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Propaganda in Havana

The Politics of Public Space and Collective Memory in the Socialist City

Andrew B. Turner

Urban Studies 400
Professor Eric Schneider
Preface

It felt like the last chance. Fidel Castro, because of his illness, was no longer the official head of state and it seemed as though Cuba was ready for transition. Four years had passed since my last visit to Havana, and I expected some change. After a lot of unnecessary anxiety and two passes over my destination in the circuitous route from Philadelphia to Cuba via Kingston, I was met with a feeling of calm at Jose Marti International Airport.

From America, Cuba seems like another world. There is a feeling of discontinuity when traveling there. People describe Havana as a time capsule, but it feels cosmopolitan. There is no doubt that things are going to change in Cuba. They already are. This project was timely in that sense. It was all about time. The moment in history that I studied Havana seems crucial. But every moment on the island is made to feel that way.

This project is nothing more than a snapshot of a city. The image that I describe in the following pages is a candid one. There are many contradictions and questions because a city is impossible to know and describe thoroughly. But something is undoubtedly unique about Havana. It cannot be fully understood. That is why I keep going back. I believe that the Cuban capitol has something to tell us about the nature of cities.

Every person I know that has been there comes back with a photograph of a propaganda billboard. Usually it’s the one on the Malecón in front of the old American
Embassy with a cartoon of Uncle Sam. That is the only evidence of socialism to the casual viewer. This project is about what is behind that image.

Liberal American travelers to Cuba have a curious relationship with the place. It is supposed to be something like utopia. Most would have thought that paradise had better tasting food. People say they need to get to Cuba before… it changes. It should change, though. It is as if Cuba is the last hope for some. And Cubans continue to bear that heavy burden of hope. Propaganda in Havana displays ideals that most of us can agree with. That is why it is so interesting, because many believe it.

I want to thank my good friend Matt Beagle for accompanying me and for watching the bikes as we rode all over the city taking photos.
The revolutionary idea should be diffused by means of appropriate media to the greatest depth possible.


The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny and of a collective history. In the same way the second phase, that of the building-up of the nation, is helped on by the existence of this cement which has been mixed with blood and anger. Thus we come to a fuller appreciation of the originality of the words used in these under-developed countries. During the colonial period the people are called upon to fight against oppression; after national liberation, they are called upon to fight against poverty, illiteracy and under-development. The struggle, they say, goes on. The people realize that life is an unending contest.

Frantz Fanon. 1961.
Introduction

In 2004 alongside a Christmas tree and standard American-style holiday decorations the U.S. Interest Section in Havana set up a giant number 75. It was a reference by the U.S. government to the number of dissidents Cuba had imprisoned the previous year.\(^1\) The American diplomatic post is a modern looking structure on Havana's waterfront built as the U.S. Embassy before Cuba's 1959 revolution. Directly across from the fortified compound, which is no longer technically the Embassy, an open-air stage at the "Anti-Imperialism Park," has been the main venue for political rallies since the year 2000.\(^2\) In response to the Christmas provocation the Cubans erected a series of large posters showing graphic images of abused Iraqi prisoners and the words, "Fascists, Made in the USA." A spokesman for the U.S. State Department remarked on the escalating propaganda war, "Castro gets angered by the truth, yet they call their revolution a revolution of ideas. So we're battling with ideas."\(^3\)

In January of 2006, messages began scrolling the width of the U.S. Interests building in red letters. Across the 25 windows of the fifth floor a 9-foot-high news ticker displayed electronic messages that could be seen kilometers away. The ticker presented international news along with messages catering directly to the Cuban public. One message read, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up." Another proclaimed, "Only in totalitarian societies do governments talk at their people and never listen." Some communications relating obscurities of life in the US were slightly less direct.

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"Eight workers in a butcher shop won $22 million each in the Power Ball lottery." All the messages were in Spanish, however Cuban police did not allow pedestrians to stop and read. Some foreign diplomats stationed in the capitol thought the news ticker went too far, calling it "A serious violation of diplomatic norms."

In response, Cuba expanded its presence at the site with the “Martyr’s Plaza,” featuring enormous black flags designed to block the messages. Each of the 138 flags had a white star representing, "The light of a people that are in pain and mourning for their children and families." During a dedication ceremony for the new Plaza in which more than a million people came to protest and hear the Cuban President Fidel Castro speak, the ticker turned on. "They turned on the little sign. How brave the cockroaches are," Castro retorted. "Looks like 'Bushecito' gave the order." A U.S. official explained the action casually, "If the point is to reach people, why not turn it on when a million people are cruising by?"

Michael Parmly, head of the Interests Section, finally spoke out to clarify the official U.S. position. "The press has called this 'the billboard war,' which I find funny and amusing, but I don't consider this to be a war. I repeat, and I'm probably going to start to sound boring, our effort is to communicate with the Cuban people." The U.S. Interest Section in Havana is a controversial place where the broader "Battle of ideas" between Cuba and America is being waged. Depending on the ideological perspective, "communication" can be propaganda and public space can be battleground.

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4 Christian Science Monitor.
7 Ibid.
Since 1959, the Revolution in Cuba has attempted to rebuild the class composition of society, the economy, urban and rural dynamics and the nation's standing in international relations. It has not, however, drastically rebuilt downtown Havana. Without a major construction campaign, there is minimal evidence of the contribution of socialism to the urban environment with one obvious exception. Where American commercial advertising used to be, now billboards display messages to advance the objectives of the revolution.

