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The Pixelated Afterlife of Nicolás Guillén Landrián: Migratory Forms

by Jessica Gordon-Burroughs

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Abstract: Through migratory, traveling, and transnational understandings of the evolution of cultural objects and canon formation, the following article explores the Cuban national film archive and its conceptual and material afterlives in the digital sphere, with the Afro-Cuban filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián as a case study. Located within a Third Cinema canon of oppositional and liberationist filmmaking, Guillén Landrián's work is primarily associated with the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) and the 35mm celluloid film that principally characterized both ICAIC feature-length and newsreel production. This article examines Guillén Landrián's *Inside Downtown* (2001), the only video in his oeuvre, produced while in exile in Miami, Florida. I will demonstrate how the digital circulation of *Inside Downtown*, alongside Guillén Landrián's other works, creates new social and aesthetic meaning, subjectification, and systems of value.

Cuban filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián's final and sole audiovisual work produced in exile, *Inside Downtown* (2001), lives on YouTube distressed and marked by encoding artifacts. In collaboration with Jorge Egusquiza Zorilla, *Inside Downtown* is one of fifteen surviving films directed by Guillén Landrián (1938–2003), many of which have been transferred to digital formats and later smuggled across the Florida Straits, eventually making their way to YouTube.

The first fourteen were produced within the context of the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC)¹ from 1962 to 1972 and then languished in the Cinemateca de Cuba's film archive on 35mm celluloid film until transferred to VHS, and later to DVDs and computer files in the 1990s and in the early 2000s, bearing with them the visual artifacts produced by multiple formats, copies, and compressions.² Oscillating between epic and satire, solidarity and critique of the Cuban Revolutionary project, these films possess physical lives that evoke a transnational territory of circulation but also a convergence between cinematic and digital media.³ Reaching viewers beyond theatrical screening contexts and national boundaries, these works illustrate what becomes of art when it is reduced to a file in one of our newer seeing machines.

Albeit with an emphasis upon its contradictions, in Cuba, Guillén Landrián's work at the ICAIC imprinted a national project upon celluloid. Produced in Miami, Florida, *Inside Downtown*, which portrays street dwellers of urban Miami and artists and poets of Guillén Landrián's generation, to the contrary, manifests its informality and extranational nature in both its digital video's materiality and its eroded spaces of representation. Attesting to the migratory status that inheres in *Inside Downtown* as a work, the transposition from national to extranational and from film to digital reveals changes both in media production and circulation and in Guillén Landrián's work conditions as a filmmaker. In *Inside Downtown* these axes inextricably intertwine as part of a broader story of diasporic production, rewriting historical maps of spectatorship, identification, and affiliation. Analyzing the effects of the digital circulation of Guillén Landrián's oeuvre, and in *Inside Downtown* in particular, this article will illuminate how digital circulation creates new social and aesthetic meaning, subjectification, and systems of value.

Born in Camagüey, in Central Cuba, the son of an attorney—a prominent advocate of Camagüey sugar workers—Guillén Landrián worked intermittently at the ICAIC in Havana from the early 1960s to the early 1970s first as a production assistant and later as a director primarily in the newsreel and scientific documentary division. Nephew of the poet laureate of Revolutionary Cuba Nicolás Guillén and disciple of Joris Ivens and Theodor Christensen, he signed simply as “Guillén Landrián,” omitting his first name to avoid confusion with his party liner uncle. He shot on 35mm film such Cuban classics as *Ociel del Toa* (*Ociel of the Toa*, 1965); *Retornar a Baracoa* (*Return to Baracoa*, 1966), about the construction of highways and infrastructure in Eastern Cuba; *Desde la Habana ¡1969! Recordar* (*From Havana. 1969! Remember*, 1969); and the notoriously censored *Coffea Arábica* (*Arabian Coffee*, 1968), which ironized the Havana Greenbelt urban agricultural project. *Coffea Arábica* featured a still of Fidel Castro followed by the Beatles’ song “Fool on the Hill” and was interpreted at the time as an irreverent parody of the leader, especially in light of the Greenbelt agricultural project’s failure. Despite Guillén Landrián’s important role in documentary aesthetics of the period and his increasing recognition by critics, the cameo of Fidel Castro ultimately resulted in the film’s censorship by the ICAIC and progressively unfavorable political winds for the filmmaker. Thus, it proved an important political turning point for Guillén Landrián, although his final fall from grace at the ICAIC was precipitated by the documentary *Taller de Línea y 18* (*The Workshop on Línea and 18th Street*, 1971). Thirty years later he would produce his only video, and also his only documentary produced in exile, *Inside Downtown* (2001).⁴ Largely passed over by the scholarship surrounding Guillén Landrián’s work, *Inside Downtown* is far from a mere footnote in Guillén Landrián’s production.⁵ I will demonstrate in the following that *Inside Downtown*,

instead, is a key link to his oeuvre and to the Cuban diasporic canon more broadly, thus, troubling its consistent omission.

Through artisanal production modes—that is, a video format and its primarily YouTube-based online distribution—*Inside Downtown* both anticipates and, later reflects the migrations of Guillén Landrián’s work from the cinematic archive to the digital sphere. Depicting a city that is materially reconfigured according to neoliberal dictates, *Inside Downtown*’s viewership is likewise conditioned on YouTube by neoliberalism’s material and transnational coordinates. If Guillén Landrián’s celluloid films from the 1960s deteriorated due to the contingencies of the celluloid archive, *Inside Downtown* intertwines with the fate of his earlier films, yet engages the “aesthetic, political, ideological and phenomenological implications” of digital “loss.”⁶ Enacting what Paul Gilroy calls the “cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity” of diasporic cultural objects, Guillén Landrián’s oeuvre, and *Inside Downtown* in particular, works against causal or progressive models of canons or technological evolution critiqued by scholars across disciplinary perspectives.⁷ *Inside Downtown*’s digital travels points toward three important questions:⁸ What symbolic and material migrations allow a cultural object, in particular a Latin American and Cuban cultural object, to be “made visible” opening up new inter/intra-national publics? How do material *dispositifs* allow a film to survive historical archival attrition and enter a canon? And, finally, how does a specific market and/or state affect processes of preservation and spectatorship?

Exhumations in the Digital Sphere. If the construct of the archive has been understood as a space of order—or as a space upon which we imprint order—the content of the archive in practice reacts as if it were organic and mutating, generating unpredictable figures, territories,

and spaces. These seemingly living, unstable objects call into question whether archives are territorial or bounded and whether archival “things” are truly as static and immutable as we many times wish to believe.⁹ Film conservation history, in fact, is replete with vivid, almost archeological tales of celluloid unearthed in unlikely circumstances. Film conservationist and silent film expert Paolo Cherchi Usai insists that surviving film “is not an abstract entity brought to us through a logical pattern designed by history on behalf of posterity. It is the survivor of a complex, often random process of selection, not much different from a Darwinian evolutionary scheme.”¹⁰ In other words, film preservation is not linear; the survival of film as an object lacks the teleological nature many times ascribed to the material formation of film canons. Examples range from a barn in the American Midwest filled with nitrate films from the silent era where every film’s first reel was missing, sacrificed by locals as fireworks, to a swimming pool containing 510 reels of nitrate film abandoned by distributors, protected by frigid temperatures in the northern Yukon.¹¹ Both collections ultimately challenged the boundaries of existing film canons. Such haphazard incidents of the survival of orphan films are arguably less the exception than the rule in virtually any archival context, pointing toward a counterintuitive relationship between chance and conservation. Rather than being deliberately ordered, the paths of archives, canons, and cultural objects take twists and entangle.

