Laura-Zoë Humphreys, *Fidel between the Lines: Paranoia and Ambivalence in Late Socialist Cuban Cinema*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2019. xi + 287 pp. (Paper US\$ 27.95)

One of the problems concerning all research on Cuba is the sense that the reader will always try to make a judgment as to the political intentions and affiliations of the researcher/author. This is borne out in this study early on as Laura-Zoë Humphreys tries to illustrate how nuanced debate in Cuban studies is often “reduced to Cold War binaries” that do not reflect true artistic activity coming from the island. In essence, *Fidel between the Lines* is an examination of cinema and censorship, and it does an excellent job of trying to understand the various paradoxes and complications therein.

Humphreys recognizes that cinema in Cuba during the Revolution has been a site of acute anxiety in its struggles over freedom of expression—the 1961 film *PM* was the work that inspired Castro’s “Words to the Intellectuals” speech, the framework of which still holds strong for artistic cultural production on the island today. In her examination of films from the late socialist era, Humphreys recognizes that it is often through the use of allegory that this anxiety is released (this taken from Fredric Jameson), and she is correct to point out that the more recent digital advances have posed a threat to the dominant control of Cuba’s national film institute (ICAIC).

The book explores how Cuban filmmakers have attempted to “open up conversations about the meaning and significance of the Revolution” (p. 12). Revolutionary Cuban cinema has done this since its inception in 1959, but what is important is to examine the nature of those conversations, and Humphreys does this well, using painstaking research and some very good analyses of a large body of films.

Chapter One deals with the new technological openings of the 2000s and how this broadening of technical horizons created a sense of political paranoia as the ICAIC began to lose some of its dominance and control. As Humphreys points out, suspicion and surveillance are part of everyday life on the island, but perhaps with the availability of new technology sometimes beyond the reach of the authorities, a sense of paranoia seeped in. In her documentation of the email “war” of 2007 and her examination of Castro’s 1961 speech, she makes a nuanced and interesting analysis of the cultural politics of the period.

Chapter Two revisits a number of key films, such as *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, *Fresa y chocolate* and *Guantanamera*, and although these do not necessarily present any originality in themselves as filmic analyses, they do illustrate well her point about paranoia and ambivalence being central to allegorical narratives, particularly at times of political sensitivity.

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The controversial film *Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas* is analyzed in Chapter Three; what is interesting here is how Humphreys aptly demonstrates the controversy of allegory and the political struggles of the time regarding the bureaucratization of the Revolution. Her analysis of the 1988 film *Plaf! (o demasiado miedo a la vida)* is also particularly revealing in this context. The book eloquently examines how myriad intellectual voices on the island in the cultural arena provide far more than the simple binary some observers believe exists and that these voices all have a platform of some sort. The book shows how the interpretations of what constitutes “revolution” in the cultural arena are many and varied; what is deemed revolutionary by one intellectual may be interpreted otherwise by someone else, and Humphrey takes care to provide a variety of voices in a number of well documented interviews with cultural producers and observers.

Chapter Four is interesting in that it looks specifically at cinematic representations of staying in Cuba during times of migration and how these messages contribute to ambivalence inherent in Cuban cinematic production. The examples used are *Juan de los Muertos*, *Amor vertical*, and *Lista de espera*, together with some useful conversations with prominent Cuban filmmakers, and the chapter deftly concludes that the desire to remain in Cuba evident in these films is a critical function that juxtaposes social criticism with political optimism.

The final chapter in a well put together piece of work illustrates the changing relationship to dominant revolutionary discourse that emerges in more recent filmmaking, including from Fernando Pérez, Cuba’s most prominent director of the 2000s. But in addition to films by Pérez, Humphreys looks at work by emerging young filmmakers who examine the dilemma of whether to leave or stay on the island. Films by Susana Barriga, Esteban Insausti, and Yan Vega for example highlight the ambiguous nature of contemporary Cuban reality that perhaps harks back somewhat nostalgically to the ambiguity associated with the early years of the Revolution, and the experimental aesthetics associated with that time. This is an energetic, highly readable, well-researched account that makes a valuable contribution to the field.

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