While deterioration speaks to the lack of available economic capital, propaganda attests to the wealth of moral capital. Sanctions imposed by the United States have isolated the island since 1962, taking a significant toll on the city. The embargo blocks the traditionally American-export oriented Cuban economy from access to U.S. markets. New legislation from Washington since the fall of the Soviet Union further constricts trade with Cuba, banning boats that dock in Cuba from U.S. ports for six months. The Cuban-American anti-Castro lobby continues to advocate for economic strangulation of Cuba even while America softens relations with other communist countries like China and Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Havana the cosmopolitan Capitol presents an interesting dilemma in the transition to socialism. Formerly America's 'capitalist playground,' and to this day one of the best examples of colonial architecture in the new world, the Havana inherited or regained by the Revolution may still be considered a capitalist city in form. The evidence is in the Plazas of Old Havana and the high-rise apartments, luxury hotels,

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nightclubs and mansions from the 1950s that continue to dot the landscape 50 years later. Practically nothing of significance has been built in the inner city since 1959.\textsuperscript{10}

Representing the socialist revolution by building monumental architecture would have been impossible, impractical or inappropriate. Rather than through affirmative additions to the built environment, a revolutionary identity has been communicated in opposition to the preceding eras. This is a study of the "Image of the city" through public spaces. Signs are a way to "read the city" in an effort to understand the struggles over the meaning of public space that shape urban life. Propaganda is a vehicle to a better understanding of the revolutionary city. The question is: \textit{How do propaganda billboards affect public space in making Havana a socialist city?}

At issue is not the normative judgment of whether the billboards are authoritarian. It would be the same type of simple argument to say the Cuban Revolution rules by dictatorship. Separating propaganda from political opinion is difficult, but necessary to understand how it might work. The propaganda war unfolding at the U.S. Interests Section and to a degree throughout the city is representative of how the significance of public space is contentious and not simply a matter of the physical structures.

I argue that propaganda billboards contribute to an ideological rather than a physical re-construction of Havana in the image of a socialist city. Socialist ideology and values have a physical presence in the built environment through billboards more than architecture, which has not been so radically reconstructed. Their effect is a convergence and alignment of public space with the abstract and authoritative socialist discourse.

For the Cuban public, propaganda vehemently interprets the American presence at the Interests Section, which would otherwise be an anomaly, in revolutionary terms. "Disgrace!" "Injustice!" "Barbaric" contend signs, which are physically erected in opposition to the building. To the socialist city this "Imperialist" space around the Interests Section is supposed to be dead. Police guards prevent people from approaching except for during mass mobilizations when hundreds of thousands gather in protest. The government exercises complete authoritarian control over this space, stripping it of all other meaning because the social significance of an American presence in the city is too potent to leave open to interpretation. On the stage of the Martyr's Plaza, however, hidden behind giant speakers children still play soccer.

A socialist identity for Havana is actively communicated and reinforced within the built urban environment. Understanding whether propaganda is effective or whether people positively receive the messages is not the aim here. The following analysis rather acknowledges that the character of public space does have an undeniable influence on life in a city. Socialist propaganda, as a prominent feature in Havana's public spaces, also must have some influence on the city's public life.
Literature Review

Literature on this topic positions the question about billboards at the intersection of art, politics and public space. I hypothesize that the Cuban Revolutionary Government uses political propaganda billboards not just as art to beautify the urban landscape or as politics to announce ideas, but rather to make active contributions to the social construct of the city. The idea is based on assumptions that within this action is something uniquely Cuban, particularly socialist and especially urban.

There has been a wealth of information published about Havana, the Cuban Revolution, art under socialism and propaganda--although relatively little to bring these topics together. A few have directly addressed public displays of propaganda in Havana with regard to their artistic merit and political value. David Kunzle, one of the most prolific authors on Cuban revolutionary art forms, eloquently describes this phenomenon in the urban setting. "The fabric of the city of Havana has often been compared with an old and crumpled suit of clothes; the posters are like a flower stuck in its buttonhole." Of those directly addressing this topic, Kunzle and other American art historians who spent time in Cuba documenting the graphic arts community in the earlier parts of the Revolution, have produced some colorful books of Cuban poster art. His descriptions, and also notably those of Susan Sontag in an introductory essay to Dugald Stermer's The Art of Revolution, aptly describe the role of graphic arts in Cuba's socialist transition. These works are primarily concerned with poster art from the perspective of the art historian. They provide an important introduction and analytical framework, but

11 Kunzle, Cushing, Sontag, Stermer, Peters.
lack theoretical foundations for an urban spatial analysis of this powerful art, which is the aim of this project. I take these works as a descriptive starting point for the communicative function of art in Revolutionary Cuba and build upon the authors' assumptions to better understand how propaganda works in the urban environment.

Propaganda as Art:

Kunzle begins by offering an important description of what the billboard (valla) is, and what it was like in the 1960's and '70s, during the "Golden age of Cuban design."  

The message is always directly political or social. In size and placing comparable to the U.S. billboard, the valla is composed of twelve silk-screened sections, separately pulled, in several different colors, which are both strong and subtle like the silk-screened posters… Around two hundred different ones are produced in a year by the Havana Department of Revolutionary Orientation.  

There are strong connections between vallas and both commercial advertising billboards on the one hand and propaganda posters on the other. In proportion, construction and presentation, the valla compares to the billboard we know in America and elsewhere. In design and content, they mirror the smaller and better-known film and event posters, for which Cuban graphic artists have become internationally renowned.

Cuban poster production has declined since the mid 1980's and most of the works written about them were from the previous "Golden Age." Billboards however, have been in continuous production since the early 1960's and are a peripheral topic in the literature about poster-art. I want to reiterate the distinction between the poster and the billboard. The latter is of interest to this project. Although related organizations are

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responsible for both productions,\textsuperscript{17} they have served different functions and taken separate historical trajectories.