Likewise, in Cuba, official film conservation has been irregular, rendered so by predictable mechanical, material, and political processes, as well as by more adventitious circumstances.¹² In the 1990s, the deterioration of the Cinemateca de Cuba’s film archive was attributed to the political and material compromises surrounding the fall of the Soviet Union and to the subsequent era of shortages referred to in Cuba as The Special Period, in which air-conditioners and archivists were abandoned in favor of goods for basic sustenance.¹³ Prior to the

1990s, this same decay in the Cinemateca de Cuba's film archive was associated with diverse factors ranging from the material difficulties produced by the United States embargo and Cuban censorship during moments of greater aesthetic orthodoxy to Revolutionary imperatives of cultural diffusion over the importance of preservation. To this history of Cuban archives, we may add broader issues surrounding the relative invisibility of Latin American and experimental film in international cinematic canons due to its marginalization in European and United States-based commercial distribution circuits.¹⁴ Similar observations regarding the marginality of experimental time-based media within Cuba itself have been made by Cuban critics and curators Luisa Marisy and Luciano Castillo, the latter describing Cuban experimental film as suffering from a "congenital arrhythmia," a condition worsened by archival irregularities.¹⁵

Despite insistent fables of celluloid decay, the cultural politics of the 1990s and 2000s in Cuba have also lent themselves to strategic resuscitations of previously marginalized filmmakers. Guillén Landrián is a paradigmatic example of an archival rebirth. The films of Guillén Landrián in the 1960s won prizes such as the Golden Spike Award at the Valladolid International Film Festival and a special award at the Krakow Film Festival. Yet, in the following decades, Guillén Landrián endured marginalization and censorship for his polemical and iconoclastic work and nonconformist personal and aesthetic tendencies, in particular during the politically conflictive 1970s, in particular the period spanning from 1971-1976 that Cuban intellectual Ambrosio Fornet has called the "grey quinquennium."¹⁶ This marginalization eventually led Guillén Landrián to leave for exile in 1989, the year of his departure coinciding with the dusk of the Cold War. Deactivated though not destroyed by Cuban cultural institutions, his work was shelved in the Cinemateca de Cuba's film archive following his expulsion from the ICAIC in 1972. The 1970s and 1980s being a period during which arguably the sole viable channel of national

circulation was the official ICAIC, Guillén Landrián's work managed to survive its political and aesthetic relegation and the confines of the Archive through word of mouth: the *rumor* of Guillén Landrián's figure that interrupted an official silence, as his presence was perhaps made more powerful by his absence.¹⁷

In recent years, Guillén Landrián's films have been screened in Cuba at the Film School at San Antonio de los Baños, the Instituto Superior de Arte de la Habana, and on Cuban public television, coordinated by Luciano Castillo, Humberto Rolens, and Greta Rodríguez. The filmmaker has become the subject of multiple documentaries—*Café con Leche* (Coffee with Milk, Manuel Zayas, 2003), *Nicolás: El fin pero no es el fin* (Nicolás: The End but not the End, Jorge Egusquiza Zorilla and Víctor Jiménez, 2005), and *Retornar a la Habana con Guillén Landrián* (To Go Back to Havana with Guillén Landrián, Julio Ramos and Raydel Araoz, 2013). Internationally, his work has screened in retrospectives at Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival 2011, The Play-Doc International Documentary Film Festival 2013, The Vienna International Film Festival 2013, and the Courtisane Festival 2014, among other venues.¹⁸

Guillén Landrián's oeuvre has also been featured in ICAIC-edited film publications, such as the multi-volume *Coordenadas del Cine Cubano* (2001; 2005; 2014). This more recent exhibition of Guillén Landrián's work retroactively reformulated what has conventionally been understood as the Cuban Revolutionary canon of the 1960s and early 1970s, usually comprised of filmmakers Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Julio García Espinosa, and Humberto Solás, and newsreel documentarian Santiago Álvarez. None of these filmmakers, Álvarez included, identified as filmmakers of color. In his celebrated 1965 short film *Now*, Álvarez famously appropriated in montage Charles Moore's iconic images of 1963 Birmingham, Alabama, along with other United States Civil Rights Movement images pirated from *Life* magazine.¹⁹ However, contrary to the work of

Guillén Landrián, even Álvarez's racial critique—and the broader racial critiques of Cuban productions of the period—forged an “outward looking” (rather than “inward looking”) politics of cinema intended to “decolonize consciousness through work on race.”²⁰ This, among other factors, lead us to back to Guillén Landrián's unresolved figure and retroactive canonization, which not only points towards the racialized tensions of canon formation, but also to the material and institutional axes of canonization.

Guillén Landrián was not the only Cuban filmmaker silenced during this period. The work of his contemporary and colleague at the ICAIC, Sara Gómez (1942–1974), also experienced periods of shifting visibility, and at times invisibility in the Cuban canon and its corresponding mechanisms of consecration.²¹ Sergio Giral, the third Afro-Cuban director active during the first two decades of the ICAIC, endured a similar fate.²² Largely dedicating himself to magisterial historical epics of slavery, Giral was swiftly censored when he instead chose to confront contemporary politics of the period in the film *Techo de Vidrio* (*Glass House*, 1980). In a 1991 interview with Jean Stubbs, Giral lamented that “you exercise a form of self-censorship in not wanting to destroy the cake by sticking your fingers in it too much.”²³ Beyond their anecdotal nature, these three cases disrupt national myths of racial harmony. They point toward an institutional and civil violence manifested in the politics of visibility put into institutional practice by the ICAIC and in the Miami art and film scene where Guillén Landrián, like Giral, later found himself.

Critiquing Revolutionary racial discourse in several of his films, Guillén Landrián arguably suffered a premature civil and social death himself both in the putative racial democracy of Revolutionary Cuba and later Miami.²⁴ Even as Cuban racial democracy was construed as colorblind and raceless, Guillén Landrián would first undergo a silencing and forced

disappearance within Revolutionary Cuba.²⁵ Later, Guillén Landrián would become victim of both a civil and literal death (from pancreatic cancer) in a Miami dominated and determined by a white Cuban establishment. Operating under the guise of North American exceptionalism, the social logic of this Miami was configured in the final days of Jim Crow segregation, which fundamentally conditioned its racial, social, and symbolic limits.

Despite the force of a racialized analysis of Guillén Landrián's censorship, scholarly extrapolations surrounding his suppression and institutional silencing have been various and interwoven. As with many other films of the period, the marginalization of Guillén Landrián's work occurs at the center of ongoing aesthetic debates, such as the infamous disputes between Blas Roca and Alfredo Guevara surrounding European art film aesthetics in the 1960s. Their conflicts illustrate the aesthetic restrictions of the 1960s and the multilayered conflicts surrounding meaning and intention during the period in which Guillén Landrián worked in Cuba.²⁶ Relative to the censorship of Guillén Landrián's films, critics have particularly cited the recusant politics of Guillén Landrián's "discontinuous" visual montages; and his "sonic montage" that in *Taller de Línea y 18* broke with what may be called an "audio-visual contract."²⁷ Needless to say, the latter critique is located within the context of a broader analysis of race and the avant-garde and the "radical questioning" of the unfortunate yet enduring opposition between "representational-identitary discourse" and "aesthetic experimentation" that its author, Julio Ramos, detects in Guillén Landrián's work.²⁸

Recent criticism on Guillén Landrián, however, has focused less on his eccentric place in the Cuban film canon of the 1960s than on his unearthing. Paradoxically, the lack of circulation of Guillén Landrián's surviving films as a consequence of their political and aesthetic relegation may be what ultimately preserved them. In fact, like much experimental film, their public

invisibility is what left them relatively pristine from the ravages of repeated screenings—that is, from the quiet erosion of the projector or the Moviola. In the words of Dean Luis Reyes, his “exhumation” and almost Deleuzian “virality”²⁹ among the generation of filmmakers active in the last decade has resulted in “near mythical status.”³⁰ Part of an explosion of pirated audiovisual material on the island, in the 1990s, Guillén Landrián’s largely forgotten films of the 1960s and 1970s (including *Coffea Arábica*, *Desde la Habana ¡1969! Recordar*, and *Taller de Línea y 18*) began circulating informally in Cuba on VHS.³¹ Two or three of his films were screened at the Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano de la Habana (Festival of New Latin American Cinema of Havana) in the early 1990s. In 1999, a 35mm print of *Coffea Arábica* was screened at the private Havana-based Ludwig Foundation of Cuba, while, in 2001 and 2002, shortly before Guillén Landrián’s death in 2003, an almost complete retrospective of his films made its way to the ICAIC-sponsored Muestra de Nuevos Realizadores (Showcase of New Filmmakers).³² More recently these surviving films have formed a second informal archive abroad on YouTube. There they comprise part of a larger diasporic Cuban do-it-yourself (DIY) digital film archive.³³ Part of a broader reincorporation of controversial filmmakers from the 1960s and 1970s historically excluded from the Revolutionary canon, the work of Guillén Landrián serves as a point of entry to an alternative visual historiography and cinematic tradition for many contemporary Cuban filmmakers both on the Island and abroad. These filmmakers, including Juan Carlos Alom, Juan Carlos Cremata, Eliécer Jiménez Almeida, Susana Barriga, Esteban Insausti, Armando Capó, and Jorge de León, among others, look to his work as a means of building an expanded or parallel canon, largely outside the state production system, bringing us to Guillén Landrián’s final documentary and only work created outside a state production apparatus.³⁴

