen holding a sheet of newspaper where the headline reads, ‘Girls who learned to dream’ (00:14:56), referring to the era of the 1960s, when each woman received a sewing machine. To this old seamstress, the future involves the sewing machine, because as she says, ‘The machine sews yet so Fidel can still work’ (00:27:10). This scene is full of nostalgia and irony at the same time, as it can be seen that the machine hardly works and, as we know, Fidel relinquished power to his brother Raúl in July 2006.

The deterioration of Cuba occurs at all levels. Hence, the protagonist of the tent discusses his future, which according to him is the cemetery, because he thinks there is nothing in Cuba: ‘The future here is uncertain. Here there’s nothing. At least we have no hope of anything’ (00:29:08). This uncertainty manifests itself not only in older people. It also appears in young voices as in the young doctor, who sees the future of Cuba ‘a little uncertain, in the sense
that measures changes at times and do not really know how the future will be’ (00:29:22). Similarly, the scholar Lisandro Pérez (2008) reflects in his essay on the topic, ‘Reflections on the Future of Cuba’, where more than a break he foresees a continuity (p. 90). For the academic Archibald Ritter (2010), Cuba’s future is impossible to predict and stresses that the modest economic changes of the 1990s characterising the ‘Special Period’ have led to a ‘gerontocratic paralysis’ that might endure well into the 2010s (p. 229).

If the future of Cuba, or of any country, lies in its youth, it is worth noting the expertise of the director to portray this particular youngster (medic and rocker in her spare time) walking down the street, perhaps to reflect that the lives of many young professionals who are stagnating in Cuba, rather than contemplating movement, as seen as a common feature in most of the protagonists. That is, one could summarise that the lives of these seven Cuban characters adhere to an irritating monotony, because nothing seems to change, but stoically they are waiting for something to finally happen.8

However, it is also interesting to note this doctor’s way of leisure. Like many young Westerners, she enjoys listening to music and going to concerts, but maybe the big difference is that young Cubans seem to expect a change that is coming, as poetically suggested when she appears looking at the sky with a blank stare on the Malecón. She puts on the rock music she likes and the camera captures images of waves breaking on the jetty, another poetic image that seems to suggest that something will break soon, metaphorically alluding to the boiling situation in which Cuba has been since 2006, when the health of Fidel Castro worsened considerably. This poetic and political reading is even more obvious at the end of the film, when the seven protagonists are walking on the unmistakable Malecón, where the sensitivity of the director again intentionally shows different people in the same space looking for hope, as she says, ‘maybe it is a utopia that Cuban society will remain in solidarity’ (Peacock Film). This thinking is similar to the view of Fernandes (2006), for whom the new Cuban filmmakers seek to assimilate emerging new values such as tolerance, humanity and self-cultivation into a political vision that promotes nationalism ‘as the basis of a shared new order’ (p. 43).

By age and by personal tastes, Gómez confesses that she feels closer to the young doctor-rocker, but feels that the most important character is the fisherman, because he begins and ends the film.

His raft makes us think of the stone of Sisyphus9 and to see him entering the sea without knowing what will happen evokes the idea of a leak. Among the characters he is one that expresses himself in a natural way, radical; he says just what he thinks, and his sincerity is touching. (author’s unpublished interview with Sandra Gómez)
Thus, several types of individual paths are portrayed in the film, forming a vision of different forms of existence in Cuba and a particular emphasis is given to future generations. In this regard, it is noteworthy that a younger generation has emerged, which is more in tune with the demands of a new audience characterised especially by young people. For the critic Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (1997), the unprecedented critical factor of these young filmmakers is that they come from another ‘milieu, outside of the established film production institutions’ (p. 182).

Within a purely Cuban cinema context, we find that the work of Sandra Gómez belongs to the generation of the Cuban-1990s (born between 1970 and 1980) that the specialist Ann Marie Stock characterises by performing street theatre. Due to lack of funding from the government, these new filmmakers take to the streets, they will reconsider what it means to be Cuban in times of transition, and especially this generation of the 1990s questions, assimilates risks ‘and poses challenges’ (Stock 2009, 24), as is evidenced by Sandra Gómez’s documentaries. Paraphrasing the documentarist and academic Michael Chanan, Gómez’s work would belong to what he calls ‘third cinema’, expressing a new culture and societal changes (Chanan 1997, n.p.). We understand third cinema as liberating film which can be found not only in third world countries ‘where cinema was not dominated and controlled by the Hollywood majors and their lackeys’ (Chanan 2004: 380). This is a film against social injustice, that the academic Guneratne Anthony claims as being ‘to arms against social injustice and post-imperial exploitation’ (Guneratne and Dissanayake 2003: 4). Michael Chanan describes this new generation not as an artistic movement but as a wave of activity, where the camera remains rooted in social reality and directors ‘have their own take of the world’ (Chanan 2007: 12).

