

# Sara Gómez

## MY CONTRIBUTION



For the first time in a museum, this exhibition presents the most complete retrospective of the work of Afro-Cuban filmmaker Sara Gómez (Guanabacoa, 1942 – Havana, 1974), one of the main figures in Cuban documentary filmmaking during the 1960s and 1970s.

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[LA VIRREINA]  
CENTRE  
DE LA IMATGE

Despite her premature death, Sara Gómez Yera (Guanabacoa, 1942 - Havana, 1974) had an exceptional career in the already memorable scenario of 1960s and 1970s Cuban documentary filmmaking.

She was a pioneer of what would later be termed as “anti-ethnographic film”, an exponent of a filmography based on the political power of testimony, the filmmaker who investigated her era from the viewpoint of a triple controversial minority: young, female and black.

All of Sara Gómez’s work is inscribed within the framework of the revolutionary project that began in 1959. However, unlike other contemporary creators, her films could be considered a seismograph of the real tensions that were being generated in Cuba during the first fifteen years after the revolutionary triumph.

This is how *Mi aporte...* (My Contribution...; 1972), one of her most important films, should be understood. It explores the places constructed by women in the public sphere, the workplace and the domestic sphere and is about the ideologies they display according to their different economic backgrounds and their particular value systems, against a totalitarian machismo.

Sara Gómez’s films pay particular attention to processes of marginalisation and class antagonisms. However, in contrast to certain concepts used excessively by the narratives of the time, her work addresses the knowledge that the most vulnerable layers use to challenge history with a capital H and under what circumstances individuals become complex social subjects.

*Guanabacoa, crónica de mi familia* (Guanabacoa, Chronicles of My Family; 1966), *De bateyes* (The Sugar Workers’ Quarters; 1971) and *De cierta manera* (One Way or Another; 1974) make up a sort of triptych on blackness seen from different perspectives. The first—an autobiographical documentary—traces the origins of the filmmaker’s family within a lineage of middle-class musicians and professionals. The second delves into the colonial wounds of Cuba’s racialised working class, through the memory of numerous descendants of people enslaved in the 19th-century sugar mills, most of them owned by Catalan businessmen. The last—the first feature film made

by a woman on the island—tells the romantic story of two characters: a white schoolteacher who unwaveringly embraces the creeds of the revolution and a mixed race worker, born in the shantytown of Las Yaguas, who, despite beginning a process of emotional and ideological change, resists dismantling the machismos that are dominant in the neighbourhood, the home and the workplace.

Finally, there is another group of films, including *Iré a Santiago* (I'm Going to Santiago; 1964), based on Federico García Lorca's poem "Son de negros en Cuba" included in *Poet in New York* (1929) and, in particular, *Y... Tenemos sabor* (And We've Got Flavour; 1967), which analyses the African legacy in Cuban culture, recapturing the studies carried out by Fernando Ortiz Fernández, Argeliers León, Lydia Cabrera and Rómulo Lachatañeré.

These documentaries not only give an account of some of the intellectual debates shared with various colleagues of her generation—such as Inés María Martiatu, Sergio Vitier, Nancy Morejón, Rogelio Martínez Furé, Jacinto Abraham Rodríguez and Miguel Barnet Lanza—on the traditions that the working classes and black people build around themselves and the circumstances of life that challenge them, but also looks into how music and dance, together with other festive manifestations, burst into the collective space and create unexpected and non-appropriable politicisations.

## SARA GÓMEZ AND DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING IN CUBA DURING THE 1960S AND 1970S

Valentín Roma

### *El Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*

At the beginning of 1959, the government that emerged from the Cuban Revolution began to create a multitude of cultural institutions following the new ideological principles.

As part of this process—which was not free of struggles and friction—, film was considered to be one of the most effective tools for creating social imaginaries and collective consciences. Proof of this was the creation by the revolutionary government, just three months after assuming power, of the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC, the Cuban Film Institute), an organisation that immediately became the island's great audiovisual catalyst.

ICAIC was initially managed by Alfredo Guevara, a comrade of Fidel Castro at the University of Havana and the Young Communist League organisation and undertook the production of a wide range of film formats, from newsreels to television capsules for educational purposes, from documentaries to feature films. The institute's role went far beyond that of a state structure that was supposed to boost the Cuban film industry or contribute to the education and experience of filmmakers of the time. It also publicised government actions launched during that period of revolutionary enthusiasm, decided what content was suitable or inappropriate, encouraged international cooperation through visits to Cuba by like-minded filmmakers—many of them from socialist countries in Eastern Europe—and even produced films by them and other prestigious creators, to broadcast to the world what the country was undertaking during the initial stages after the triumph of the revolution.

In May 1961, Orlando Jiménez Leal and Alberto “Sabá” Cabrera Infante produced—with few resources and outside the structure of ICAIC—the short film *P.M.*, which documented a night in the port of Havana, where a Bohemia of black workers, prostitutes, musicians and hustlers partied among dancing, drinks and laughs.

ICAIC had commissioned the filmmakers to make a recording that should have been entirely different, so, on seeing the final piece, requested a second edit. Jiménez Leal and Cabrera Infante used the discarded footage and made the second short film that could be categorised as “free cinema” or under the Cuban denomination *cine espontáneo* (spontaneous cinema).

However, ICAIC’s Reviewing Committee banned *P.M.* from being shown in cinemas—it was only broadcast on Canal 2 of CMBF TV, as part of the programme *Lunes en televisión*—, arguing that it showed “a city of cabarets and vices, a partial and harmful portrayal of Havana’s night-life, which impoverishes and distorts the attitude of the Cuban people against the artful attacks of the counter-revolution”.

To put the final assessment from the censors’ report into context, it is worth noting that just a month earlier, in April 1961, the invasion of Playa Girón had taken place by mercenaries supported by the US Government of John F. Kennedy and the Cuban Democratic Revolutionary Front, an anti-Castro organisation of Cubans in exile, former officials of the Fulgencio Batista regime and other anti-communists. ICAIC directors considered that, following the attack on the island’s sovereignty, it was unacceptable to broadcast an idle and overly festive image of the people.

The veto of *P.M.* also shared the suspicion of certain media outlets, which were accused of being petty-bourgeois or half-hearted in their defence of the revolution, such as *Prensa Libre* and, in particular, the literary supplement *Lunes de Revolución*, edited by Guillermo Cabrera Infante for the newspaper *Revolución*, which was edited by Carlos Franqui, whose disputes with ICAIC increased from then on.

As a result of the whole situation, meetings were held at the National Library of Cuba on 16, 23 and 30 June 1961, which concluded with Fidel Castro’s famous speech “Words to Intellectuals”, in which he coined his equally famous slogan: “Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing”.

Just two months later, after a tense convention beforehand, the Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC, National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba) was founded, under the direction of the poet Nicolás Guillén. In November of the same year, *Lunes de Revolución* stopped being published.

#### *From Enciclopedia Popular to Excursión a Vueltabajo*

Sara Gómez began to work for ICAIC in 1961, at the age of just eighteen. Her first commissions, under the supervision of cinematographer Octavio Cortázar, were four video clips—*Plaza Vieja* (Old Town Square), *Solar habanero* (Havana Tenement), *El solar* (The Tenement) and *Historia de la piratería* (History of Piracy), all from 1962—. They were part of *Enciclopedia Popular* (Popular Encyclopaedia), a thirty-eight-series educational programme, which involved more than forty filmmakers and was broadcast between 1961 and 1963, initially as part of the Year of Education and the Literacy Campaign, both promoted by the revolutionary government and later as a basic educational tool for general audiences.

*Enciclopedia Popular* contributed to the learning process of the young filmmakers involved, who began producing these short information clips, followed by documentaries and, finally, feature films.