***Inside Downtown* and the Rise of the Transnational Viewer**

Guillén Landrián's final documentary and only digital work, *Inside Downtown* (2001), was completed shortly before Guillén Landrián's death in 2003. While Guillén Landrián's celluloid films were intended as militant cultural objects in a national project, *Inside Downtown* was anchored in an intimate, non-institutional vision of 2001 Miami. Now circulating among Guillén Landrián's broader oeuvre on YouTube, *Inside Downtown*—recorded with a digital Sony prosumer camera—is conditioned by YouTube's recodification and the subsequent pixelation of its images, and the hissing of its audio. Recorded with cinematographer Egusquiza Zorilla over a period of four days in 1999, *Inside Downtown* was edited two years later afterhours at Village Films, a now-defunct production company in Miami where Egusquiza Zorilla worked. Over a month and a half, eleven hours of footage was edited into the 30-minute final cut.³⁵ Edited on Avid, *Inside Downtown* represented a challenging process of adaptation to digital media for Guillén Landrián. Working alongside Egusquiza Zorilla, however, in *Inside Downtown* he would develop an aesthetic and rhythm novel to his oeuvre. Posted by Cuban documentarian Víctor Jiménez from Miami in 2011, one year after YouTube introduced content recognition and duration extension past ten minutes, *Inside Downtown* is integrated within a larger history of media and within a broader history of diasporic representations and archives, problematizing both technology and public and domestic spaces as sites of diasporic social experience

Even if *Inside Downtown* is not technically pirate video like Guillén Landrián's other films circulating on Youtube, *Inside Downtown* shares pirate video's unmoored and imperfect qualities. Its imperfect reproduction has generative and erosive consequences. *Inside Downtown*'s audiovisual artifacts, in particular, remind the viewer of the multiple renders and

migrations of the video running across the screen, and the diasporic viewership that this implies. In its opening scenes, its digital noise, is most perceptible in the degradation of its chromatic palette, creating unrecognizable forms within its images' contours, and in the roughness of the curves in the white fonts of the film's title, against the gridding and the blockiness of pixelation. The production credits and the Spanish subtitles, which appear on the bottom of the screen, announce the bilingualism of the work from its first scenes and suffer similar degradations. Likewise, the audio is characterized by a permanent hiss, a result of the re-compression of an already polluted ambient soundtrack of a noisy cityscape.³⁶ This noise arises from a loss of definition to fit the standards for online streaming, compounded by the comparative lack of definition of the digital prosumer camera used in *Inside Downtown*'s production, which emphasizes the informal, extrainstitutional archival politics of the video's circulation.

As Brian Larkin has observed, pirate archives, as they are "dislodged" from a state apparatus and formal institutional circulation, take on a new precariousness that manifests in their material forms. Their "[c]onstant copying erodes data storage, degrading image and sound, overwhelming the signal of media content with the noise produced by the means of reproduction."³⁷ This erosion not merely loss. Rather, it "creates an aesthetic, a set of formal qualities that generate a particular sensorial experience of media marked by poor transmission, interference, and noise."³⁸ The "texture, flow and materiality" of these digital images and sounds are formal products of the codecs (or coder-decoders) involved in the compression of digital images and sounds as they move between formats and, by extension, viewers, redistributing "individual and collective sight."³⁹ Extending Larkin's observations into the politics of audiovisual perception, these codecs not only alter sensorial experience but also reflect and enact "new relations between people, things, spaces, and times in events and forms," and thus institute

“a relational ordering that articulates realities together that previously lay further apart.”⁴⁰

Following Laura Marks, I suggest that digital piracy and informal digital archives constitute accumulations of “transnational” objects that, in their subjective incorporation, have particularly vast consequences for the “reorganizing” of the materiality, the formation, and the spatiality of diasporic subjectivities.⁴¹ Physical proximity is not an assumed or preferred precondition for identification or affiliation with *Inside Downtown*’s subjects or between viewers, and shared distance (materialized in the loss rendered within the file) reinforces bonds that once may have been tenuous or even strained. These transnational digital archives have altered the way moving images and place cohere collective experience, redefining the forms in which diasporic viewers self-conceive their identities, as well as their physical, temporal, and affective relations to each other.

The audiovisual identities of such diasporic communities, as are many others of the former Soviet bloc, are an outcome of neoliberal post–Berlin Wall media politics, resulting in the dispersion of the contents of their national archives. They are also a product of new economies, new visual aesthetics, and, more specifically, new representations and modes of constituting collective subjectivities.⁴² Within Cuba, digital practices of direct online access and in particular streaming have historically been constrained in practice by limited bandwidth and connectivity—this despite the discursive construction of the digital sphere as a symbolic space in which emergent subjectivities are conformed and rehearsed.⁴³ Abroad, however, diasporic online communities recast understandings of the symbolic locations of exile both discursively and geographically. As Cristina Venegas writes, “these online communities offer the possibility for the displaced to become both ‘discursively emplaced’ and ‘virtually present,’” and have “begged a reconsideration of the spatial logic of exile.”⁴⁴ This new media archive is both continuous and

discontinuous with historical audiovisual archives, as well as with the remixing and dissemination of analogue video sharing. Yet, the corporate-sponsored democratizing conditions of new media fragment, pixelate, and re-combine the identities that they both represent and produce with a new voracity, thus giving the degraded and often incomplete objects of this archive new social meanings—simultaneously aleatory and strategic—within digital materialities. Here, in the virtual sphere, the politics of visibility of Cuban film and video are radically redistributed. In the provisional and mutating archive of YouTube, diasporic identities find new expressions, albeit perpetually unsettled and rhizomatic. These expressions are mediated and channeled by a conceptual displacement (and emplacement) that materializes in the representational spaces between their pixelation and the degradation of blurred images and sounds.⁴⁵

The vision of Miami that *Inside Downtown* depicts is a particular one. The Miami of 2001 had been reshaped as an “extra-territorial” community by the one and a half million Cubans who had settled there since the 1960s, yet with a renewed urgency during the Cuban financial collapse of the 1990s.⁴⁶ It was an intensely divided community that only one year before had been further cleaved by the Elián González affair.⁴⁷ However, *Inside Downtown* is not only a treatment of the segregated urban landscape and the dispossessed inhabitants of the northern side of the Florida Straits, the “racialized,” “automobile-centric,” and “built environment,” of contemporary Miami as Antonio López has described it.⁴⁸ It is also a portrait of Cuban artists of Guillén Landrián’s generation, many living in a marginal exile and inhabiting (sometimes almost burrowing within) these compressed urban geographies—conditions that Hamid Naficy describes as “claustrophobia” and sites of cinematic “confinement” in the context of diasporic

filmmaking, here creating a work that oscillates between an aesthetics of exteriority and interiority.⁴⁹

Inside Downtown is thematically and visually part of a broader audiovisual tradition representing Miami and the Cuban exile community who has made Miami its home. Miñuca Villaverde's *Tent City* (1980), for example, recorded the precarious open-air tent city briefly mounted and fenced-in beneath the roar of Interstate 95 for Mariel Exodus-era Cuban refugees. Sergio Giral's video and archival footage in *The Broken Image* (1995) documented in a more traditional interview format the words, images, and absences of diasporic filmmakers—including Guillén Landrián himself—many of them from the same milieu as the artists and poets featured in *Inside Downtown*. More broadly, *Inside Downtown* is also in conversation with the early 35mm work of León Ichaso and Orlando Jiménez Leal on New York City, such as *El Super* (1979), which depicts another architecturally-inscribed Cuban exile experience: the basement apartments (and, in later works, the rooftops).⁵⁰ However, *Inside Downtown*'s shaky hand-held video image, unconventional documentary logic, and comparatively neglected status lend it an unsettled place in the Cuban diasporic canon that is difficult to categorize within this panorama of urban visuality and experience.