Despite some negative connotations, the literature agrees that this is propaganda, in contrast to other Cuban arts. For art historians, 'propaganda' in this case may be a positive label relating to art with clear functionality. Cuban posters and billboards also generally maintain a higher artistic quality than other examples of socialist propaganda distinguishing them from those of the Soviet Union and China.\textsuperscript{18}

In general the COR (Committee of Revolutionary Orientation) posters, as well as the billboards, are the closest the Cubans come to our stereotyped conception of propaganda. But even here they destroy our illusions: the Cuban artist/propagandist is encouraged to deal imaginatively with slogans, workers, guns, plows and heroes in a way that the Soviet socialist-realists never conceived of.\textsuperscript{19}

Billboard production as an artistic medium is naturally conducive to populist messages because of its ability to communicate to the public at large. Lincoln Cushing also asserts that because Cuba is a small, relatively underdeveloped island nation, and has limited space, posters and billboards are especially useful modes of communication.\textsuperscript{20} This may also have been true of billboards in Havana during the Republic, but most were in English and have been described as "The most vulgar types of American billboard advertising."\textsuperscript{21}

After the revolution, Cuban authorities adapted and reclaimed the billboard for political purposes in contrast to previous use in advertisements for consumer goods. The

\textsuperscript{17} Lincoln Cushing identifies the three primary producers of Cuban political graphic arts: ICAIC-Cuban Institute of Cinematic Art and Industry (Film Institute), Editora Politica-The Publishing Department of the Cuban Communist Party (formerly COR), and OSPAAAL-The Organization in Solidarity with Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Non-Governmental).
\textsuperscript{20} Cushing, Lincoln. Revolucion: Cuban Poster Art. P. 7.
appropriation for nationalism is seen as an example of the revolutionary victory. Kunzle describe how,

The very media, which in pre-revolutionary Cuba were the most completely subservient to consumerism, have effected a dramatic transition for which there is no precedent anywhere. All the arts in Cuba – theatre, music, dance, literature – have undergone a radical transformation; but it is in the visual mass media which capitalism evolved to serve its own specific and historic needs, that the transition to socialist values appears the most extraordinary.  

The *vallas* now perform an overtly political rather than commercial function--while also visually embellishing the landscape. The dual function of beautification and indoctrination seems to be a point of departure from other examples of socialist propaganda in which Cubans have excelled.

Taking up the political function, propaganda billboards are similar to public information campaigns with a focus on consciousness and education for the public good. Whereas advertising might entice one to buy with pretty girls as visual metaphors, says Sontag, political communication makes use of the heroic national figure for "Ideological mobilization." This is a nuanced departure from the persuasive techniques of advertising, where products are impressed upon viewers by stimulating desires. The art historians suggest that billboards are more than communication; they are designed also to be a reflection of society.

For this reason, some have compared Cuban billboards to mural arts. There are unquestionably some similarities. Large and often optimistic images that reflect community and cultural identities and lofty ideals are common to both art forms. For example, after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 came a renaissance of muralism with the rise of the masters: Rivera, Sequieros, and Orozco. De Juan tries to affirm this

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connection as a general after-effect of revolution. "The role played by the excellent murals in Mexico was, as a matter of fact, taken up by the explosion of design work produced through those first decades of the Cuban revolution."24 In terms of the effort to recreate and promote a national identity, this connection may be valid, but with a closer analysis the billboards of Havana seem to serve a purpose quite different from murals.

Murals and billboards both serve as methods of community beautification and unification. But Kunzle describes why Cubans didn't find murals to be the best medium for their specific purposes.

They regard the mural as functionally inefficient in a revolutionary situation… Better, say the Cubans, to color a wall with changeable posters and uallas, which are more responsive to the particular need of the hour, than expend effort upon murals, which lack the flexibility required by a revolution full of abrupt changes and constant radicalization.25

The art historians see propaganda in Cuba then as a clever adaptation of art for the revolutionary cause. Sontag goes so far as to see the artistic merits of Cuban propaganda as a legitimization of their content. If propaganda is contrived or authoritarian, how could it be so expressive and beautiful?

Despite the plethora of official functions they fill, the posters have a remarkable grace. At least some political posters establish an astonishing degree of independent existence as decorative objects. As often as they convey a particular message, they simply express (through being beautiful) pleasure at certain ideas, moral attitudes, and ennobling historical references.26

From such a perspective, the billboards can be seen as objects of art with inherent political significance.

As art, the billboards reflect communally held ideals and culture -- like murals. Also like advertising, the communicator or producer of the billboard deliberately seeks to engage with and influence already existing ideas held by the viewer. But without

measurable objectives, like increasing sales, ideological and cultural promotion through outdoor advertising—for its own sake—can be confusing. Sontag continues, "And indeed, many of these posters do not really fill any practical need… and amount to the creation of a new work of art rather than to a cultural advertisement in the familiar sense."  

Here we find a gap in the art-historical analytical framework.

It is necessary to take a step back from appreciation to understand the purpose and function of propaganda. If the use is perceived productively, propaganda may also be called public communication. Scholars in communication describe how governments organize public information into campaigns to communicate for maximum social impact. From this perspective, an artistic or aesthetically pleasing presentation of public information is only one element of a successful campaign.

**Propaganda as Public Communication:**

Advertising tools, like billboards, have also been adopted in effective public communication for the good of society. The desired outcomes of such messages however, are not so easily defined. Information campaigns deal in the promotion of ideas and ideological effects are difficult to measure. Janet Weiss describes public information campaigns or (PICs) as a way that, "Government officials deliberately attempt to shape public attitudes, values, or behavior." The effectiveness of public campaigns can be defined in a number of different ways.

Public information can be used simply to point out a problem, like in health campaigns. Direct communication from the government may also be designed for

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28 Weiss, Pratkanis and Aronson, McGuire, Atkin and Freimuth, Salmon.
ideological, political, contextual, cost and programmatic effectiveness. This is to say that propaganda may work on a number of different levels--even simultaneously. A health campaign may simply identify a societal problem, 'AIDS awareness,' for example. But in doing so it may also attempt to change attitudes and behaviors or even say simply by virtue of its presence, "The government cares about your health." In addition to the manifest purpose of public communication there are also a multitude of latent purposes.

Public information campaigns are tools for the dissemination of information and to influence public perception. There is an established body of work on the necessary elements of effective campaigns based on the policy demands of the moment. Weiss identifies four variables of successful public communication.

The tasks are: (1) to capture the attention of the right audience; (2) to deliver an understandable and credible message; (3) to deliver a message that influences the beliefs or understanding of the audience; (4) and to create social contexts that lead toward desired outcomes.