Sara Gómez’s training was completed with her work as director’s assistant to four established creators: Roberto Fandiño in *Tiempo de pioneros* (1962), Agnès Varda in *Salut les Cubains* (1963), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea in *Cumbite* (1964) and Jorge Fraga in *El robo* (1965).

In 1964, the filmmaker made her début with a documentary titled *Iré a Santiago* (I’m Going to Santiago). Sarita, as she signed her early work, used “Son de negros en Cuba” (Blacks Dancing to Cuban Rhythms) as a starting point, a poem by

Federico García Lorca from his book *Poet in New York* (1929), with which he equates the becoming of black bodies in the American metropolis and in the tropical city.

The film portrays a camera-in-hand journey through Santiago de Cuba, that place where, in the director's words, "Cuba is an island in the Antilles and *mulato* is a state of mind".

The opening scenes are set to the beat of "Son de la loma" by Trio Matamoros. In these scenes, some of the stereotypical characteristics associated with Cubans are described as the camera takes us along the avenues of Santiago and films its inhabitants posing, acting and approaching the filmmaker.

Visually, the film has a certain rudimentary air, but the script—written by Sara Gómez—is evidence of her keen ear for capturing oral street culture.

Furthermore, traditional music takes on a distinctive role in this documentary, as do various formal findings, including the credits painted in brushstrokes on the steps of one of Santiago's many flights of stairs and on street furniture.

*Excursión a Vueltabajo* (Excursion to Vueltabajo; 1965) concludes this preliminary period in the filmmaker's career. It is a documentary about tobacco growing in Vueltabajo, a province of Pinar del Río, one of Cuba's five tobacco regions.

Sara Gómez uses a surprising voice in the first person, which sometimes even addresses the people who appear in the footage, something that years later, in other films she made, would be one of the most recognisable narrative resources of her filming style.

Bearing in mind that she studied music and journalism, contributing to the weekly *Hoy, domingo* and the youth newspaper *Mella*, it is no surprise that the script has a light and sophisticated pace, typical of good editorial reports, in which anecdotes mix with analyses and unnoticed data with historical references.

Some of her main interests can be observed in the film, such as the focus on women's work in the fields and the contrast between technology that increases productivity and ancient knowledge that remains irreplaceable.

At just twenty-two years of age, Sara Gómez had already made films like *Iré a Santiago* and *Excursión a Vueltabajo*.

Films with a determination, a language and a personality that are removed from the ordinary, something unprecedented for a filmmaker with such a short amount of experience.

### *Guanabacoa: crónica de mi familia*

*Guanabacoa: Chronicles of My Family* (1966) is an autobiographical documentary, in which the filmmaker appears for a few minutes for the first time and tells the story of her family and of Guanabacoa, where she was born.

The first part is a journey through the town's streets and focuses on the inhabitants and emblematic places, such as the statue of Ernst Hemingway—who lived in nearby Cojimar—the Jewish cemetery, the military fort and a square dedicated to the memory of the Creole politician Pepe Antonio, mayor of the town between 1748 and 1762.

The second, presents the filmmaker's relatives, from the men, who then and in the past were musicians, to the women portrayed in the old photographs that show a distinguished social class, with elegant dresses, strict rules of conduct and visits to "the societies for black people"—"for certain blacks", as Sara Gómez points out.

In the third part of the film, she introduces Berta, the filmmaker's cousin, who reflects another point of view of a once-wealthy family. "Will we have to fight against the need to be different as black people who have improved our lot?" asks Sara Gómez at the end of the film. "Will we come to Guanabacoa accepting our entire history, the entirety of Guanabacoa and be able to say this?"

This recapitulation about class fragility connects with the story of her *madrina*—as she called her great aunt who, as we are told at the beginning of the film, died while the editing was being completed—with the evolution embodied by Berta. These two black women—three if we count the filmmaker herself—, make up the corners of a triangle in which the different ways of confronting collective and private memory are expressed, always against the backdrop of this syncretic Guanabacoa, where the African cultural presence and blackness are constituent elements.

## *Cuba as a Red Fantasy*

In his book *Fantasia Roja* (Red Fantasy; 2006), the essayist Iván de la Nuez traces the unflagging fascination that European left-wing intellectuals had for the Cuban Revolution.

Following this metaphor, the exhibition compiles a series of films shot by foreign filmmakers who, between 1961 and 1970, were invited by ICAIC to bring together young Cuban political filmmaking and international avant-garde documentary making, as well as to echo a revolutionary process that, at the time, had no appropriate media coverage on a global scale.

Joris Ivens was the first of them. His film, *Cuba, pueblo armado* (Cuba, a People Armed; 1961), takes Fidel Castro's invitation literally and films the People's Militia instead of filming the Rebel Army and, in this manner, conveys the protagonism of the working classes in the revolution. Ivens recreated war episodes, everyday moments of the troops and staged surrenders, in which even bewildered counter-revolutionary prisoners took part.

Agnès Varda produced *Salut les Cubains* (Hello, Cubans; 1963) using over one thousand five hundred photographs of the four thousand that she took during her time on the island. The documentary is a sort of subjective panegyric—between *costumbrista* perspective and cliché—about what Varda defines as “socialism and cha-cha-chá”. The last scene of the film features a young Sara Gómez, dressed in uniform—she had been appointed by ICAIC as Varda's assistant director because she had some film experience and could speak French—, dancing with other filmmakers to the popular song “El Cuini tiene bandera” by Orquesta Aragón.

*Soy Cuba* (I Am Cuba; 1964) by Mikhail Kalatozov, analyses the political and social evolution in Cuba through different stories, from Batista's dictatorship up to the advent of the revolution. In the first episode, the destitute masses clash with the splendour of the casinos for the Americans who arrive in search of cheap prostitution. The second narrates the burning of a sugar field when the owner-farmer discovers that he will lose his land to the American United Fruit Company. The third describes the repression of rebel students at the

University of Havana by Batista's police. The last episode shows farmers helping rebels in Sierra Maestra and then accompanying them in their triumphal march through the streets of the capital. *Soy Cuba* is characterised by the use of static shots with a strong expressive impact and unexpectedly wide shots. These resources were later imitated by filmmakers like Andrei Tarkovsky, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola and Paul Thomas Anderson.

*Ella* (1966) is a film by Theodor Christensen that deals with the role of women in the revolution, a significant theme given the eminently macho character of the stories usually narrated. The filmmaker explores the lives of a young woman in the army, a female taxi driver, former prostitutes in the process of “rehabilitation”, a female student of aeronautical mechanics and an aspiring actress and her reluctant mother, among others. According to Sara Gómez, this film was a direct influence on her approach to *Mi aporte...* (1972).

The film by Argentinean filmmaker Alejandro Saderman, called *Hombres de Mal Tiempo* (Men of Mal Tiempo; 1968), brings together five *mambises*—the name given to those who fought in the insurrections for independence against the Spanish colonial state in the Dominican Republic, the Philippines and Cuba—and a group of professional actors who re-enacted the Ten Years' War (1868-1878). The testimony of the former combatants, by then hundred-year-olds, is an oral historical description but also serves as a guide for the interpreters to perfect their adaptation.

In January 1961, Chris Marker directed *¡Cuba Sí!*, a documentary glorifying Fidel Castro, which, in the filmmaker's own words, “aims to communicate, during the first period of alert, if not the experience, at least the vibrations, the rhythm of a revolution that one day may be considered the decisive moment of an entire era in contemporary history”. Marker later withdrew this effusive film from circulation, which had been censored in France.