Despite the work's open structure that pushes against evidentiary models of documentary production, *Inside Downtown* still falls within a documentary mode. At times it resembles a filmic essay or a reflexive documentary mode in which cinematic representation is itself the premise of the film.⁵¹ Playing with this categorical fluidity and the destabilization of realist aesthetics, *Inside Downtown* opens with the text "This is a fiction film." It closes with the English-language text "THE END BUT NOT THE END," alluding to the recurring use of the Spanish "El fin pero no es el fin" in several of Guillén Landrián's Cuban-produced films from

the 1960s, and to a broader openness and undefined nature within Guillén Landrián's documentary work. Critics, such as Dean Luis Reyes and Laura Beatriz Álvarez Ponce, have observed the reflexivity of Guillén Landrián's films of his earlier period.⁵² Yet Reyes' keen observation regarding Guillén Landrián's reflexivity is arguably even more applicable to *Inside Downtown* than to the Eisenstein-influenced virtuosic montage explorations that characterized many of Guillén Landrián works of the 1960s-era, such as *Coffea Arábica*, or to earlier films showing the traces of Italian neorealism and *cinéma vérité*.⁵³

Structured by a series of interviews, *Inside Downtown* places emphasis upon a mode of address, social encounter, and plurality of voices significantly absent from Guillén Landrián's work from the 1960s. The interviews themselves are informal, improvisational, even if ultimately determined by Guillén Landrián's directorial presence. The interviewees are not identified by name until the final credits, and the lack of a "Voice-of-God" commentary lends the work a nondidactic tone. Guillén Landrián and Egusquiza Zorilla record each of the seven artist interviewees—Enrique Gay García, Toni López, Julio Pichón, and Silvia Sarasua, among others—in his or her domestic workshop, equipped with the accoutrements of these artists' trades, including poetry books, paintings, sculptures. Knocking on doors to record without advance notice, camera on before arrival, Guillén Landrián and Egusquiza Zorilla found their subjects often unprepared to perform before a camera, shirtless (Enrique Gay García) or in boxers (Julio Pichón).⁵⁴ The painter Silvia Sarasua mutters "Oh my God" in English as she tidies her hair, the camera following her and reflected in the mirror. We only infrequently hear Guillén Landrián's interview questions, yet he does occasionally step into the frame: dancing with an interviewee in one sequence and offering to light a cigarette in another. Later in the documentary, Guillén Landrián, against the backdrop of a cement construction site, chats with a

street kid who asks if the camera that records them is a “TV,” signaling the strangeness and out-of-place-ness of the camera, but also the work and filmmaker’s embeddedness with the city’s streets.

If *Inside Downtown* dialogues with reflexive documentary modes, it also converses with the filmic genre of the city symphony, historiographically and disciplinarily bridging both documentary and avant-garde film.⁵⁵ While the city symphony celebrated and produced the fine-tuned machinery of modernity—the aesthetic modes of New Objectivity and its corresponding new subjectivities—*Inside Downtown* eulogizes the inoperability of the city’s machinery and its inhabitants.⁵⁶ A dissonant symphony of the abandoned street corners and interiors of a late-capitalist metropolis, *Inside Downtown* is recorded in the shadows of the production of the immaterial capital of finance. Opening with the sounds of sirens and of planes flying overhead across a night sky, the low-angle shots of a clunky handheld digital camera soon record the imposing and looming high-rises of Miami’s Downtown. In the morning scenes that follow, the same lens moves past shop windows, displaying shoes, suitcases, and low-end children’s clothing, overlooking unpeopled streets that draw attention to the absence of urban crowds, basic pedestrian movement, and urban activity canonized by early silent films.⁵⁷

Symbolically expelled from the classical Hollywood “fantasy of democratic freedom, self-presence, and control” expressed by “cars as both material and symbolic objects,”⁵⁸ the camera gazes through the Miami commuter rail windows, dirty and streaked, which act as a second lens through which to perceive the city. According to Guillén Landrián’s passenger-informant, from the Metromover commuter rail the arrival to Downtown is signaled by vultures circling the County Court House like “polka dots flying in the air.” The same passenger explains how the Metromover’s expansion was voted down, limiting pedestrian movement throughout the

city. Guillén Landrián's interview subjects, inhabitants of the public space including the Metromover itself, are visually and practically excluded from Miami's financial centers and its car-centric urban infrastructure. This exclusion is highly racialized in the eyes of Guillén Landrián's camera, even as one of the few white figures represented in the work, a man seen earlier on foot, begs Guillén Landrián from a stolen pickup truck for two dollars for gas, equally marginalized as the other subjects represented largely on foot. This compelling scene is paired by the closing scene of *Inside Downtown*—a drawbridge lowering across the Miami River—which is shot through a car windshield made discernible by the drops of rain hitting its transparent surface. This constructs a “mobile intimate realm”⁵⁹ from which to observe; it reproduces the interiors that comprise the majority of the documentary at the same time that the windshield recalls the streaked windows of the Metromover, yet allows Guillén Landrián to rewrite the “dominant subjectivit[ies]” of car-based perception.”⁶⁰

In the remaining portions of the documentary, primarily recorded in domestic spaces in a bilingual interview format that structurally nods toward the “acousticity”⁶¹ of diaspora, *Inside Downtown* documents the artistic creation of Guillén Landrián and his fellow artists. With little public (or corporate) sponsorship for cultural production, these artists are alienated from the city center and encamped in their domestic spaces.⁶² Positioning language as a site of identity and collective belonging, as well as exclusion, the artists interviewed are marked by the differences of language and national affiliation that condition them as observing subjects, even as the term “downtown” is used in both English and Spanish in the documentary, breaking into the informants' Spanish.⁶³ The documentary construes this “downtown ” as both a point of encounter and as an space from which these artists are expelled both literally and metaphorically as inhabitants and producers.⁶⁴ If Downtown Miami's business district was described by Manning

Marable twenty years before as part of a complex of “white symbols of power and private property,”⁶⁵ in 2001 the painter Gay García, Guillén Landrián’s third interviewee, bitterly personifies the haphazard new urban concrete constructions of Miami’s Downtown as nothing less than “colonizers.”⁶⁶ Another interviewee, Tony López, a prominent Cuban artist who emigrated to flee the Batista regime in 1958,⁶⁷ is featured in his studio in Wynwood—an area of Miami now home to a high-end gallery district. From offscreen, López, refers to a plaster statue of José Martí, explaining that it is a copy of one now in New Orleans. In the Miami of *Inside Downtown*, however, the plaster cast is ensconced in an internal barred porch, a synecdoche of the public space, reproducing the artist’s own interiority and confinement within an intimate domain.

However, the two sequences featuring the poet Esteban Luis Cárdenas, one of which is the first formal interview in the documentary, are in many ways the documentary’s narrative center. In his second appearance, Cárdenas briefly recites from his poetry book *La ciudad mágica* (The Magic City, 1997), though his voice soon moves offscreen. If only briefly, his poem “Barrio” (1994) narrates and determines our visual understanding of the city. Born in 1945 in Ciego de Ávila, Cárdenas emigrated to Miami in 1980, where he would live until his death in 2010. Cárdenas’s poetic voice relates the social actors of the city streets who frequent “markets cubanos (bodegas)” and inhabit “boarding homes” (half-way houses), in the shadows of affluent corporate Miami.⁶⁸ By giving such protagonism to the persona of the disabled Afro-Cuban poet Cárdenas—confined to a walker as a pedestrian victim of two automobile collisions—Guillén Landrián spotlights the *marielitos*, or the Mariel Generation. What Antonio López called the “blackened”⁶⁹ immigration wave, these émigrés were identified in reference to Cuba’s Mariel Harbor and the Mariel Boatlift; they were also notoriously—and to the chagrin of much of the

Cuban exile community—fictionalized in *Scarface* (Brian De Palma, 1983). The painters, sculptors and poets of this generation were disproportionately artists of color in the context of an historically white Cuban exile community and were particular in their influences, which included Lydia Cabrera and Eugenio Florit. They were artists in a double exile, expelled from both Revolutionary Cuba and an elusive American Dream, represented by the Miami Cuban bourgeoisie. Cuban essayist Iván de la Nuez expresses the difficult assimilation of the Mariel-era artists and writers. De la Nuez writes, “For the Mariel exiles (los marielitos) there was no Ry Cooder who would make a revival phenomenon of them, offering reparations for a poorly lived history; nothing. They were too conflictive. They weren’t exotic. They didn’t traffic in nostalgia. They weren’t renovators of Magical Realism.”⁷⁰ According to de la Nuez, their “conflictivity”—marks of race, class, and politics—made Cuban artists like Cárdenas stubborn commodities, resistant to the machinery of canons and attendant market mechanisms, associated with the likes of La Buena Vista Social Club and Magical Realism.