Such a policy tool, without measurable outcomes, is often seen as ineffective and having only symbolic meaning for policy makers. However, Weiss points out that regarding propaganda the conventional wisdom tends to be that, "Campaigns run by the government constitute a dangerously powerful abuse of state power." These assessments are clearly contradictory, leading Weiss to conclude, "Individual campaigns can simultaneously weaken and strengthen the competition of ideas." The potential strengths of public communication demand a closer look at the particular method of communicating and the content of the messages.

30 Salmon, Charles T. and Lisa Murray-Johnson.
32 Weiss, Liu, Salmon.
In order to effectively deliver information, communicators have to identify and cater to specific outcomes. To be persuasive, a campaign must address input and output variables or, "Stratagems of influence," customized for policy related goals. 35 "That is, who says what, via which media, to whom, regarding what." 36 Public communication is a delicate science that balances effectiveness with the perceived abuse of power. From this perspective, beauty or artistic value contributes to message credibility towards three basic objectives: "Internalization, identification, and compliance." 37 There are however, many methods of communicating public information. Billboards have specific strengths and weaknesses in terms of these definitions of effectiveness.

The most compelling reason to use a billboard whether for public communication or for advertising is that billboards are site specific. They are also a cost effective and a highly visible medium, but "Because a billboard appears at a specific location, many of its advantages are linked to geographic factors." 38 In a study of businesses in America, Taylor found that the primary reason that companies decide on billboard advertising is to have a constant visual presence near the point of sale. Consumerism aside, billboard propaganda can be thought of as a way to connect ideas with socially important places. The context in which messages are received is very important for the ultimate effectiveness of communications. Pratkanis and Aronson stress the necessity of a favorable climate for messages through what they call "pre-persuasion." Effectiveness depends on reducing visual competition and integrating the message into the existing built environment.

35 McGuire, Atkin, Pratkanis.
36 McGuire.
37 McGuire P. 24.
38 Taylor, 24.
The communication literature suggests that environment is equally as important as message in understanding the influence of propaganda. How billboards affect people in public space is then a matter of the relationship between the content and the location.

The Politics of Propaganda: Unification through Collective Memory:

The art historical perspective correctly identifies that the political utility of propaganda in terms of content is as a tool of 'ideological mobilization.' The Revolution in Cuba demanded from the nation a new sense of self. "After taking power Castro sought to socialize the populace to new values and new loyalties." The Revolution expressly set out to create the *Hombre Nuevo*, a 'new man.' "The reinvention of history was an integral part of the scientific mythology of communism and the project of creating a new socialist man. Thus, pre-socialist historical trajectories were discredited, and new national histories sought to present the achievement of state socialism as an historical inevitability."40

From this perspective, history itself legitimizes the Revolution, which was portrayed less as a break from the past than as the fulfillment of Cuba's long struggle for independence over many generations. Ideologically, propaganda unites historiography with political circumstances. Theories of 'collective memory' offer insight into such a utilitarian view of history. "The ability to align past, present, and future in some meaningful way can be a useful tool for defending different aims and agendas."41

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39 Eckstein, 4.
40 Young, 944.
41 Jansen. 959.
Memories in this sense are selective reconstructions of past events important to society that serve a present need.\(^42\)

Clearly, collective memory so conceived is a potent political tool. To realize a political community as a salient group identity, political leaders must act to inscribe and codify the social memory of that entity.\(^43\)

Maurice Halbwachs suggests that collective memory reconstructs "An image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of society."\(^44\)

The Revolutionary epoch, according to Kapcia has "Always been a process of redefinition, rooted in a history of colonial and then neo-colonial denial of national identity."\(^45\) A sense of revolutionary nationalism and national identity is key to building the 'new man,' who is supposed to be, "Egalitarian, selfless, cooperative, nonmaterialistic, hardworking and morally pure."\(^46\) In the Cuban context, the fundamental mechanism for re-definition is the political myth.\(^47\) "Here 'myth' is understood in a very particular way: as the 'cohesive set of values seen to be expressed in an accepted symbol or figure, which is perceived by a given collectivity to encapsulate the essence of all.'"\(^48\) Jansen describes the meaning of historical figures, embodied in these myths, as a product of "Reputational trajectories." Reputations are generally static, but critical junctures in history, like revolutions, necessarily redefine historical reputations.

An example of a myth might be that of José Martí the hero of Cuban independence, or the campesino an iconic farmer who represents the rural past. At the heart of these myths, which existed well before the revolution, is cubania or lo cubano--

\(^{43}\) Golden, 271.
\(^{44}\) Halbwachs.
\(^{45}\) Kapcia, 402.
\(^{46}\) Eckstein, 4.
\(^{47}\) Kapcia, 407.
\(^{48}\) Kapcia, 408.
the intangible and contested sense of what is truly Cuban. Cuban identity, through a redefinition of myths, was radicalized to reinforce the experience of revolution. Figures that during the republic had represented a particular notion of independence became symbolic of the 'sacrifice' and 'struggle' of the early socialist period. "The revolution emphasized struggle in order to offer one very partial view of Cuban history, one that extolled sacrifice and that provided the moral subsidy and, on occasion, the inspiration that was needed to keep up popular enthusiasm during the transition to socialism."

This struggle, la lucha, came to characterize Cuban national identity as part of a greater 'battle of ideas.' "The memory constructed by the revolution was that of a nation eternally at war, fighting for justice and liberation, and thus projecting itself toward a future that would always be marked by struggle." Mor sees national identity creation as a matter of "Self-presentation," where a state acts like a credible individual in presenting itself to the international community. Self-presentation is necessary because revolution presents a "Legitimacy conflict." For a newly conceived nation, claims to legitimacy have to "Be based only on structures that establish unity and guarantee consensus; like language, ethnic background, tradition, or indeed reason."