Ten years later, with Valérie Mayoux, he would film *La Bataille des dix millions* (Cuba: Battle of the 10 000 000; 1971), which focuses on Castro's failed appeal for a ten-million-tonne sugar harvest. The film uses images borrowed from Santiago Álvarez's documentary *Despegue a las 18.00* (Take-Off

at 18.00 Hours; 1969) and from the leader's self-critical speech on 26 July 1970.

Although Marker would probably disagree, *¡Cuba Sí!* and *La Bataille des dix millions* form a diptych that travels between two glaring truths: one unconditional and the other conditioned. This double spell cast by the figure of Fidel Castro on the French filmmaker's camera serves as an abstract and conclusion to understand the different film styles used by directors in their approach to the first decade of the revolution: from "free cinema" to the most orthodox social documentary, following the example of John Grierson, and from montages based on photographs and sections of celluloid to experiments with sound and narratives.

*Cuban Documentary Film Style (1960–1974). Official  
Accounts and Creators That Challenged*

Sara Gómez's trajectory has recently undergone a significant revival, particularly on behalf of a group of historians, filmmakers, writers, journalists, poets and activists who, from inside and outside Cuba, are rolling out a process of rewriting the island's political and cultural memory.

It is to them that we owe the study of Gómez's work through parameters other than the official line that, to date, had bypassed and even minimised some of the most poignant aspects of her filmography, presenting her as a voice laden with truly condescending epithets, a creator who deserved lower-ranking likenesses than the personifications with which the great male names of the period were usually described.

However, while it is true that the filmmaker is part of this crucial experience for Latin American film production that was Cuban documentary filmmaking in the 1960s and 1970s, it should be added that, during the period and under the auspices of ICAIC, there were multiple sensibilities and different generations. For example, there were filmmakers such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Julio García Espinosa, José Massip and Santiago Álvarez who had a previous and to some extent common background. Some of them belonged to the

Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo (Our Time Cultural Society; 1951), founded by choreographers, playwrights, composers and educators, which three years later and until 1960, published *Nuestro tiempo*, a magazine that introduced film criticism among its contents and which preceded *Revista de Cine Cubano*, the theoretical publication linked to ICAIC.

Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa had also studied together at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, the epicentre of Italian neorealism, where they both collaborated in directing the first film by "Titón"—Gutiérrez Alea's nickname—, *Il sogno de Giovanni Bassain* (1953). For their part, Guevara and Massip took part in what is considered one of the pioneering social documentaries in Cuba, *El mégaro* (1956), also co-directed by García Espinosa and Gutiérrez Alea. In addition, the latter co-directed, with Santiago Álvarez, the feature film *¡Muerte al invasor!* (1961).

However, apart from the aforementioned creators, who according to some film historiography are a sort of programmatic nucleus that would include—although on a different level—Manuel Octavio Gómez, Pastor Vega, Octavio Cortázar, Manuel Herrera and Sara Gómez, the ICAIC brought together filmmakers with different aesthetic and ideological paradigms. We refer to Fernando and Miñuca Villaverde, Fausto Canel, Alberto Roldán, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, Orlando Jiménez Leal, Alberto "Saba" Cabrera Infante, Néstor Almendros, Eduardo Manet, Humberto Solás and Sergio Giral, among others, whose critical standpoint about the regime and the ICAIC itself problematized official accounts of the period, placing them in a subordinate, if not invisible, position. This includes the impossibility of accessing the highly relevant work by these creators, which is not even part of the collections of the institutions that produced them and, in some cases, is not even in the hands of its own creators.

Therefore, —to contribute to a complex picture of the practices of the period, but also to determine exactly what Sara Gómez's main contributions to Cuban cinema of the time were—two different film anthologies are presented. One that includes *Sexto aniversario* (1959) by Julio García Espinosa; *Asamblea general* (1960) by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea; *Historia de una batalla* (1962) by Manuel Octavio Gómez; *Now!* (1965)

and *LBJ* (1968) by Santiago Álvarez; *Por primera vez* (1967) by Octavio Cortázar and *Madina Boe* (1968) by José Massip, in what could be considered a more commonly used overview when capturing the account of Cuban documentaries from the 1960s. And another that includes *Gente en la playa* (1960) by Néstor Almendros; *Primer carnaval socialista* (1962) by Alberto Roldán; *El parque* (1963) by Fernando Villaverde; *En la noche* (1964), by Pastor Vega; from the short film fiction trilogy *Un poco más de azul*, which includes *Elena* (1964) by Fernando Villaverde, *El encuentro* (1964) by Manuel Octavio Gómez and *El final* (1964) by Fausto Canel, the first and last films whose broadcast was banned in Cuba; and, finally, *Cofea Arábica* (1968) by Nicolás Guillén Landrián.

#### *Music and Working Classes in the Filmography of Sara Gómez*

Sara Gómez's work advocates a displacement that was later underpinned by the Vietnamese filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha when, regarding her film *Reassemblage* (1982), she said that she understood ethnographic practice to be "speaking nearby" rather than "speaking about".

This vision, completely alien to the most elementary agencies, is unrelenting from the beginning of Sara Gómez's career to the point of distinguishing her from other contemporary creators, making her a kind of pioneer of the "anti-ethnographic films" of the 1980s and 1990s.

The importance of music culture in her work should, perhaps, be understood the same way: it is not so much a rhythmic inventory or an overview of the anthropology of Cuban sound, but a dive into those processes of emancipatory and collective affirmation that use dance and music as a channel.

Therefore, although she took part in several documentaries that, during the 1960s, researched the island's musical roots—we refer, among many others, to *Ritmo de Cuba* (1960) by Néstor Almendros, *La tumba francesa* (1961) by Orlando Jiménez Leal and Néstor Almendros, *Nosotros, la música* (1964) by Rogelio París and, particularly, *La herrería de Sirique*

(1966) by Héctor Veitía—, Sara Gómez, more specifically, explored the narrative that the working classes and black Cubans constructed about themselves and about the conditions that challenged them, based around the antagonisms they raised against the system of thought and order for the world imposed by whiteness and around the musical traditions, but at the same time "together with" those who constructed and nourished them.

*Y... Tenemos sabor* (And We've Got Flavour; 1967) is, perhaps, the work that best illustrates these interests. This film, with the participation of luthier Alberto Zayas, traces the origins and uses of numerous instruments used for dance music.

The filmmaker combines technical and historical descriptions with live performances by the groups Changüí, Típico Habanero, Clave y Guaguancó and Conga de Santiago de Cuba, as well as the trios Los Decanos and Virgilio, Almenares y Márquez.

In addition to teaching the spectator about the different musical genres and how to recognise them when they are being performed, Sara Gómez records those who sing and dance in tenements, on ramshackle streets, at funerals or spontaneous gatherings, all without resorting to paternalistic picturesque qualities, but questioning the persecution of festive moments in the public space or its kidnapping by the authorities as an official narrative, as occurred in the case of *P.M.*

The footage also recaptures some of the pioneers of research on the African legacy in Cuban culture, such as Fernando Ortiz Fernández, Argeliers León, Lydia Cabrera and Rómulo Lachatañeré. However, *Y... Tenemos sabor* concludes with a reference to the new experimental rhythms of the era. A young Chucho Valdés and his Combo—formed by legends of the calibre of Carlos Emilio Valdés, Julio Vento, Manuel Armesto "Cala", Roberto Concepción and Orlando "Cachaíto" López—opens the traditional roots towards the horizon of Afro-Cuban jazz, without considering the suspicions that these rhythms of American origin provoked at the time. The evocative phrasing of Amado Borcelá Navarrete "Guapachá" and his genuine blend of the *guaracha* and bebop genres, guaranteed that popular music would continue its journey in times to come.