Like Cárdenas, *Inside Downtown* and its informants express the conflicts of Guillén Landrián’s generation reaching beyond the particularities of the Mariel Exodus, to a broader exile experience. Populating a mediascape shaped by diaspora and exile, *Inside Downtown* and its subjects are excluded both spatially, metaphorically, and practically from dominant financial centers and markets, but also from the support of the State. More broadly, *Inside Downtown* distills not only a transition between the filmic and the digital in the oeuvre of Guillén Landrián, but also between a Cuban and a transnational reception and archive, ultimately calling attention to the machineries of patronage and spectatorship, as well as to the politics and organizing forces of archives and canons

The New Digital Archive

Under neoliberal reformulations of the state, private streaming platforms have taken the stead of the state-sponsored archives that preceded them. Founded in 2005 from a Silicon Valley garage and purchased by Google in 2006, YouTube's name lexically compounded televisual references with those of a populist, yet individualistic, second person (presumably singular) referent-viewer-user. YouTube has constructed an online video platform that "in the public mind [. . .] is not simply an archive but an ideal form of archive," imperiling the historical preservation archives from which its users many times appropriate.⁷¹ Yet, as Jamie Baron cautions, "if YouTube is an archive, it is an archive without an archon."⁷² Baron's systemic critique extends beyond the confines of any one artist, film, or creative process to a broader politics of the digital audiovisual document. As audiovisual materials leave the authority and sanction of official state or commercial archives to enter digital audiovisual sharing sites, they lose accompanying notions of location, provenance, and institutional authority over their ordering, preservation, and constitutive logics. In other words, "There is no archon or even a body of archivists behind the curtain."⁷³ The regulatory mechanism is instead the corporate search engine and the users themselves who mediate and distribute the politics of digital agency, across what YouTube's own promotional materials have construed, perhaps deceptively, as an "empty" platform.⁷⁴ As users salvage, transfer, and circulate moving images and sound from a vast historical archive to YouTube and other media sharing sites, the internet has taken shape as a system of symbolic construction and of the production of collective subjectivities in many ways outside of the hierarchical processes of selection of traditional archives and canon formation, even as the mechanics of its search engines are configured within a vertical corporate platform.

As such, the mass infrastructure and high technology of YouTube's proprietary platform contrasts with the improvisational nature of its content, simultaneously at the center of dominant audiovisual production and reception and at its most remote margins. YouTube hosts not only auteur works such as *Inside Downtown* but also a broad range of genres of both professional and amateur audiovisual material. This combinatorial multiplicity of fragments draws from commercial and independent media and from elite and popular aesthetics; in the case of Cuban audiovisual production, it aggregates not only videos of national cinema and television, but also amateur representations of diasporic culture. Interspersed between Hispanic news features, Caribbean tourist videos, and home movie bloopers, Guillén Landrián's films live digitally in a state of constitutive variance, perpetually marked by the traces of their analogue and digital migrations. Some of the films are digitized by recording filmic projections, their frames cropped and their titles altered. Others are overlaid with on-screen television station logos, anteceded by test cards and countdown leader, or marked scratches and grain relics from celluloid and holdover noise and scan-lines from video. Guillén Landrián's trademark closeups of Afro-Cuban and *guajiro* subjects—the films' most concentrated sites of identification—on YouTube are crisscrossed and remediated by celluloid and digital artifacts, infused with both a material distance from their original forms and the closeness of the pathos of loss.

The conspicuous nature of these traces emphasizes the dense material and historical travels of these works, yet in the video descriptions themselves there is no mention of when and how the films were digitized, nor of their provenance, giving the videos an ethereal and ungrounded quality, at the same time that their subjects of representation are highly embodied. For instance, the description fields of two videos posted in 2010 by Juan Miguel Salas Rodríguez—a former Cuban film student now living in Berlin—describe both *Los del baile* (The

Dancers, Guillén Landrián, 1965) and *En un barrio viejo* (*In an Old Neighborhood*, Guillén Landrián, 1963) as a “Documental desconocido Cubano” (“Unknown Cuban documentary”).⁷⁵ Borrowing Germanic capitalization conventions in their hybrid Spanish descriptions, the two videos’ shared title, calls attention to the diasporic character of the videos yet extracts the works from historical context by omitting the dates of the videos and labeling them as “unknown.” Running against the historic archive’s fetish of the knowable, categorical, and historically verifiable in objects, this description facilitates the digital “knowability” of the work of Guillén Landrián. At the same time, though, the description, in addressing an initiated public, intervenes in the Cuban canon—the “known” and “the Cuban.” In a new medium and upon a new platform, it establishes a hermeneutic within parameters that dialogue with the national yet also exceeds it. These digital copies and conditions connect with broader systems of knowing and arbitrators of value, pointing towards the internet’s complex machineries of visibility and invisibility; the authority to see and be seen; and the vexed politics of what and who is remembered and forgotten inherent within it as an archival system.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the ICAIC and the Cinemateca de Cuba’s film archive in particular have gradually lost their exclusivity as a frame and caretaker of the Cuban image. The debilitating shortages in state institutions (and subsequent partial privatizations), as well as the advent of digital technology more broadly, propelled this transition. This progressive shift from national archival structures to extraofficial digital circulation has relocated and reformulated agency, authority, and even historicity surrounding Cuban audiovisual images and their use and reception. Once digitized, migrated and deployed within media sharing sites, Cuban audiovisual documents and their users become part of a new system, which in its orderings and assignations of value, intervenes in the conditions of the historical

archive. As national audiovisual memory has left the historical archive's exclusive domain, the proliferation and multiplication of the task of audiovisual memory has resited what was once its authority across amateur-use archives and the corporate servers and search engines that have become the mechanical girders, but also the conceptual dictates of the migration of digital files, redistributing agency over the audiovisual.

Inside Downtown portrays the discards of high capitalist immaterial production.

However, the streaming technology upon which its file runs, oscillating between material and immaterial production, is at the center of epochal changes in the aesthetics and politics of information and production. It is here *inside* these digital territories of property and access—both moving and static, material and immaterial—where Guillén Landrián's digital archive and broader diasporic archives now circulate and embed. On YouTube, national film heritage takes on a “poor” digital aesthetic that is YouTube's material precondition. While the historical archive was a machine of containment, enclosure, and, in many cases, the domain of the state—particularly in the case of Cuba—this new digital archive is instead marked by both capture and dispersions,⁷⁶ corporate administration and DIY empowerment. The selective material rebirth of YouTube's contents relies upon these novel and at times precarious modes of illuminating the limited works within the Archive upon which canons are based. In this fashion, if the historical canon was a process of selection, exclusion, and the institutional assignation and ultimately the transmission of value, YouTube's search engine algorithm is likewise a mechanism of the systemic and differential production of value.⁷⁷

While early internet apologists proclaimed a stateless, matterless, and raceless new world hovering in the ether, the uneven symbolic production of value has seemingly become only more marked and entrenched in the digital sphere. The internet is both an empowering

space of invention (and of accessing new visions of self) and a space in which new and old structures of power and cultural exclusions endure and restructure.⁷⁸ Yet, under cognitive and attention capitalism, Google's algorithmic mechanism does not operate in a vertical fashion as the Western canon and other forms of traditional knowledge arguably have. Rather, dynamically combining both horizontal and vertical components, Google's algorithm operates "vortically" across the mass and aggregated expressions of judgment that populate and entwine with the highly privatized sphere that is the internet.⁷⁹ Exemplifying the possible extensions of the life expectancy of a work of art through criticism, spectatorship, and varied modes of appropriation, *Inside Downtown* on YouTube possesses an associative multi-directionality that the mechanics of the historical archive lack or even shun. Nonetheless, if the historical archive has been described as elevating "trash" into "documents" or "celluloid" into "works," perhaps YouTube operates similarly, albeit with a different rapacity and immediacy.⁸⁰ Migrating and pixelating across a dense transnational history of inclusion and exclusion, *Inside Downtown* is both a victim of this new system of valorization, and the recipient and motor of a privileged digital resuscitation.