A particular logic of history constitutes socialism's claim to legitimacy. After the symbolic beginning of the revolutionary struggle at Moncada, Fidel Castro

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49 Fernando Ortiz, the father of Cuban anthropology has tried to theorize on Cuban cultural creation. He coined the term transculturation to encapsulate the complicated process by which any collective Cuban identity has come together. Ortiz, Fernando. Cuban Counterpoint: Sugar and Tobacco.
50 Frederick, 403.
51 Palimpsest, 31.
52 Frederick, 408.
53 Quiroga, 4.
54 Mor, 662.
55 Habermas, Jergen. 182.
56 Habermas, 199.
57 Palimpsests, 29.
proclaimed, "Condemn me. It does not matter. History will absolve me." 

According to Jose Quiroga's historiographical analysis, "Cuban history was then written as a justification for revolutionary work, and it was from then on to be written as prophecy—by definition, outside of time or in a time of its own, ordering and reordering the past and accommodating it to the future." In the present moment, each revolutionary action was presented as making history. The 'self-presentation' theory sees these claims to legitimacy, whether socialist or religious, or democratic or otherwise, as nothing more than an "Image making process."

Since his famous "History will absolve me" speech, Fidel Castro has galvanized collective memory to advance a convincing image of the Revolution. There can be no absolute claim to resolve a legitimacy conflict; rather the state has to actively engage in building consensus. This leads Habermas to see claims to legitimacy not as purely normative or empirical, but rather "Reconstructive." Mor also concludes that ideologies of national identity are "Concerned not with the moral issue of realizing these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized." Therefore propaganda "Instrumentalizes truth by turning it from an end into a means."

If propaganda is to represent society, it surely also has to reflect it. The significance of memory work and symbolization depends on a referential reality. Habermas warns that the risk of symbolization is getting "caught in a world of images."

Writing in 1975, David Kunzle thought Cuban propaganda billboards represented a

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59 Quiroga, 30.
60 Mor, 662.
61 Mor, 664.
62 Mor, 665.
"Dialectical process between the masses and their symbols, between practice and the theory and even perhaps, suggesting the creative relationship between the people and Fidel."\textsuperscript{63} This dialectic of symbolism, "Consists in the fact that [the symbol] also points in the opposite direction, towards an exemplary generalization and comprehensive ordering of the fixed expressions within an articulated whole."\textsuperscript{64} Ivor Miller, writing about Cuban religious symbolism in the 1990s also saw something of a dialectical process because for many, images and symbols carry double meanings.

On the one hand symbolic dates, doves, acronyms, and colors have been used by Castro to motivate Cuba's population. On the other, Santeria practitioners actively read his actions and character in ways that associate Castro with Lukumi divinities. This type of dialogic is inescapable in the Caribbean, and is one reason politicians are able to use symbols to their advantage.\textsuperscript{65}

As the concept of the whole changes, so must its representation. Symbols are never viewed in a vacuum, but rather in a specific time and physical place.

The communication literature provides that, "For a billboard to be effective, it must communicate a relevant message in a clear, interesting and readable manner to the appropriate audience. It must also be at an appropriate location in order to be seen by the target audience."\textsuperscript{66} As a medium of ideological mobilization, billboards are able to address both spatial and temporal necessities of internalization. As mentioned, the advantage of communicating on signs is that they can be changed often and that they can be located strategically.

\textsuperscript{64} Habermas, Jergen. The Liberating Power of Symbols. 11.
\textsuperscript{65} Miller, Ivor. "Religious Symbolism in Cuban Political Performance."
\textsuperscript{66} Taylor, 24.
Propaganda and Public Space: the Image of a Socialist City.

A spatial analysis of propaganda presents some of the same issues as political symbolization, but opens up new avenues of meaning and influence. Kevin Lynch's concepts of 'imageability' and 'legibility' lend themselves to spatially analyzing propaganda. Lynch proposes 'reading' the city visually and conceptually to understand how it works. "Since [city] image development is a two-way process between observer, it is possible to strengthen the image either by symbolic devices, by the retraining of the perceiver, or by reshaping one's surroundings."\(^6^7\)

Setha Low, in her study of Spanish American plazas, draws on Lefvbre and Foucoul to develop other theoretical tools of what she calls, "Spatializing culture." Low proposes a process by which social or cultural meaning is embedded in the built environment. Architecture, although important and full of cultural significance, cannot dictate all social relations in the city. Low calls the process that results in the physical environment, "The social production of space." While the experience of space, and how people make sense of their surroundings, she calls "The social construction of space." Social construction is how people react to space and transform or recreate meaning through daily use."\(^6^8\) In this way, the image of the city becomes internalized as part city life.

Pierre Nora also theorizes about memory and how it is spatialized. Through memory, spaces become places, the significance of which is constantly being contested. Buildings, parks, streets and other places are sites of collective memory imbued with national significance. For Nora, society creates "lieux de memoire" or memory sites in the

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\(^{6^7}\) Lynch, Kevin. The Image of the City. 11.  
\(^{6^8}\) Low, Setha, On the Plaza. 128
process of transition and renewal.\textsuperscript{69} Billboards, attaching memory to public space can be sites of collective memory.

The government's role in inscribing national identity in public spaces is crucial. Ana Maria Alonso describes cultural processes of "mestizaje" or hybridization after the Mexican revolution as being cemented through an "Aesthetic statism." Part of government is making representations of national identity publicly visible. "The state would supersede the church as purveyor of exemplary public images and architecture: Statues of the heroes of national history would replace the saints, and public buildings and the spaces of state ritual would supplant religious ones."\textsuperscript{70}

Art takes a unique role in layering social meaning on public spaces. For Delores Hayden, the social meaning of public art in the city depends not only on historical representation, but also on the ability to reflect the community. "No public art can succeed in enhancing the social meaning of place without a solid base of historical research and community support."\textsuperscript{71} In Revolutionary Cuba, such representations necessarily take different forms. Rather than capital investments in monuments, the state communicates through signs, partly because the revolution has brought literacy to the people too. "These representations of place involve complex interconnections of identity and place, of belonging and territorial space."\textsuperscript{72}