Sandra Gómez’s cinema is an evolution from the 1960s to the new millennium, where new technologies greatly define this new trend worldwide known as ‘Generation Y’, also characterised as being a generation that often seeks the future beyond the border. Living outside Cuba, Gómez typifies the image of the nomadic and transnational filmmaker that has become another common feature of the new Hispanic cinema due to the forces of globalisation. The short film The Illusion (2008) directed by the Cuban Susana Barriga (1982–) is another example of this new Cuban cinema, where international cooperation is essential to thematise the intercultural component, interposing two cultures in The Illusion (the Cuban and English).10 However, unlike the latter, it is interesting to note that the content of the documentaries of Sandra Gómez is located exclusively within a single culture, Cuban, so that her documentaries are confined to a single geography. In fact, the main theme of her work is her curiosity and concerns for
Cuba. That is, in the documentaries of Gómez exists a search for an aesthetic – a poetic that, as Yvette Sánchez says, referring to this particular generation of nomads: ‘you can tell from these exiles the need of reaffirmation, to conjure ties with the homeland, legitimize nationality, to narrate their country’s key social and political reality’ (Sánchez 2000: 165).

Gómez’s work resembles that of her contemporary Tania Bruguera (1968–), because both resist ‘the pressure of directly criticizing the socialist system’ (Ramsdell 2009: 207). If you stick to the axiom of Fidel Castro ‘within the Revolution, everything, against the Revolution, nothing’, then you can better understand the difficulty of the positioning by Sandra Gómez. However, if we follow the division of the Cuban artist Menéndez Aldito (1970–), who summed up the problem by saying that a counterrevolutionary artist criticises all the problems of the revolution without offering any solution, because he believes that the only solution is to change the political system, while a revolutionary artist criticises the problems of the revolution and tries to offer solutions because he believes in Revolution (Cited in Sosa-Velasco 2010: 281).

Then we argue that Gómez’s documentaries are closer to a revolutionary stance, in the sense that her films show the sub-Cuban reality, as if her camera was a shoot of awareness, which unites with her fellow Sara Gómez and Julio García Espinosa, who already claimed precisely this ‘awareness’ in the 1970s, a phenomenon widely studied by Michael Chanan in Cuban Cinema (2004: 208). The cinema by Gómez exemplifies an example of ‘cinema survey’, as it investigates and asks questions about the problems confronting the country. Her documentaries are inscribed within the revolutionary film aesthetic of the 1970s, a period that spawned the concepts of ‘cinéma vérité’ and ‘direct cinema’, which Gómez applies so that she becomes chronicler doing ‘film story’. If we apply the nomenclature of Bill Nichols (1991), her films would be within what he terms as ‘observational’ because it does not intervene in the action (p. 38), although the camera has such a degree of provocation that could be said that Gómez is an artist ‘provocateur’. However, the provocative nature of her films is not new in Havana, as we found a precedent for her irreverent questions about the future of Cuba in the documentary Todos los hombres son mortales (1988), directed by the Argentinean María Civale, who at the streets in Havana was not afraid to ask the burning question of the ‘succession of the maximum leader’ (Paranaguá 1997: 183). Apart from the Cuban influences already mentioned, Gómez’s way of filming also distils a belligerent tone, which perhaps is inherited from the pioneers of the so-called ‘New Latin American Cinema’ such as Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in Argentina and Leon Hirszman and Glauber Rocha in Brazil.
On one hand, applying the strategies proposed by Bill Nichols, because her film attempts to educate the viewer, Gómez’s work would belong within what he calls ‘political reflexivity’ (Nichols 1991: 69). On the other hand, if we follow the four basic trends proposed by Michael Renov, then her documentaries belong to category two: ‘persuade or promote’ (Renov 1993: 21), since persuasion appears as a key component. When asked if she herself is considered a provocative artist, Gómez answers with the following:

The revolution has had very great merits for the country that are undeniable. But it has also had the great defect not to being questioned or doubted. If the Revolution had integrated the questions, then it would have become something with what I can identify myself one hundred percent. Therefore there is a critical attitude, as there would be against any form of state. The ‘cinéma vérité’ is certainly something beautiful, which has a real reason to exist. Why make movies if not to find those moments of truth? (Author’s unpublished interview with Sandra gómez)

The beauty of Sandra Gómez’s documentaries consists of her great ability to show the harsh Cuban reality without explicitly criticising it, hence her poetic sensibility. Her poetic voice suggests reminiscences from the poet group ‘Orígenes’, which was ‘marginalized after the Revolution for being too aesthetic and critical, [because its role] was to free art from all political and journalistic influence in order to promote a pure and clearly Cuban art’ (Finzer 2009: 234). The work of Sandra Gómez promotes Caribbean cinema and, more specifically, a Cuban project, because she makes a cinema in which she portrays Cuba’s current problems, but with the difference of being a cinema produced or financed externally,11 in her case by Switzerland, which makes us wonder what García Canclini questioned back in 2002 in his essay Latinoamericanos: ‘what does it mean to be American?’ (García Canclini 2002: 12). If the Cuban poet Nancy Monrejón (1944–) described in her poem ‘Marina’ (from Paisaje célebre 1993) a Cuban landscape with dilapidated buildings, crumbling streets and half zombie characters because of the circumstances, Gómez’s cinematography now seems to continue in the same aesthetics but in the era of globalisation and without losing a bit of Cuban identity. In fact, this new generation is characterised primarily by the use of new technologies.