Many thanks to all the filmmakers and artists who generously shared their memories of the filming and editing of *Inside Downtown*, especially Gretel Alfonso, Jorge Egusquiza, Víctor Jiménez, Néstor Díaz de Villegas, and Julio González Consuegra, to Julio Ramos, Dean Luis Reyes, Jesse Lerner, Ruth Goldberg, Ernesto Livon-Grosman, Raúl Fernández, Dylon Robbins,

and Juan Carlos Rodríguez for their sustained conversation surrounding the work of Nicolás Guillén Landrián, to the anonymous readers whose thoughtful and careful suggestions helped improve the article, and to the editors of *JCMS*.

¹ Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos

² There were VHS copies that circulated in the 1990s. Another analogue transfer was carried out by then film student Manuel Zayas in the context of his thesis film, *Café con Leche* (2003), at the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión (EICTV, The International Film and TV School) in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba. The digitization of these Betacams was carried out by another EICTV student, Juan Miguel Salas Rodríguez, who later posted two of the films online on YouTube from Berlin. Dean Luis Reyes, email message to the author, December 18, 2017. Juan Miguel Salas Rodríguez, email message to the author, March 21, 2018.

³ Jorge La Ferla, *Cine (y) digital: aproximaciones a posibles convergencias entre el cinematógrafo y la computadora* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2009).

⁴ Prior to its premiere in the United States at Miami-Dade Community College in 2002, *Inside Downtown* received a Special Mention at the XIX International Film Festival of Uruguay (2001). The film was later shown in 2010 in Miami at Docs in Motion at Zu Galeria Fine Arts.

⁵ Guillén Landrián's state-sponsored filmic production of the 1960s produced in Cuba has only recently been reexamined by a small group of excellent critical studies. Critics who have made valuable contributions to the analysis of Nicolás Guillén Landrián's oeuvre include Laura Beatriz Álvarez Ponce, Anne Garland Mahler, Ruth Goldberg, Jesse Lerner, Ernesto Livon Grosman, Dean Luis Reyes, Julio Ramos, and Dylon Robbins. The first anthology on the filmmaker was recently published. *Nicolás Guillén Landrián. O el desconcierto filmico*, eds. Julio Ramos and

Dylon Robbins (Leiden: Bokeh-Almenara); I have only found two brief treatments of *Inside Downtown*, Magdiel Aspillaga, “Inside Downtown,” *Alcancía de Artesano* (2013): <<http://laalcanciadelartesanoblogspot.com/2013/05/inside-downtown.html>>, and a passage in Jennifer Lambe’s *Madhouse: Psychiatry and Politics in Cuban History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 218-219.

⁶ For an appraisal of the critical and artistic meaning generated by lossy digital compression, its “representational failures,” and the “visual artifacts” produced by film, video, and digital reproduction, see Rebecca Baron and Douglas Goodwin, “The Rest is Noise, On Lossless,” in *On Not Looking: The Paradox of Contemporary Visual Culture*, ed. Frances Guerin (New York: Routledge, 2015), 63, 70; See also Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” *e-flux* (November 2009), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image>; and Adrian Mackenzie, “Codecs,” in *Software Studies: A Lexicon*, 48–55. The latter three sources are primarily interested in *visual* artifacts of compression. On audio artifacts of compression, see Jonathan Sterne, “The Death and Life of Digital Audio,” *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 31, no. 4 (July 2006): 338–48.

⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 2. On the nonlinearity of “cultural evolution” from different disciplinary angles see Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, “An Archaeology of Media Archaeology. Introduction,” in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 1-24, among others.

⁸ Here, I reference Laura Marks’s notion of “traveling” or “transnational objects,” which includes tapes and films themselves. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke, 2000), 22. Marks’ concept intersects

with Mieke Bal's notion of "travelling," but also of "migratory," read broadly as a "migratory aesthetic" intertwined with time-based media. Mieke Bal, "Heterochronotopia," in *Migratory Settings*, eds. Mural Aydemir and Alex Rotas (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2008), 35-57.

⁹ This description of the archive takes inspiration from Foucault and his discussion of language, order, and classification, which may also be extended to archival systems. Michel Foucault, "Preface," in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), v-xxiii.

¹⁰ Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema: An Introduction* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 44.

¹¹ Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema*, 44.

¹² In fact, the ICAIC's archival policy has accumulated a bibliography—both academic and journalistic—that relates frequently less to its contents than to its deterioration and lacunae. See Janet Ceja Alcalá, "Imperfect Archives and the Principle of Social Praxis in the History of Film Preservation in Latin America," *The Moving Image* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 66–97; Mariana Johnson, "The Revolution Will be Archived: Cuba's *Noticiero ICAIC Latinoamericano*," *The Moving Image* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 1–21.

¹³ The Special Period, announced in 1990, roughly dates to the 1990s. On the difficulties of establishing a precise periodization for the period, see Ariana Hernández-Reguant, "Writing the Special Period: An Introduction," in *Cuba in the Special Period: Culture and Ideology in the 1990s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-21.

¹⁴ Arlindo Machado, "Voces y luces de un continente desconocido," in *Visionários: audiovisual na América Latina=Visionários: audiovisual en Latinoamérica* (Sao Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2008), 9.

¹⁵ Luisa Marisy, “Experimental Cinema in Cuba?” in *Ismo, Ismo, Ismo: Cine experimental en América Latina/Ism, Ism, Ism: Experimental Cinema in Latin America*, eds. Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 142; Luciano Castillo, “Arritmia Congénita: La experimentación en el nuevo cine cubano,” (paper presented at Festival de Cine Experimental de Toro, Cali, Colombia, 2010). Unless otherwise noted, this and all other translations are mine.

¹⁶ Fonet describes this period as a time in which literary and artistic creation more broadly became “subordinate, ancillary, with little space for play, introspection, and formal experimentation.” He first used the term at the Encuentro de Narrativa, in Santiago de Cuba, in November of 1980. It was formalized in a 1987 text in the *Casa de las Américas* journal. Despite the term’s initial radicality in disrupting an official silence regarding the period, the concept has since been critiqued by some for its relative temperance. The “Black Decade” has been proffered as an alternative. Ambrosio Fonet, “El Quinquenio Gris: Revisitando el término.” (paper presented at La política cultural del periodo revolucionario: Memoria y reflexión, Centro Teórico-Cultural Criterios, Casa de las Américas, Havana, 30 January, 2007).

¹⁷ Here I understand rumor—following Lauren Derby—as “unsanctioned speech,” which may allow us to reconceive the historic reception of cinematic works beyond the traditional “boundaries of the archive.” This unauthorized speech may “reveal alternative understandings of political authority” and “rema[p] state power as continuous with civil society,” allowing us to consider the canon and the archive beyond its more traditional limits “sanctioned” by the ICAIC. Lauren Derby, “Beyond Fugitive Speech: Rumor and Affect in Caribbean History,” *Small Axe* 18, no. 2 (July 2014): 125; 127.

¹⁸ There was an early screening of Guillén Landrián works in the 1990 Centre Pompidou program “Le cinéma cubain,” curated by Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, in the context of which José Antonio Évora began to consecrate Guillén Landrián’s figure in the catalogue text. José Antonio Évora, “Santiago Álvarez et le documentaire,” in *Le cinéma cubain*, comp. Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1990), 123-30. See, Julio Ramos, “Cine, archivo y poder: entrevista a Manuel Zayas en Nueva York,” Dossier: Especial Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *LaFuga* (October 2013).

¹⁹ Hito Steyerl, “Archive in Motion,” *Frieze* 3 (Winter 2011). <<https://frieze.com/article/archive-motion>>.

²⁰ Susan Lord, “Acts of Affection: Cinema, Citizenship, and Race in the Work of Sara Gómez,” in *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination*, eds. Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 184.