This notion of community, which relates to the concept of a 'public sphere,'\textsuperscript{73} as Habermas also describes it, does not apply simply to socialist societies. The public

\textsuperscript{69} Nora.
\textsuperscript{71} Hayden, 76.
\textsuperscript{72} Young, 942.
\textsuperscript{73} Habermas: The public sphere. By the public sphere we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. 198.
sphere is part of the state’s operations. Under socialism, all discourse is necessarily authoritative discourse. Verdery also attributes authoritative speech and cultural discourse under socialism to fragile legitimacy. "This is so because we are not speaking, in the end of language as merely a means for cultural production, but of both language and cultural products as vehicles for the formation of consciousness and subjectivity: as means of ideological production, of producing ideological effects."75

Socialist cities, in a comparison with capitalism, have been called underurbanized because of their relationship with the country and because they display fewer aspects of urbanism. "Competition over scarce resources forces planners and politicians to urbanize on the cheap... As well, socialist cities serve largely as administrative centers." Cuba adopted a strong antiurban or anti-Havana Policy.76 The government promoted a 'maximum of ruralism and minimum of urbanism.' Socialist capitol cities serve mainly as symbolic centers of political power and culture. A city that is not to be the center of commerce, but rather of production and redistribution, must revalue its public image.

Havana has to be situated within the country as a dominant and symbolic place. Its historical symbolism does not coincide with the aims of the revolution. The insertion of socialist values onto a built environment constructed by excesses of capital is a more spatial framework for viewing propaganda than the artistic or political. Susan Sontag expresses this well,

The purpose of the political poster in Cuba is not simply to build morale. It is to raise and complicate consciousness—the highest aim of the revolution itself... In this revolution, a revolution in consciousness that requires turning the whole country into a school, posters are an important method (among others) of public teaching.77 (emphasis added)

74 Verdery, 90.
75 Verdery, National Ideology Under Socialism 91.
76
The act of turning the whole country into a school, is to revalue place, by putting the moral and social over the material in public spaces. David Kunzle has best described the spatially related power in public communication through art with his insightful metaphor of Havana as a wrinkled suit with the billboard as a flower through the lapel.

We return to the question, of how propaganda billboards affect public space in the socialist city? As we have seen, one can 'read' the billboards for artistic value. Certainly, the graphic arts in Revolutionary Cuba have attained some international recognition. With artistic sensibilities in mind, the billboards may influence the city in visual ways. Another "reading" might be for content, which tends to be overtly political. This perspective explains how socialist values that the government seeks to promote might be communicated through visual symbols of collective memory.

A final way to interpret the effect of public signs could be spatial. As public displays, they also have a presence in public space in a physical and architectural sense beyond the message and artistic appearance. These three levels of meaning are not exclusive and may have a broad cumulative affect. The question is then how we should see these elements as having any influence through the image of the city?

Methodology

Research Design:
The design for this project was inseparable from the political constraints of doing research in Cuba. In fact, the research in many ways engaged rather than avoided these limitations. The methodology had to be carefully crafted in order to explore the same political positioning and ideological disputes that simultaneously inhibited the ability to openly conduct research.

One of the most potent methods of ideological warfare has been to restrict the free flow of information and people. The restrictions on information are multifaceted. Policies made by Cuba and by other members of the International community regarding Cuba delicately balance the extremes of isolation and dependence. The result was that sources that one might look to for information to gauge the public opinions in or about Cuba were unapologetically biased. In short, propaganda and politics saturated information from both sides of the Cuba-US divide. My focus was political speech, but there had to be some impartial ground by which to examine perspectives on propaganda to make sense of it. The design then was to isolate one of the most overtly political forms of public communication and then to develop an understanding of the social environment in which it was situated. The main result of this conundrum in terms of methodology was that the project had to be independent and adaptable.

Access was the primary concern. The pith of the research could only be done in Cuba. America's most reliable tool against the Cuban Revolutionary Government has been an economic embargo and travel ban. As an academic exercise this project did not need to be completely restricted by sanctions, but the climate of control indubitably guided the initial research design. Despite academic support and advising from the University of Pennsylvania, I lacked an official endorsement. This in turn influenced my
decision not to seek formal recognition from the Cuban Government, which might be necessary for a more lengthy and intrusive scholarly endeavor. This left me with a charge to collect a body of data in a short amount of time with political significance, the gathering of which would not be offensive or alarming. I needed to be able to count on unlimited access to my subject, which I would then be able, upon return, to analyze. The task was to depoliticize the most ostentatious display of ideological warfare. I accomplished this by treating them primarily as art.

To be fair in describing the situation and true nature of current US-Cuba relations, I have to note that there were few instances where politics actually interfered with my movements. Points of concern obviously included the places where conflicting interests converged, such as customs and immigration and the US Interests section in Havana. Despite these concerns, constraints on the project were more self-imposed than from any external authority.

As a result, the project was more a personal than an official investigation. Such standard avenues for gathering information as: surveys, broad interview samples, official documents, newspapers, archives, etc. were generally inaccessible altogether, limited, unreliable or biased. This did not explicitly prohibit my collecting of official information, but it required a critical analysis. Ethnographic and observational research was an obvious choice when deciding how to undertake the project. Rather than probing politically sensitive topics and opinions, it made sense to catalogue images and observations in a rather pedestrian manner. Then, as an art historian might engage in research with a body of work, I could analyze the images within a theoretical framework
away from the research site. The research became more the posters than the people and the ideas not the institutions.

The research design that emerged was a sort of pedestrian investigation. By its very nature, the project was to see what the people see in the city how the city presented itself. My idea was to survey the city using the billboards as markers of legibility. The first order was to see what the city looked like right now and how the billboards looked and fit in. The secondary purpose was to understand something of the creation and creative process by which the billboards were placed strategically throughout the city. This was the more official perspective and lent itself to interviews for which I had a few leads in the graphic arts community. The final aspect was to acknowledge the reception of such images through ethnographic observation involving much less formal interviews. Throughout, I was barely distinguishable from a tourist armed with a camera, notebook and sun hat. That was in effect, the perspective I wished to draw on, that of the casual observer. I sought to explore how the billboards helped as orientation within Havana as a socialist city and society.