Omara Portuondo sings “La otra isla”—written by Tomás González with music by Remberto Egües—in the opening scenes of *En la otra isla* (On the Other Island; 1968), the first chapter in the trilogy that Sara Gómez dedicated to the Isla de Pinos (Isle of Pines), also called Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth). This is not just a musical introduction because the melody appears again in each of the following chapters and the lyrics provide clues for understanding the issues the island triptych addresses.

The filmmaker herself defines the film as a “survey documentary” and divides it into seven sections, each preceded by a title card giving the structure. There are no off-screen references, the voice we hear is that of Sara Gómez and she also appears in various sequences, perhaps to outline the technical process of filmmaking and the agreements established between the filmmaker and the participants.

A seventeen-year-old girl, María, who explains her daily life on a farm called *Libertad* (Liberty) and compares it to the life she left behind; Fajardo, a drama teacher, who harangues about the meaning of the word “work” in the revolutionary project; Rafael, a young opera singer who, due to the racial prejudice of his female colleagues, has to leave the opera group and sign up for agricultural work on the island; Lázaro, a former priest who is torn between two systems of faith, that of Catholicism and that of the revolution, together with his girlfriend Gladys, from whom he is separated by a physical, but above all ideological distance; “La furia de los vikingos” (The Wrath of the Vikings), an interlude about the re-education process of children considered “problematic”, which Sara Gómez goes on to explore in *Una isla para Miguel* (An Island for Miguel; 1968); Mapy and Jaime, two boys who, from opposing standpoints, abhor moral regulations, although this does not detract from their involvement in the revolution; and finally, an instructor, Cacha, who reflects on the character of Manuela and Ada, two inmates at the camp, while describing her peculiar ideology about what it means to act properly, in favour of the revolution and the homeland.

As in the rest of the trilogy, Sara Gómez investigates how anonymous people come into conflict with social ideals; how they build their codes of conduct and value systems; the extent to which abstract concepts such as “peoples”, paradigms like the “new man” or elastic criteria such as “revolutionary”, as the essayist and critic Nils Longueira Borrego and the art historian Yelsy Hernández Zamora point out, are undone by these individuals to whom Sara Gómez’s camera grants a space for testimonial expression while framing them as historical subjects, precisely a condition denied by their “reorientation” on the island.

*Una isla para Miguel* begins with the following phrase by Frantz Fanon, taken from his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961): “These vagrants, these second-class citizens, find their way back to the nation thanks to their decisive, militant action.”

Despite the authoritarianism that emanates from this introduction, the filmmaker produces a documentary that, among other things, captures the techniques employed by the educators at a farm camp on Isla de Pinos, where children classified as “marginal” are trained to embody “revolutionary values”. These practices of discipline and social control, which involved the biopolitical organisation of the children, but also under which punitive methods they would be punished, are presented by Sara Gómez as a set of alienating, ethereal, rigid and simply coercive codes.

In contrast to the exercises of submission by a kind of ideological machine with no thoughts of its own, the figure of Miguel emerges, a fourteen-year-old boy who the filmmaker not only approaches but follows to the house where he lives with his family off the island. The complete reconstruction of Miguel’s circumstances, his role at the camp, his position in the domestic setting and the opinions that stigmatise his persona and his behaviour, expressed by both his educators and classmates and by his sister and mother, are a framework of over-information that engulfs this young boy whose parsimony of words is perhaps a dissident response, or an accusation, against both correctional spheres.

Once again, Sara Gómez includes procedural elements in the footage, mainly clapperboard movements in the middle of interviews. Chucho Valdés's music functions as a ritornello that opens the successive narrative episodes and creates atmospheres—sometimes in a melodic key, sometimes in the form of sonorous and jazzy stridencies—, in tune with the gravity or lightness of what the spectator is contemplating.

Although it is the last chapter of the trilogy, *Isla del Tesoro* (Treasure Island; 1969) reconstructs the history of Isla de Pinos through old engravings, photographs and vintage documentary records that give an account of its Spanish colonial occupation between 1494 and 1898, as well as the two subsequent American occupations from 1898 to 1925 and 1955 to 1958.

Sara Gómez includes references to the Presidio Modelo prison, built under Cuban President Gerardo Machado between 1926 and 1931. This panopticon was closed two years before the film's release, so the filmmaker addresses the demolition and redesign process of some of its architectural structures. The film includes images of Fidel Castro in 1955, being released from the prison, where he had been imprisoned on the orders of dictator Batista two years earlier for his part in the assault by the *26 July Movement* guerrillas on the Moncada barracks. Surprisingly, this is the only occasion on which Castro plays an explicit role in Sara Gómez's filmography, who, in portraying the Presidio Modelo prison, omitted those who were also deprived of their freedom by the Castro regime in these same facilities.

### *Mi aporte...*

Released in 1972, *Mi aporte...* (My Contribution...) is probably one of Sara Gómez's best films. In it, she condenses the most important features of her cinematographic work and the developments she introduced into Cuban film of the time.

Her approach to certain social processes from situated, complex experiences, which do not always provide an accurate account of what is happening. Her constant questioning of the revolutionary project through the people who comprise it and

who remain on the sidelines of the universal concepts. Film, understood as a place where the positions of listening and speaking are permanently reworked and modified.

*Mi aporte...* investigates the conclusions that can be drawn about the presence of women in the workplace, thirteen years after the triumph of the revolution. To this end, Sara Gómez structures the documentary around four segments, which, in a way, summarise what happened but also raise questions about the future.

The words of Che Guevara open the film. They describe a genderless working class, united by common causes and indistinct enemies. However, we soon begin to see and hear how several women contradict the guerrilla leader, the propaganda praising women's work included by the filmmaker from time to time, the stereotypical advertisements of smiling female workers and the punitive opinions of male comrades who smugly judge what women contribute to industrial productivity and, specifically, what they detract from it.

"Have we created the condition for the formation of the new woman?", asks Sara Gómez at one point in the film, to which she responds minutes later, perhaps as a reply to the *hombre nuevo* (new man) proclaimed by Che. "We must violate the male conscience that prevents women from developing. We must attack them; we have weapons."

Here, the filmmaker touched a nerve: while Cuban women had been included in the workplace, in the domestic sphere sex discrimination continued, particularly among revolutionaries. So, the double working day assumed by women and naturalised by social ideologies, hindered their position in the public sphere, increased economic instability in relation to men and constructed subalternation within the same family.

However, the women featured in the documentary do not represent an archetypal idea of woman; on the contrary, they belong to different classes, are of different ages and have different jobs, they are black, mixed race, white, widows, single, brides, with large families or have chosen not to have children. None of them explain their sexual orientation. In short, all these women speak from specific positions that clash with each other and prevent a single discourse, an encapsulation of vicissitudes, a single recipe that cauterises complexity.

The last sequence of *Mi aporte...* is a discussion among female workers in a tobacco factory, who had previously seen the recording of a conversation between Sara Gómez and a designer, a journalist and a scientific researcher.

The articulate and programmatic reflections of these four young middle-class women, including the filmmaker herself, precede the inopportune testimonies of the women we later see in their workplace.

Sara Gómez thus forces, with even a self-critical honesty, the antagonism between the fashionably dressed girls, who chat in a relaxed atmosphere, in a space that meets the modern interior design codes of the time and the group of workers from another social background, other moral systems, other ideologies.