²¹ On Sara Gómez, see Lord, “Acts of Affection,” 173-192; Inés María Martiatu, “¡Sara es mucha Sara!” Interview with Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal, *Afro-Hispanic Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 181-204; Inés María Martiatu Terry, “Una isla para Sara Gómez,” in *Hijas del Muntu: Biografías críticas de mujeres afrodescendientes de América Latina*, eds. María Mercedes Jaramillo and Lucía Ortiz (Bogotá: Panamericana, 2011), 269-292; Devyn Spence Benson, “Epilogue: A Revolution inside of the Revolution: Afro-Cuban Experiences after 1961,” in *Antiracism in Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 231-248.

²² In all three cases, the term Afro-Cuban and its racial implications is employed not as an essentialist category, but as “a historical and material culture that is embodied in everyday life.” Lord, 177. It may be understood as an historical, juridical, and representational regime of

perpetually “unfinished” identities. Gilroy, 1.

²³ Sergio Giral, “Images and Icons,” in *AfroCuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics, and Culture*, eds. Pérez Sarduy, Pedro and Jean Stubbs (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1993), 265.

²⁴ In African diaspora studies, Saidiya Hartman and Stephen Best describe “the ongoing production of lives lived in intimate relation to premature death (whether civil, social or literal),” illuminating Guillén Landrián’s condition as a filmmaker. Saidiya Hartman and Stephen Best, “Fugitive Justice: The Appeal of the Slave,” *Representations* 92, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 13.

²⁵ Revolutionary Cuban race ideology amalgamated nineteenth-century racial ideology—especially José Martí’s concept of a “nation for all”—and a Marxist flattening of race in favor of class. Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Devyn Spence Benson, *Antiracism in Cuba*; Mark Q. Sawyer, *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁶ See Alfredo Guevara, “Alfredo Guevara responde a las <<Aclaraciones>>,” in *Polémicas culturales de los 60*, ed. Graziella Pogolotti (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2006), 169-74. Roca was a prominent member of the Cuban Communist Party, and Guevara, not coincidentally, a staunch advocate of Guillén Landrián’s work, was then president of the ICAIC. For a critical appraisal of these debates see Laura-Zoë Humphreys, “Paranoid Readings and Ambivalent Allegories in Cuban Cinema,” *Social Text* 35, no. 3 (September 2017): 21. Emphasizing the broader “struggles over the meanings” and “intentions” of the period, Laura-Zoë Humphrey has observed an endemic “directed indirection” in Cuban Revolutionary film.

²⁷ On “discontinuous” visual montage in the work of Guillén Landrián, see Ernesto Livon-Grosman, “Nicolásito’s Way: Los sinuosos caminos de la estética revolucionaria,” Dossier: Especial Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *LaFuga* (October 2013). On Guillén Landrián’s “sonic montage,” see Julio Ramos, “Sonidos del trabajo: Los montajes de Guillén Landrián en Taller de Línea y 18,” Dossier: Body at Work, eds. Alejandra Laera and Fermín Rodríguez, *A Contracorriente* 16, no. 3 (Spring 2019): 79-98; and Julio Ramos, “La fábrica de los sentidos: ensamblaje y asamblea en *Taller de Línea y 18* (1971) de Guillén Landrián,” edited by John Beverley y Leonardo Solana, *Revista Iberoamericana*, (forthcoming).

²⁸ On Guillén Landrián’s critique of the opposition between “representational-identitary discourse” and “aesthetic experimentation,” see Julio Ramos, “Los archivos de Nicolás Guillén Landrián: Cine, poesía, y disonancia,” Dossier: Especial Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *LaFuga* (October 2013). For more on Guillén Landrián’s treatment of continued racial segregation under the Revolution especially in *Coffea Arábica*, see Anne Garland Mahler, “‘Todos los negros y todos los blancos y todos tomamos café’: Race and Cuban Revolution in Nicolás Guillén Landrián’s *Coffea Arábica*,” *Small Axe* 19, no. 1 (March 2015): 55-75.

²⁹ Dean Luis Reyes, “Exhumaciones de Nicolás Guillén Landrián,” Dossier: Especial Nicolás Guillén Landrián, *LaFuga* (October 2013) <<http://www.lafuga.cl/exhumaciones-de-nicolas-guillen-landrian/660>>.

³⁰ Ruth Goldberg, “Under the Surface of the Image: Cultural Narrative, Symbolic Landscapes, and National Identity in the Films of Jorge de León and Armando Capó,” in *New Documentaries in Latin America*, eds. Vinicius Navarro and Juan Carlos Rodríguez (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 60.

³¹ See Dean Luis Reyes, *La mirada bajo asedio: El documental reflexivo cubano* (Santiago: Editorial Oriente, 2010), 5.

³² Manuel Zayas dates the first formal re-appearance of Guillén Landrián's work (*Ociel del Toa* and *Coffea Arábiga*) at the Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in 1994-95. See Julio Ramos, "Cine, archivo y poder: entrevista a Manuel Zayas en Nueva York." Iván Giroud, Sara Vega, Helmo Hernández and Luisa Marisy curated the exhibition *Tiempo & Espacio: desafíos de la contemporaneidad* in April 1999 at the Ludwig Foundation in Havana. Thanks to Luisa Marisy for the format specifications. Luisa Marisy, email message to the author, December 12, 2017. On the retrospective at La Muestra de Nuevos Realizadores, see Dean Luis Reyes, *La mirada bajo asedio* (Santiago: Editorial Oriente, 2010), 5.

³³ Since 2010, Víctor Jiménez—co-director of the documentary on Guillén Landrián, *Nicolás: El fin pero no es el fin* (Coincident Productions and Village Films, USA, 2005)—has posted almost all of Guillén Landrián's surviving documentaries on YouTube from Miami; his copies were from DVDs that circulated among fellow Miami-based exiles. Interview with Víctor Jiménez. Personal Interview. December 17, 2017. Former EICTV student Juan Miguel Salas Rodríguez has also posted several Guillén Landrián works.

³⁴ This is discussed further in Goldberg, "Under the Surface of the Image;" Marisy, "Experimental Cinema in Cuba?"; and Reyes, "Exhumaciones de Nicolás Guillén Landrián." It is also treated in Jesse Lerner, "La imagen es de quien la trabaja: Cine reciclado en América Latina," in *Ismo, Ismo, Ismo*, 108-127.

³⁵ Interview with Jorge Egusquiza Zorilla. Personal Interview. December 24, 2017

³⁶ See Sterne, "The Death and Life of Digital Audio." Sterne problematizes the discourse of "originality" and "loss of being" surrounding digital audio recordings and conversions (in

particular MP3 files), redirecting this debate towards the variegated social lives of digital recordings. This argument can be brought to its extreme when extended to the social lives of the compressed audiovisual files of YouTube, whose sound lives reencoded in a significantly reduced dynamic range, that is, a process of boosting the quieter signals, and attenuating the louder signals of the video's companion audio file.

³⁷ Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 14.

³⁸ Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 14.

³⁹ Mackenzie, "Codecs," 48; Harwood, "Pixel," 217.

⁴⁰ Mackenzie, "Codecs," 48; Mackenzie, "Codecs," 54.

⁴¹ Appropriating D.W. Winnicott's notion of the transitional object—"any external object that a person partially incorporates in the process of reorganizing its subjectivity"—and applying it to contexts of "cultural translation and transcultural movement," film and video becomes what Marks calls a "transnational object." See Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 78.

⁴² Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image." Steyerl develops how the contents of many state post-socialist or postcolonial archives find themselves now within informal spheres.

⁴³ For the practices of the digital sphere in Cuba, see Cristina Venegas and Paloma Duong, who have written on the politics of Cuban bloggers. Cristina Venegas, "El ser liberado: la biopolítica de los blogs cubanos," *Kepes* 9, no. 8 (January-December 2012): 37-60; Paloma Duong, "Bloggers Unplugged: Amateur Citizens, Cultural Discourse, and Public Sphere in Cuba," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia* 22, no. 4 (November 2013): 475-397. "Offline" exchanges occur through pirated DVDs, pen-drives, and the sale of files through external drives, most recently in a file-share phenomenon called "el paquete." For a critical

appraisal of the “paquete,” see Dean Luis Reyes, “Entendiendo el ‘paquete,’” *Cinereverso* (2014): <http://cinereverso.org/?p=13668>. For a broader study of VHS and DVD piracy, see Anna Cristina Pertierra, “If They Show ‘Prison Break’ in the United States on a Wednesday, by Thursday It Is Here’: Television and New Media in Twenty-First Century Cuba,” in *Cuba: The Struggle for Consumption* (Florida: Caribbean Studies Press, 2011), 197-238.