By age and common interests, Sandra Gómez’s work belongs to Generation Y in Cuba. Although living in Switzerland, she often keeps in touch with her native country through her favourite Cuban blogs, which are the following: Generación Y (Yoani Sánchez), Octavo Cerco (Claudia Cadelo) Habanemia (Lia Villares) and more particularly, the influence of Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo and his two blogs: Lunes de Post-Revolución,12 in which he publishes reviews of Cuban cultural life, and his English blog Boring Home Utopics, where he...
publishes pictures of Havana on a daily basis. Finally, we should also mention the independent *Revista Voces*, which appears only in digital format, where young writers and intellectuals reflect on the Cuban reality (author’s unpublished interview to Sandra Gómez).

*El futuro es hoy* immerses us in the profound habanera reality of the new century which, however, for many of the characters does not seem to have changed much since 1959, that is to say, Cuba has already 51 years of revolution as this documentary exquisitely witnesses. As objectively as possible, combining different voices, this film revolves around the dialectic between the needs of the director to engage with her own history and, on the other hand, the misfortune of many of her protagonists unable to intervene in their own future. That is the great value of the poetic and sincere gaze of its author, Sandra Gómez, who, through her particular way of using the camera, seems to make it another character who knows all ins and outs of the impasse being experienced by Cuba currently. Hence, her provocative and irreverent title, *The Future Is Today*, which sounds like a rebel yell from the new generation of Cuban filmmakers. At the end, it will be the public who will have to imagine the end of the film, that is, the future of Cuba.

**Notes**

1. Award SIGNIS 2009 in the *Muestra Nuevos Realizadores Cubanos* (Havana); Best Documentary Award in the 8th Edition of the *Euganea Film Festival* 2009 (Italy); Golden Award in the International Film Festival *Film Insulaire* 2010 (Groix). More information in http://www.peacock.ch/index.php?site=DOCUMENTARIES&film=35&show=festivalsandawards.

2. About the controversial term of *cubanidad*, it is interesting to remember its geographical meaning and in particular to rescue the definition provided by the geographers Joseph L. Scarpaci and Armando H. Portela in their book *Cuban Landscapes: Heritage, Memory and Place*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2009.

3. In fact, Sandra Gómez told me that in 2010 Cuba prohibited to fish in the Malecón and, as a result, this fisherman cannot fish there anymore.

4. The central office of SIGNIS is in Brussels. Over there they have money to finance the video projects of these young Cubans. SIGNIS does not belong to the ICAIC. On the contrary, SIGNIS belongs to the Catholic Church, and they are always against the Marxist system. Sandra Gómez is so far the only director who has been awarded twice by SIGNIS.

5. I met him personally during the SIGNIS awards ceremony on 24 February 2009.


7. According to the director, ‘esta carpa es en realidad una gran excepción, un caso único. Un suceso aislado, independiente, casi fuera de la ley, porque en realidad estaría prohibido colocar una carpa así allí en las rocas; solo que este personaje es una
buenas personas y ya los policías lo conocen. Ellos saben que vive justo en el edificio de enfrente y lo dejan en paz” (author’s unpublished interview to Sandra Gómez).

8. That ‘something’ could well be that anticipated fiesta that foresee Robert González Echevarría (2010: 281), when he mentions in his book titled Cuban Fiestas: ‘A certain death is needed before people will pour out onto the streets and begin dancing again.’

9. Sisyphus was the first King of Ephyra, and because of his use of trickery, he was punished by Hermes to roll a huge stone up a steep hill. Due to the heavy weight of the stone, he was inevitably forced to begin again. However, the fisherman differs from Sisyphus in the sense that he does not seem to be condemned to a futile exercise.

10. Also I had the honour to meet Susana Barriga and watch her short film during the ‘Coloquio Internacional Ciudad y Mujeres’ organised by Luisa Campuzano in Casa de las Américas, Havana, 23–27 February 2009.

11. This particular financing comes from outside and is a problem that affects other artistic productions, especially literature due to the fall of the Cuban publishing industry during the ‘Special Period’, which forced several writers to look for a publisher outside the island. Therefore, we can see Cuban art produced by foreign money and hence the question of whether Cuban authors abroad have an ‘agenda’, and if so, whether this is due to targeting a specific Cuban audience or, on the contrary, this is provoked by the demand of a foreign market. That is to say, foreigners are interested in buying Cuban art without knowing the politics in the island. For more information, please read the books of Esther Withfield (2007) and Andrea O’Reilly Herrera (2011).

12. Apart from alluding to the already disappeared literary supplement of Pardo Lazo, known as Lunes de Revolución, here we also think that it is necessary to remember what is meant by its disappearance, which according to Howe is ‘a definite end to semi-independent presses and aesthetic freedom’ (Howe 2004: 187).

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María Civale (1988) Todos los hombres son mortales.

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