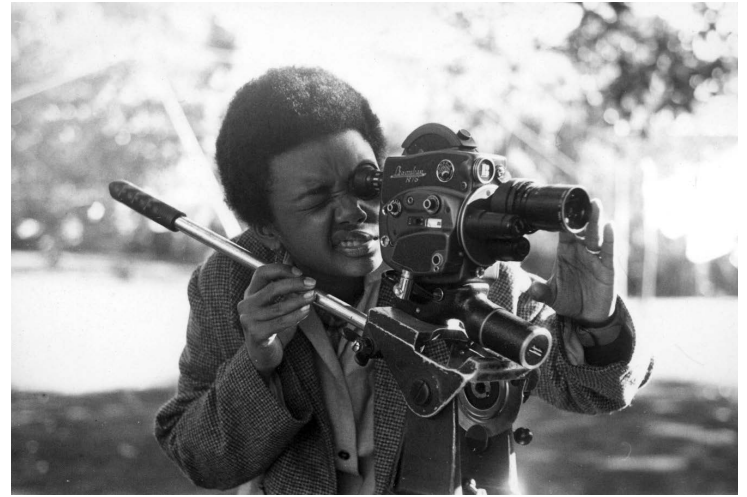
Although it may appear to, the sequence does not compare people with university studies and those with no academic training. On the contrary, Sara Gómez widens the political zoom of her camera to show us different ways of opposing a totalising machismo, whose anchor traverses purchasing power, accumulations of knowledge and ideologies.

### *The Job of Being a Mother*

*Atención prenatal* (Prenatal Care) and *Año uno* (The First Year), both from 1972, are two short documentaries about the system of accompaniment, care and health control, introduced by the government for mothers and their children, during pregnancy and the first twelve months of life of newborns.

Both films are a report on the Cuban public health system through the relationships established between community nurses, doctors, paediatricians and pregnant women or those who have just given birth.

Sara Gómez avoids any superfluous sentimentality and focuses on the tasks of the medical personnel and the learnings that the mothers need during these crucial moments of their children's lives. The style of the two short films is similar, based on frontal, anti-propagandist close-ups, which include the recording of a birth whose montage is surprising for its cinematographic sobriety as if it were a kind of precise allegory.



Sara Gómez, unknown author



Ethnological Studies Group



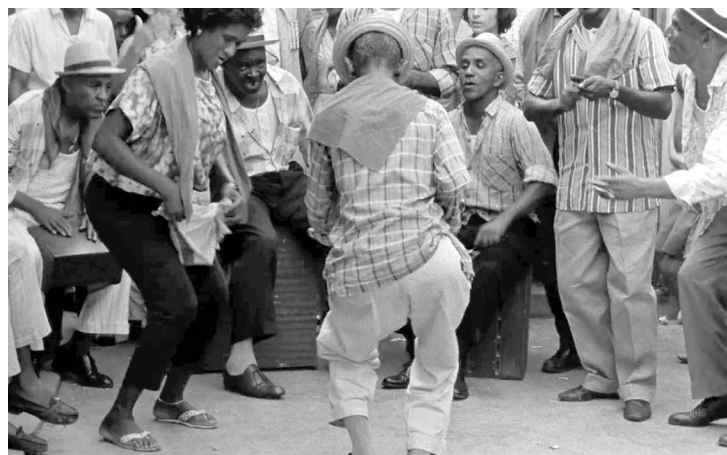
*Una isla para Miguel, 1968*



*Guanabacoa: crónica de mi familia, 1966*



*De cierta manera, 1974*



*Y... Tenemos sabor, 1967*



Sara Gómez, unknown author

If we take into account the year they were released and the subject matter, the two films could be considered excerpts from *Mi aporte...*, that is to say, an investigation into the work surrounding motherhood and the circumstance of being a mother.

ICAIC's Grupo de Experimentación Sonora (GES - Sound Experimentation Group) composed the music for both films and reinforced the sophisticated, agile and elegant atmosphere that is unusual in an extremely educational film. The GES was created in 1969 and its first director was Leo Brouwer. Silvio Rodríguez, Pablo Milanés, Noel Nicola, Eduardo Ramos, Sergio Vitier and Leonardo Acosta, among others, formed part of the group. It was an essential organisation for channelling the new Cuban music genre, which was later called the Movimiento de la Nueva Trova (New Song Movement).

#### *What Is a Batey?*

A *batey* is the housing area and communal services provided for the workers at a sugar production conglomerate or *ingenio*. A *batey* is not a boy riding a bicycle, a man looking at the camera while driving his tractor and two young people smiling and walking.

At the beginning of *De bateyes* (The Sugar Workers' Quarters; 1971), Sara Gómez contrasts dictionary definitions with current images, as if wanting to refer to these spaces from the colonial history of the island and from its present.

The film goes back to the 19th century when Abreu, Carbó, Ribalta, Serra, Vidal Quadras and Baró, among many others—most of them Catalan businessmen who profited from the slave trade, despite it being banned—began an extraction process of Cuba's natural wealth. This plundering continued in the 1920s by North American companies such as the United Fruit Company, which brought families from Jamaica and Haiti to Cuba as slaves, the men to work as labourers and the women to work in the houses of the sugar mill managers. There is, therefore, a double discrimination, particularly against the Haitian inhabitants, who lived outside the *bateys*, isolated in the sugar cane plantations.

The filmmaker once again alternates information about events with micro-historical testimonies, knowledge and voices. Black workers of African origin—and on this occasion, people arriving from China—once again take centre stage in the film.

Pablo A. Fernández, author of the novel *Los niños se despiden* (1968), in which he narrates his childhood in a *batey*, explains the extreme poverty that seized these places during the 1930s; Felipe Ribalta Rodrigo, the by-then elderly son of an enslaved woman who was able to free herself, recounts the harsh living conditions in the municipality of Sagua la Grande; the daughter of the manager of the Chaparra and Delicias sugar mills describes her memories of travelling on her father's yacht, as well as the nickname her family received: "the princes of sugar".

*De bateyes* is one of Sara Gómez's most outstanding films and, at the same time, a faithful document of the intense wounds that colonial exploitation left on the societies that suffered it.

The film ends with an almost Brechtian sequence. René Fraga, an elderly storyteller who lives in the old *batey* of Santa Rita de Baró, in Matanzas, tells the story—between jovial, perverted and tragic—of a man accompanying his wife, Tinguario, to the cemetery, who had died before the marriage could be "consummated".

### *The Assembly, the Street and the Factory*

Between 1970 and 1974, Sara Gómez made three documentaries, in succession, that are framed in a sadly final period of her career. Viewed in perspective, they are a type of diagnosis of the Cuban revolutionary project that began in 1959.

*Poder Local, Poder Popular* (Local Power, Popular Power, 1970) is about a neighbourhood assembly in the Central Cuba *batey*, Matanzas province, which was called to elect a president for *Poder Popular*.

Sara Gómez films the preparations for the referendum, the setting up of the hall where it would be held, the unfavourable opinions and the expectations of the citizens, as well as self-criticism by the leaders.

The film provides an understanding of the participatory methodologies and systems of representation, with decentralised local assemblies, as well as the difficulties and corrective processes these required.

*Un documental a propósito del tránsito* (A Documentary About Traffic; 1971) begins with a car accident and the court trials of a couple of drivers involved in various mishaps. It goes on to statistically describe the number of injured and dead and the healthcare and human costs of bad driving practices. The testimonies alternate with images of the conditions of roads and streets. Once again, the voices are heard of those who hold the companies accountable for the state of the vehicles.

Textile industry workers, specifically from the Alquitex factory in the municipality of Alquizar, discuss the ideas put forward during the 13th Congress of the CTC (Cuban Workers' Confederation), held between 11 and 15 November 1973.

*Sobre horas extras y trabajo voluntario* (Extra Hours and Voluntary Work; 1973) questions the need to work overtime to accumulate labour merits, as this not only implies an unnecessary energy expense but also conceals mistakes in productivity planning.

Concerning volunteering, Sara Gómez gathers contributions, especially from women workers, that criticise the consequences of volunteering on daily life, how it takes up rest time and deteriorates family relationships.