*City Sample:*

An individual billboard was the basic unit of analysis for the study. Photographs then would be the foundation for a content analysis after returning. In addition to the images, I also identified a number of standardized elements important to each billboard. These factors were the basis for placing each image in the context of the city on a number of spatial and conceptual levels. I identified each billboard as a unit of study by its content, usually a quote. For each, I collected a set of data including a photograph and notes on
location, placement, and a description of the general area. The original goal was to collect a sample of between 30 and 50 sites.

In a city as large as Havana, a sample strategy was crucial. In the effort to construct a sample of the visual environment of the city, I was constrained by time, budget and practicality. For these reasons, I employed a dual strategy of purposeful and emergent sampling techniques. First, there had to be key locations as in any city that I made sure to consider and represent in the study. These included: central squares, major thoroughfares and culturally or politically important places. In each of these independently significant sites, the functions and values of the public space revealed something about the billboards and vice versa. The second sampling technique was to cover as much space as possible, in a strategic way, to find billboards throughout the city.

Havana is a major urban center. As the capital of the country and the province, it is expansive and has 13 municipalities. The five central municipalities around the bay comprise the historic and culturally significant center of the city. For obvious reasons, I concentrated my work there. I tried to get a representative sample within each municipality by traversing significant roads. There are obvious problems with this strategy, namely that a lot could be missed. Again, the goal was not to quantify the stock of public propaganda in the city, but to get a set of data of significant sites. I ensured the comprehensiveness of the roads traveled with a simple tourist map and often asked people, when appropriate, about the locations of other signs.

Another major limitation was staying within the city. A comprehensive sample and comparison of urban and rural signage would have been fascinating but did not fit within the scope of this project. It is worth noting, however that some of the outlying
areas of the city did fit into the purposeful sampling strategy. The primary site that fit this description was the tourist destination of Habana del Este with its pristine beaches. On the 30 or so kilometer route out of the heart of the city, but still technically within the municipal limits, there were prime examples of signage designated for a specific type of viewer. Other than this excursion, I confined the location of the study strictly to the central five municipalities.

In each section of the city, I attempted to identify at least two important sites. This gave me a direct destination from which to begin the random sampling of each area. From there, I let visual cues on the map guide me through the city's neighborhoods with the flow of traffic to experience the city as it would be for people conducting daily activities. In the course, I stopped to gather data at each billboard site. I quickly found that the signs were more reliably placed on large roads and so made the survey of each area from these types of paths. In order to not get a biased sample, I often digressed to smaller streets and occasionally found some billboards, but more often just got a better feel for each neighborhood.

At each standard billboard site, I was interested in a few seemingly simple yet important elements. These comprised the context for later data analysis and were collected with the idea of the intended audience for each billboard in mind. I noted positioning, as in elevated, ground level, mounted, sanding alone, etc. Orientation was also important—which way they faced. I included basic observations of the area, whether residential, commercial, industrial, etc. As most were on streets, I noted the type of street, one or two lanes, or in the case of the way to Este it was a highway. Transportation was a concern and so I noted observations of traffic in some cases, paying
attention to bus routes and fixed taxi routes and foot traffic. And finally made some evaluations of the environment about whether it was visually dominant, a busy stretch, dilapidated, policed, etc.

Along the way, I found many more examples of public art and signage than just the billboards that I was explicitly looking for. For each of these peripheral examples, I made a value judgment about whether to collect data on it. My thinking in this process was to collect a representation of the variety of public arts and signage around the city as it was impossible to map and account for every example. These included murals, street signs, tourist information, business signs, traffic markers, institutional identifications and graffiti. The goal was to account for the types of competing images in the city to provide context for the significance of official political communication in the visual landscape.

The final part of the billboard sample was to place it spatially on a map of the city. Each site was numbered and noted for organization and as an important element of analysis. In doing so, I noticed that some billboards had changed messages during my study. I did not have time to retrace the whole city, but when I noticed a new image at a site I had already covered, I noted this and let the map reflect the change as well.

**Extended Site Observations:**

Because the initial sample was broad, I also elected to do some extended site observations to gain a visual depth to my analysis. I selected a few important billboards based on content and significant locations for ethnographic-style observation. In each site, 4 in total, I elaborated on the original survey techniques. I photographed in panorama to better provide visual evidence for how the images were situated in their
environments. I sat down and observed at length, about an hour, what the scene was like again using the same concepts outlined above. The most significant portion of these locational observations was the accompanying informal interviews. I asked Cubans willing to talk to me what the signs meant and what their general feelings were about the messages. These conversations wandered and were not by any means strictly structured or even recorded, but I made notes on individual reactions and also expanded my understanding of the neighborhoods and institutions in the area.

It might be noted that I hardly had a chance to do any kind of sampling for these interviews as most often I was approached, having been identified as a foreigner. The conversations were often political and enlightening. Most of the people who talked to me were young idle men, with little else to do. But, by identifying myself as a student and one interested in Cuban arts and culture and having visited numerous times, I feel fairly sure that the better part of these conversations was relatively sincere and have some value for the study.

**Interviews:**

From the inception of this project, for the reasons I mentioned above, I knew that interviews would not be a reliable source of data. Interviews took a supporting role to offer a variety of perspectives and to complement the other data that I was able to collect. There were some questions as I made my way around Havana that only somebody in the government could answer about the process and intent behind the billboards. There were also glaring questions as to the effectiveness and the public reception of the messages. The only people that could tell me about this were those on the street. The last
perspective that I sought to explore was that of the arts community in an effort to better understand whether these were purely political objects or had some artistic value and process as well.