⁴⁴ Cristina Venegas, *Digital Dilemmas: The State, the Individual, and Digital Media in Cuba* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 157; 158.

⁴⁵ Venegas’ (and Larkin’s) reflections on new media is informed by an historic discourse on media devices that has a long-standing Cuban and Latin American tradition. Among others, Julio Garcia Espinosa, “Por un cine imperfecto,” in *Por un cine imperfecto* (Caracas, Venezuela: Rocinante, 1973), 12; Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, “Hacia un tercer cine. Apuntes y experiencias para el desarrollo de un cine de liberación en el Tercer Mundo” (originally published 1969), in *Hojas de cine: Testimonios y documentos del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*, Vol. III Centroamérica y el Caribe (Mexico: Fundación Mexicana de Cineastas, 1988), 29-62.

⁴⁶ Isabel Álvarez-Borland, “Introduction,” in *Cuban-American Literature of Exile: From Person to Persona* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 8-13.

⁴⁷ Ricardo L. Ortiz, *Cultural Erotics in Cuban America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 6.

⁴⁸ Antonio López, *Unbecoming Blackness: The Diaspora Cultures of Afro-Cuban America* (New York: New York University, 2012), 168.

⁴⁹ Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 5.

⁵⁰ The Cuban exile canon is treated in greater detail in Ana López's seminal essay, "Greater Cuba," in *The Ethnic Eye: Latino Media Arts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 38-58.

⁵¹ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 125.

⁵² Dean Luis Reyes, "Nicolásito, El documental reflexivo de Nicolás Guillén Landrián en los años 60: testimonio paralelo de una revolución," in *Coordenadas del Cine Cubano 3*, eds.

Reynaldo González and Mario Naito López (Santiago, Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2001), 246-255.

Laura Beatriz Álvarez Ponce, "Nicolás Guillén Landrián: testimonio, crítica y contemporaneidad," in *Coordenadas*, 256-274.

⁵³ Manuel Zayas, qtd. Álvarez Ponce, "Nicolás Guillén Landrián: testimonio, crítica y contemporaneidad," 258; Jorge Luis Sánchez and Livio Delgado, qtd. Álvarez Ponce, "Nicolás Guillén Landrián: testimonio, crítica y contemporaneidad," 258.

⁵⁴ Interview with Jorge Egusquiza Zorilla; Interview with Julio Pichón. Personal Interview. December 19, 2017.

⁵⁵ Scott MacDonald, *Avant-doc: Intersections of Documentary & Avant-Garde Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

⁵⁶ See Martin Gaughan, "Ruttman's Berlin: Filming in a 'Hollow Space'?" in *Screening the City*, ed. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (London: Verso, 2003), 41-57.

⁵⁷ This aspect of *Inside Downtown* was in many ways illuminated by Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky's article on Fernando Pérez's *Suite Habana* (2003). Aguilera Skvirsky's analysis of *Suite Habana* as a Havana city symphony, which "goes after the experience of an alternative modernity" in a post-Soviet landscape, clarified Guillén Landrián's, perhaps opposed, critique of the inoperability of late-capitalist modernity in Miami only a couple of year's prior to Pérez's

experimental documentary. See Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky, “The Postcolonial City Symphony Film and the ‘Ruins’ of *Suite Habana*,” *Social Identities*, 19: 3-4 (July 2013): 423-439.

⁵⁸ Jude Davies, “Against the Los Angeles Symbolic: Unpacking the Racialized Discourse of the Automobile in 1980s and 1990s Cinema,” in *Screening the City*, 221; 222.

⁵⁹ Davies, 222.

⁶⁰ Davies, 220.

⁶¹ Naficy, 25.

⁶² Manuel Zayas, “El cine postergado,” *Cubaencuentro* (September 2005):

<<http://arch1.cubaencuentro.com/entrevistas/20050904/74540a9e00385c591a45bac12d946245/1.html>>

⁶³ Juan Flores, “Broken English Memories: Languages in the Trans-Colony,” in *From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 57; 58. Despite the Puerto Rican specificity of the essay, Flores’ observations of the historical agency of language in identitary formations is productively applied to the linguistic “breaks” of broader diasporic communities; to which may be added Coco Fusco, *English is Broken Here. Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York City: The New Press, 1995).

⁶⁴ For a discussion of Miami’s transformation into an international banking center, see Ramón Grosfoguel, “World Cities in the Caribbean: Miami and San Juan,” in *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 78-99.

⁶⁵ Manning Marable, “The Fire this Time: The Miami Rebellion, May, 1980,” *The Black Scholar* 11, no. 6 *The Black Struggle: Miami & the Caribbean* (July/August 1980): 2; 5.

⁶⁶ Lynette M.F. Bosch, “From the Vanguardia to the United States. Cuban and Cuban-American Identity in the Visual Arts,” in *Cuban-American Literature and Art: Negotiating Identities*, eds.

Isabel Álvarez-Borland and Lynette M.F. Bosch (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 134. Enrique Gay García, was a member of the so-called “Vieja Guardia,” a generation of artists active in the 1940s and 1950s in Cuba connected with the New York Abstract Expressionist movement, had left Cuba for exile in Miami in the 1960s.

⁶⁷ “Entrevista con el escultor Cubano Tony López,” interviewer Alfonso Rodríguez, *Confluencia* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 104.

⁶⁸ In the 1980s and 1990s in Miami, halfway houses were called “boarding homes” The notion of the “boarding home” was canonized by Guillermo Rosales, another writer of Cárdenas generation, in his novella *Boarding Home* (1987).

⁶⁹ López, *Unbecoming Blackness*, 156.

⁷⁰ Iván de la Nuez, “Prólogo: El espejo roto de la literature cubana,” in *Cuentos desde Miami*, ed. Juan Abreu (Barcelona: Poliedro, 2004), 15. This reference emphasizes the comparative marketability of the Latin American “Boom” writers, such as Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar, in English-language markets, or of the megahit *Buena Vista Social Club*, an album produced in 1996 by Ry Cooder, in *Inside Downtown*’s diegetic soundtrack in a cassette form.

⁷¹ Rick Prelinger, “The Appearance of Archives,” in *The YouTube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2010), 268.

⁷² See Jamie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London: Routledge, 2014), 140.

⁷³ Baron, *The Archive Effect*, 143. This observation is echoed by Robert Gehl in what he calls YouTube’s “lack of a centralized ‘curator of display’” allowing “large media companies and entrepreneurs to step into the curatorial role.” Robert Gehl, “YouTube as archive: Who will

curate this digital Wunderkammer?” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 2009): 43.

⁷⁴ Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, Introduction, *The YouTube Reader*, 10.

⁷⁵ These two films were produced by the ICAIC Documentary Division and the Noticiero ICAIC Latinoamericano (ICAIC Latin American Newsreel) respectively.

⁷⁶ Seb Franklin, “Cloud Control, or The Network as Medium,” *Cultural Politics* 8, no. 3 (November 2012): 446.

⁷⁷ See Herrnstein Smith, Barbara. *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); or John Guillory’s critique of the discourse of value surrounding canon formation, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993), in particular Chapter 5, “The Discourse of Value: From Adam Smith to Barbara Herrnstein Smith,” 269-340.

⁷⁸ See John Perry Barlow, “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace” in *Postcards from the Net: An Intrepid Guide to the Wired World*, ed. Jon Casimir (Sydney: Allen and Unwin) 365-7. Or Lisa Nakamura’s critique of these early internet articulations in *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁷⁹ See Matteo Pasquinelli, “Google’s PageRank Algorithm: A Diagram of the Cognitive Capitalism and the Rentier of the Common Intellect” in *Deep Search: The Politics of Search Beyond Google*, eds. Konrad Becker and Felix Stader (London: Transaction Publishers: 2009). Pasquinelli founds his analysis of Google’s PageRank’s algorithm upon forms of social capital and value intertwined with attention economies.

⁸⁰ Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), IX.