Based on a commitment to the socialist development of the country, the film points to subsequent debates on the regulation of energy consumption in the industrial sphere, the overexploitation of workers and the establishment of short working hours.

### *De cierta manera*

This feature film—the first directed by a female filmmaker in Cuba—premiered three years after the death of Sara Gómez. However, although she was unable to finish it, the creator wrote precise instructions as to what the final result should be, which included an extraordinary soundtrack by her close friend, the composer Sergio Vitier.

*De cierta manera* (One Way or Another; 1974) is a film that pivots around multiple dichotomies: fiction versus documentary, professional actors and people who act, a white middle-class teacher versus a *mulato* worker, the school that redeems and the street codes that label, young emancipated women versus archaic macho beliefs, urban regeneration plans and ways of life unwilling to be brought to order, people born under the socialist model versus those labelled “marginal”.

With these ingredients, Sara Gómez Yera—as she signed the credits—made a film that concludes a significant part of her previous investigations, or at least amplifies them, through characters traversed by multiple regrets, moments of growth and setbacks.

The main plot revolves around a teacher who arrives in the Miraflores neighbourhood—a residential area built by the revolutionary government where the insalubrious shantytown of Las Yaguas used to be—and a worker born in the original settlement.

This affective story not only highlights the collision of mentalities between each protagonist, the different economic backgrounds and respective ideologies but also an additional conflict. She embodies an unwavering conviction regarding the narratives of the revolution, while he symbolises a certain resistance to new collective commitments, as well as a belligerent refusal to dismantle the machismos that dominate the neighbourhood, the home and the workplace.

Sara Gómez was a pioneer in the documentary analysis of marginalisation processes. However, at the time of making this film, fifteen years after the revolutionary triumph, debates emerged, encouraged by militant intellectual circles, which questioned the extent to which the Cuban political project had included subaltern classes in its transformations and its theory for change.

Within this framework, the filmmaker composes a comprehensive preamble that connects the decrepit suburbs of Havana—full of people living in extreme poverty—, the colonial history of the island and the rites of secret societies like the *Abakuá*. To do this, she uses archive images together with two voice-overs, one male and one female, that list statistics, sociological data and criminalising diagnoses of the lumpen working class.

From this scenario, Sara Gómez extracts a series of narrative threads that contradict the accusatory asepsis of the numbers. This is how the relevance acquired by the “real character” of Guillermo Díaz should be understood, whose origins—a former boxer from Las Yaguas who murdered a man and, after serving his prison sentence, began a new life as a singer-songwriter—do not prevent him from being one of the most lucid and sensitive voices of the entire story.

Parallel to the contrasts in which the film is set, perhaps to avoid any Manichaeian temptation, it offers various epiphanies that take the stories into unforeseen territories. One of the most unique is when Mario confesses to Yolanda: “I’m scared”. This is the equivalent of saying that an area of his behaviour and way of positioning himself in the world has entered into a definitive crisis. Another occurs with the dialogue between Guillermo and Mario at the gym, after the former urges Mario to abandon his certainties, to give up the security provided by the “scene”, in other words, a certain context of virile fraternity.

Curiously, these moments of metamorphosis are only experienced by Mario’s character and not by Yolanda’s, who invariably blames the failure of her pupils’ schooling on dysfunctional families and, when reprimanded by the other teachers, even persists in a kind of revolutionary ventriloquism, as if she were speaking assertively on behalf of an abstract entity.

*De cierta manera* begins *in medias res*, during an assembly that is listening to the explanations of a worker accused of absenteeism and with the interruption of another comrade who reveals the real reasons as to why the worker did not go to the bus factory where they work.

This scene is revisited during the last part of the film, when the council sentences Humberto, the wayward worker, to six months imprisonment on a farm, for vagrancy. Meanwhile, Mario, the informer, begins a series of conversations with different characters in which he either feels sorry for himself or makes a furious, macho and homophobic attack on anyone who tries to justify the worthiness of his whistle-blowing. Finally, after the verdict, a heated debate breaks out among the rest of the workers, who not only condemn Humberto’s negligence but see it as disloyalty to the revolution.

Sara Gómez ends the film with a sequence of urban demolitions, which gives way to an encounter between Mario and Yolanda. The two argue and gesticulate—above all, Mario—, but the only thing that can be heard is Guillermo Díaz playing “Véndele”.

At times, the camera disregards the couple to offer brief shots of self-built dwellings, ramshackle alleyways and people living in suffocating interiors. As the song progresses, Mario and Yolanda walk towards the new neighbourhoods of un-completed buildings.

The bolero emphasises all that we should sell—a synonym, in slang, to abandon—, especially the hypocrisy that seduces and lies to us, that promises salvation and obscures how to achieve it.

## SARA GÓMEZ INTERVIEWED BY MARGUERITE DURAS

La Havana, 1967

**Marguerite Duras [MD]:** In the capitalist countries, youth, beginning from early childhood, are subjected to a kind of duping, a kind of social climbing—being the top students in the class in order to become famous, rich, and independent. The French term for this is *percer*: to make your own through the masses and surpass them. That is the single ideal. What happened here in Cuba with respect to social climbing, with all this competitive spirit? In your present process of development, can you tell yet what will replace it?

**Sara Gómez [SG]:** It is necessary to consider that all the questions are based on premises that I am obliged to accept before answering, which makes me uneasy. You ask me, “What happened here with the . . . ?” Here, I would say that nothing happened in the field of the individual, but rather everything is *happening*, and it is happening through a long and painful “dissolve,” to speak in cinematic terms. In regard to the changes in the economic base, I think these are produced by sector—they don’t occur on the scale of individual ethical values. The “social climbing,” the competitive spirit is here, present, but this doesn’t worry me greatly.

What I do believe is that the basic structure tends to channel and, in fact, transform this individualistic feeling in accordance with the society. A Cuban child doesn’t want to be a “vanguard,” that is to say, the best in the class. And this can be achieved only by the path of serious and conscientious study, by honesty in exams, by participation in seminars and special courses, and by gaining the right to be the “monitor”—guide and helper— student of the material so that he or she can represent an interest greater than that of the Revolution.

This creates an intellectual development committed to true vocation. Do you know our actual education system? The adolescent and the youth want to be “vanguards,” “militants,” for which they must be studious and work hard;



actively participate in sport, cultural, and agricultural activities; and, of necessity, they must be recognized as such by the masses. Hence, the masses themselves give the student the right to “surpass” them, if I can use your term here. The masses continually test the individual’s honesty. In assembly, they discuss his or her right to be a militant, to be a political, administrative, or artistic cadre. The masses will soon consist of men and women who were better children and better young people.

Personally, I’m optimistic; my experiences justify this optimism. I believe in the scholarship recipients of the schools of art, of physical education, of technology, and of languages. I believe in that generation of high school students who for forty-five days each year share a roof and food away from their homes as they perform agricultural work next to men and women whom they have never seen before and of whose existence they had no palpable awareness.

If, in any case, I did feel any worry for those men and women who were not better children, I’m confident in the reciprocal influence of their direct contact with the youth. I’m confident in the conflicts they will face logically, the triumphs of the best of each, and the impotence of those who are not capable of improving themselves. Does this mean that opportunists, mediocre people, and the wealthy do not exist? No, they are here among us—and it is possible that within me lives an opportunist, a mediocre person, and one who aspires to possess riches—but this is no cause for worry since we are willing to fight against these elements outside and within ourselves. And what I can assure you is that this is not a country of conformists. I believe more than anything in one of these young “conflictive” people who are in each classroom, on each farm, in each industry, the one who questions what no one had questioned before, demands an answer, and makes everyone think.

**MD: Personal well-being is the only well-being in capitalist societies. Enjoying goods acquired with money and meeting family and friends in a country house—these are the only aspirations of bourgeois families. But later, despair begins to set in. Can you say what could replace this so-called**

**well-being, considered to be the most common in European countries—a tranquil well-being that is like a nightmare?**

**SG:** This “tranquil well-being” that is effectively a “nightmare” has stopped being an ideal, perhaps because it has stopped being a possibility. We are too committed to be tranquil. It is evident that we are an accelerated people who are in a rush. We all have urgencies—the urgency of our collective economic problems, the urgency of our political and military problems. We have an enemy. We recognize it, we have faced it, and we have a responsibility to end it. We feel the urgency to express ourselves now, immediately, to affirm ourselves. We are desperately devoted to a true compulsion to work, to struggle, to devote ourselves. And we believe, we believe with an aggressiveness that does not allow for tranquility, but rather excites us and extends us, one and all, together. Believe me, I have never lived one day without rejoicing, without experiencing a true and authentic state of inner celebration, and sometimes, for reasons so unfamiliar to your world, like the triumph of one of our sports teams in an international competition, or, I don’t know, on a bus, for example, or during an appointment at a polyclinic, I’d meet a woman who would talk to me about her worries, her domestic problems, and I understood. I told her things about myself, too. We’d become friends. We’d affectionately engage with each other for two hours even though, and this is the wonderful part, we wouldn’t see each other again (or we might, it doesn’t matter). I don’t know her name or her house, but I like her. I understand her, and that makes me happy.

It is possible that you think all this talk about intercommunication does not answer your question, but I believe I have given you my new concept of well-being, which is, of course, subjective, a part of my personality, which is decidedly extroverted. But there is something symptomatic here—I have never felt alone for a long time without being ashamed of it later.

**MD: A change is underway here. What is the major difficulty in this mutation, I mean from the individual point of view, of your inner life?**

SG: I believe in the change you refer to, and I have thought about this many times. In my personal case, and in that of many others I know, the major difficulty occurs in domestic relations, in the rules of living together in a house. There are things we previously accepted intellectually or rationally that later produced a serious and terrible emotional contradiction. I know very well what I want to do with myself, what is necessary for me to do with my life, but it happens that I almost always vacillate. I vacillate to the verge of desperation, and I've even come to feel impotent in the face of my own inertia. I don't feel capable of doing anything, of breaking with those who oppose me due their old values. They are my parents, my grandmother, the people I love, and they will suffer. They might die, and I would feel responsible. I need them in some way.

We are a country that has inherited the traditional Spanish family, and we are permeated by prejudices in regard to this. It is not easy; it becomes tragic. The fact that this occurs within the frame of a revolutionary family is curious. In the case of the antirevolutionary family, it's easier. For example, I do not have problems with my father. He left for the United States as a political exile and, in fact, has disappeared. The differences, the determinants, are just too serious. Do you understand? The problem is on this side of the dividing line. In an extreme case of war, my mother will be next to me holding her gun, but in normal times, times of peace, of work, living together, it becomes distressing. There are things she doesn't understand, that she has not had to learn to understand and that I must justify. And when I talk about my mother, I talk about an entire generation of women and men forty-five years or so old, women and men who are militant and even lead large organizations, but who still believe in the myths of the previous bourgeois society. They aspire to make of us a society of virgin ladies—decent, elegant, and refined, “ladies of exceptional morals”—and serious men, gentlemen, formal and discrete men who know how to keep up appearances. They are possessive of us to the point where a rupture takes place in a violent and painful way for both sides. And the dramatic thing is that this takes place as a result of a Revolution we are all willing to defend.

MD: The projection of themselves in their possession of material things, this fundamental vice in humans that leads to ruin—what will replace it? Will this be the point when the major modification of the “I” will take place here? By diminishing its attributes, will it, or will it not, remain the “I” preserved from suffering? The suicides of those who “failed” in society—what does this mean here? Without such “failure,” what would suicide mean? Would it be what one might call pure and metaphysical suicide?

SG: Much of what I expressed in my answers to questions one and two is useful to respond to this question, too. We could also analyze specific facts, since I don't feel capable of speculating. Recently, my husband and I became aware that our two-year-old daughter had not developed a sense of personal property. Ever since she was forty-five days old, she has attended a daycare [*círculo infantil*<sup>1</sup>] where, for ten hours a day, she shares food, clothing, toys, television, and direct attention from members of the staff. This realization was a big surprise for us, but my daughter does not differentiate between *her* ball and *a* ball, *her* chair and *a* chair, *her* plate and *a* plate.

All of this made me think of working experience on the Isle of Pines, where I heard people say “my farm,” “my shelter,” “my dairy,” and even “my island.”

On the Isle of Pines, the Island of Youth, they are creating, out of the blue, a habitable place<sup>2</sup> They are building, they are planting, they are the only ones responsible for the island, and, in fact, they own it. Is it that a transformation is taking place in the meaning of property without having necessarily

<sup>1</sup> *Círculo infantil* is a free daycare system in Cuba for children starting when the children are forty-five days old. It has had a profound impact on families, the community, and, especially, working mothers of the Revolution. The *círculo* was created in 1961 through the leadership of Vilma Espín, president of the Federation of Cuban Women. This social advance is discussed directly in the film *Mi aporte* and by several authors in this volume.—Eds.

<sup>2</sup> Leida Oquendo, an anthropologist and a close friend of Sara Gómez, was among the group of communist youth who went to the Isle of Pines “with the feeling that with the experiment we undertook, we carried a great burden—that of the entire future of the Revolution—on our shoulders” (Lord in conversation with Oquendo, Havana, March 2004). Sara Gómez's trilogy on the island is discussed throughout this volume. Also, while in Havana in 1967, it appears that Duras herself went to the Isle of Pines.—Eds.

lost it? I don't know. It's possible. I don't understand this problem very well. And I confess that I am penetrated by a feeling of possession of certain things that sometimes offers me relief and at other times . . . and other times offers me compensation. But it occurs to me that we tend to feel that we are the owners of all that in which we participate, that of which we are a part, aiding in its creation. Perhaps this new, wider sense of property would stop us from devoting ourselves to the stingy possession of a "really awesome outfit to wear to the dance tonight." Am I being clear?

Now, to suffer from the lack of a personal possession so that we feel like failures, to the point of committing suicide, isn't this rather ridiculous? I offer a tenacious resistance to accepting failure. In fact, I don't like the word. And, in regard to "pure and metaphysical" suicide, I don't understand. I don't believe it. Here we possess, and we are all possessed, even those who don't know it or have not wanted to know it. Isn't that beautiful?

**MD: In the capitalist world, the nuclear family is something that offers relief from a universe inscribed with unhappiness. That is the only thing it offers. And here? Having children so that they are quickly freed from your tutelage—is this discouraging for some? Or the opposite?**

SG: Well, we know what has happened with the family—its values have been dwarfed by others. My family represents a small minority compared to the others, all those that are available to me. But I don't give up; I have chosen. Besides, you are mistaken. My daughter has not been freed from my tutelage. On the contrary, I am conscious that my responsibility toward her determines that I must contribute to her living in a better world. By complying with my social duty, I am complying with the biological duty.

**MD: The idea that the child must necessarily be in conflict with his or her parents in order to take a place in this world—what do you think about this?**

SG: This time we have not entered into conflict with our parents to occupy *their* place in the world, but *another* place in the world and, what is more, another place in another world—a world precisely opposite to this one that led us to desperation and violence.

**MD: How have the functional attributes of women in Cuba been transformed? It seems that the traditional function of woman is about to disappear. Women's behavior seems less feminine than it is in Europe. Is this an illusion?**

SG: I'm not sure If completely understand your question. But if you're referring to those functional attributes that place responsibility on women through procreation, I think they have not changed; rather, they have grown. As time goes by, we are less of a polite, aesthetic, static, sexual, and passive object. Revolution has confronted us with the responsibility of our intelligence, our commitment as thinking beings. In the case of women, this change is manifested in providing us a security—a kind of self-sufficiency that we did not possess before. So when we devote ourselves, we are capable of demanding. More than ever, we are quite conscious of the precise value of how much we devote ourselves. And we reflect this in our behavior, a new sense of liberty, which, in my opinion, brings freshness, charm, and spontaneity to our relationships.

**MD: Has the inalienable solitude of human beings changed for the better or the worse—that is, for the best, art; for the worst, suicide? Has this solitude changed its meaning?<sup>3</sup>**

SG: Yes, it has changed meaning. All our lives our work is in what you call "inalienable solitude for the best"; that is, our life, our behavior, our work belong to us. We are alone facing

<sup>3</sup> In Spanish, the question is as follows: *¿La soledad inalienable del hombre para lo mejor y lo peor . . . ?* Given Sara's answer—and the historical period—the meaning could well be translated as "alienation" as much as "solitude."—Trans. On the matter of the high rates of suicide in Cuba both before and after the Revolution, see Perez (2005).—Eds.

our own historical consciousness—that makes us fully responsible, and so the reason for alienation has disappeared. Our work is creative, we live to create—to create something that we will possess beyond time, beyond any possible existential anguish, like art. Is that clear?

**MD:** With work currently being in perfect correlation with the revolutionary consciousness, what will it be when the mechanization of the means of production takes place? What will people's occupations be?

**SG:** Your question takes me by surprise, and I confess that I cannot answer it. I have said much, and I'm exhausted. I've tried to be honest. I couldn't do otherwise. But now, I want to add something with regard to this question. The problem you are raising here is not my problem. I'm not sure if it was [Frantz] Fanon, but someone said that each generation is obliged to resolve its own problems, and the problem of replacing people with machines is not one that will occur in my lifetime. But I will say that I wish this problem would come to me; this would imply that the problems I face now would be resolved. And yet I like these times. I feel a real generational pride. I'm confident in our historical significance. I want to clarify that I am happy, happy to live here and now. You talked earlier of the absurd, or useless, quality of life—I don't remember—I don't know exactly what I wanted to say, but I don't understand it, believe me, I don't understand it. And if you believe it, you are justifying my uncertainty of your work, your cinema. Sincerely, I hope you excuse me for this last statement. I'm full of good will for you, believe me. It's just that I cannot manage to understand it.

## FILMOGRAPHY

*Solar habanero*, 1962

*Enciclopedia Popular*, episode 31

10 min

*El solar*, 1962

*Enciclopedia Popular*, special episode

10 min

*Plaza Vieja*, 1962

*Enciclopedia Popular*, episode 28

4 min 44 s

*Fábrica de tabacos*, 1962

*Enciclopedia Popular*, special episode

4 min 44 s

*Historia de la piratería*, 1963

(History of Piracy)

*Enciclopedia Popular*, special episode

10 min

*Iré a Santiago*, 1964

15 min

Production: ICAIC, Fernando Pi

Photography: Mario García Joya

Editing: Roberto Bravo

Script: Sara Gómez

*Excursión a Vueltabajo*, 1965

10 min

Production: ICAIC, Fernando Pi  
Photography: Luis Costales  
Editing: Justo Vega  
Script: Sara Gómez

*Guanabacoa: crónica de mi familia, 1966*

13 min  
Production: ICAIC, Eduardo Rivero, Jesús Pascau  
Photography: José Tabío, Luis March  
Editing: Justo Vega  
Musical composition: Fabio Landa  
Script: Sara Gómez

*Y... tenemos sabor, 1967*

30 min  
Production: ICAIC, Jesús Pascau  
Photography: Mario García Joya, José López  
Editing: Justo Vega  
Musicians: Conjunto Changüí, Conjunto Típico Habanero, Conjunto Clave and Guaguancó, Conjunto de Santiago de Cuba, Trío Los Decanos, Trío Virgilio, Almenares y Márquez, Orquesta Estrellas Cubanas, Chucho Valdés and his Combo with Amado Borcelá Navarrete “Guapachá”  
Script: Sara Gómez

*En la otra isla, 1968*

41 min  
Production: ICAIC, Jesús Pascau  
Photography: Luis García  
Editing: Caíta Villalón  
Musical composition: Tomás González Pérez

Musicians: Omara Portuondo, Quinteto de Jazz of the Orquesta Cubana de Música Moderna  
Script: Sara Gómez

*Una isla para Miguel, 1968*

22 min  
Production: ICAIC, Jesús Pascau  
Photography: Luis García  
Editing: Caíta Villalón  
Musical composition: Chucho Valdés  
Script: Sara Gómez

*Isla del tesoro, 1969*

10 min  
Production: ICAIC, Jesús Pascau  
Photography: Luis García  
Editing: Caíta Villalón  
Musical composition: Armando Guerra  
Music: Armando Guerra, song “La otra isla”  
Script: Sara Gómez

*Poder local, poder popular, 1970*

9 min  
Production: ICAIC, Guillermo García  
Photography: José M. Riera  
Editing: Iván Arocha  
Script: Sara Gómez

*De bateyes, 1971*

24 min  
Production: ICAIC, Santiago Llapur, Guillermo García  
Photography: Luis García

Editing: Iván Arocha  
Musical composition: Emiliano Salvador  
Music: Grupo de Experimentación Sonora of the ICAIC  
Script: Sara Gómez

*Un documental a propósito del tránsito, 1971*

17 min  
Production: ICAIC, Orlando Vigil-Escalera  
Photography: Rodolfo López  
Editing: Iván Arocha  
Music: Grupo de Experimentación Sonora of the ICAIC  
Script: Sara Gómez

*Año uno, 1972*

10 min  
Production: ICAIC, Rolando Gómez  
Photography: Lupercio López  
Editing: Iván Arocha  
Music: Grupo de Experimentación Sonora of the ICAIC  
Script: Sara Gómez

*Atención prenatal, 1972*

10 min  
Production: ICAIC, Jorge Rouco  
Photography: Luis García  
Editing: Caíta Villalón  
Music: Grupo de Experimentación Sonora of the ICAIC  
Script: Sara Gómez

*Mi aporte..., 1972*

33 min  
Production: ICAIC, Santiago Llapur

Photography: Luis García  
Editing: Iván Arocha  
Script: Sara Gómez

*Sobre horas extras y trabajo voluntario, 1973*

9 min  
Production: ICAIC, Guillermo García  
Photography: José M. Riera  
Editing: Iván Arocha  
Script: Sara Gómez

*De cierta manera, 1974*

79 min  
Assistant Director: Rigoberto López  
Production: ICAIC, Camilo Vives  
Photography: Luis García  
Camera operator: Julio Valdés  
Camera animation: Adalberto Hernández  
Lighting: Carmelo Ruiz  
Sound: Germinal Hernández  
Editing: Iván Arocha  
Musical composition: Sergio Vitier  
Musical performance: Sara González  
Script: Sara Gómez, Tomás González  
Dialogues: Sara Gómez  
Set design: Roberto Larrabure  
Accessories: Joaquín Moreno  
Credits: Ricardo López  
Actors: Mario Balmaseda, Yolanda Cuéllar,  
Mario Limonta, Isaura Mendoza, Bobby Carcassés,  
Sarita Reyes

**Curator: Valentín Roma**

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**In collaboration with the Instituto Cubano del Arte  
e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC)  
and the Vulnerable Media Lab.**

**La Virreina Centre de la Imatge  
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**Opening hours:  
Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays,  
11 am to 8 pm  
Free entry**



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