The most consistent and dependable source for finding subjects to interview was to simply walk down the street. As I collected the rest of the primary data, I was often questioned and I equally often responded with more questions. While explaining what I was doing, many people helped me to understand what I was looking at. One aspect of these common exchanges, which I no more than made note of, was my own identity as an American.

This was a talking point that allowed conversations to cut directly and seamlessly through politics. This is not the place to discuss such an issue in depth, but I found it an important method to access sensitive information to identify myself, which inspired a discussion of topics closely related to the issues written on the signs before us. Of these types of informal interviews, I conducted and noted around ten. Not all the information is accessible as direct quotations since I was unable to record interviews, but it has helped me to shape my own perspective both in conducting the research and later in analyzing the data.

The other perspective to compliment the public reception was an official position. There have been three organizations involved in the production of politically based arts in Cuba during the Revolution. Many of the graphic artists have been involved in more than one of them as well as in producing and promoting their own work independently. To initiate a 'snowball' sample, I made use of what limited contacts I held in the arts community around Havana. This included making visits to cultural and arts centers
working in graphic arts such as Prográfica and Taller Experimentál de Gráfica in Havana as well as institutions in the US that work to promote Cuban arts.

One of my main informants was Reinaldo Morales Campos, now an independent poster scholar, but he was formerly the director of OSPAAAL (The Non-Governmental Office of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America). He was able to work collaboratively with me in understanding the international and political aspects of Cuban graphic arts. He also put me in contact with the most important interview from this perspective, which was with Jose Papiól of Editora Política. These interviews were rather formal but did not make use of a tape recorder. In both cases, we had to meet within their homes because such an interview was inappropriate at the official workplace. Much of the topics that we discussed were about the production process and organization rather than outright politics. What these interviews served to do was explain the tactics and practices behind the propaganda production.

Content Analysis:

The final stage of research was to collect information from a variety of sources about the content of the billboards. First, each billboard had to be translated. And the visual, historical and rhetorical references in the billboards included a set of figures not totally familiar to a foreign viewer such as myself. To have any frame of reference for analysis, I had to have a basic understanding of Cuban history, politics and culture. For this aspect of the research I relied on whatever sources were available. These included: books, newspapers, informed acquaintances in Cuba and the US and especially the staff at the Institute for Cuban Studies and Art in New York City. I cannot say that I could
fully understand the range of significance behind the communication of each billboard, but this last stage has brought invaluable new meanings to the data collected on site.

Findings: Data and Analysis

Propaganda billboards are not a feature of all parts of the city. They are notably absent from the historic colonial core. Traversing the central municipalities, I found
seventy-eight propaganda billboards and a multitude of official signs and other public arts. Through interviews and observations, I have been able to piece together the careful process of producing and placing propaganda throughout the city. Secondly, I have organized the data into categories based on content and location.

One state organization is primarily responsible for propaganda in Cuba. According to the head of the state propaganda office, José Papiól, propaganda on billboards serves the purpose of promoting "Unification and patriotism," along with radio and television messages. He founded Editora Politica, part of the Department of Revolutionary Orientation in the Ministry of the Interior, in 1963. The central office is under his direction with 125 employees, although each province in Cuba has a satellite office with relative autonomy. He describes a pragmatic process that is both artistic and political. Although an official priority, Editora Politica is not immune to the shortages that affect much of Cuban society. "No es facil," It's not easy, says Papiól, repeating the national mantra of the Special Period. Paint, glue and paper have to be used sparingly and so the organization is deliberate in communicating only what it identifies as necessary.

To hear the head of Cuba's propaganda office describe the daily "struggle" of shortages is striking. In the early 1990s they couldn't get the right quality paper so there were far less billboards when they were "needed" the most. Now in somewhat better times, many signs have solid or plain white backgrounds to conserve paint. The shortages have also affected OSPAAAL, the Office of Solidarity with the Peoples of Latin America, Africa and Asia, which is famous for political posters. Reinaldo Morales Campos, the former director, remarks on the importance and challenges of political
graphic arts in Cuba. "Now because of the lack of ink and relevant political causes, there is little work being done on posters by OSPAAAL and Editora Poltica." The organizations have both begun projects to retrospectively catalogue and refurbish past works because there is increasing international interest. "In actuality, there is less to be in solidarity with now than years past," states Campos.

Papiól uses the word propaganda frankly. The billboards compliment TV and radio messages in a cohesive effort to provide useful information and shape public opinion. They always consider the people's reaction in placing the billboards so the messages may, "Penetrate the mind" (conciencia). Papiól describes the simple strategy behind propaganda's presence. "If you wait for a bus and you don't read it, you'll see it on the way home, or in the morning on the next day. And if you don't leave the house, there is the radio." The organization seeks to balance influencing people with not bothering them and so the placement is important. Especially with Fidel's image, Papiól says that it is easy and inspiring, but the organization shies away (evitamos) from over using it.

He proposes that the National Ballet is a standard example for Havana-specific messages. Advertisements for a performance typically go up around the University, because students like to see shows. Meanwhile, advertising the ballet is not sensible for the rural parts of Havana Province, which typically get more nationalistic messages addressing "voluntary work" programs. Billboards allow Editora Poltica to be "selective," targeting workers, or students for example. Of paramount importance, however, is making sure that each billboard is visible, which usually means placing it on major streets.
Teams of eight work on designs, which are thematically organized into campaigns. The office follows effective communication practices closely. Artists as well as Party officials, planners and psychologists make up the working groups. They begin with the campaign concept, an important anniversary for example. This process has changed little in forty years. They distill the theme into a single meaningful image, usually accompanied by some text. Papiól and Reinaldo Campos, the Cuban poster scholar, both stress that Cuban graphic design is about simplicity, identifying attractive graphics and instilling them with meaning. To be meaningful, messages must also be current. "It's not Che, but the anniversary of Che's death. They're events with themes attached," states Papiól.

The teams make small proofs of potential designs, which they take to focus groups to sample the public's understanding of the intended message. The organization analyzes responses from children, old folks and all types of people to see whether the communication is clear. Designs are then transferred to a strong paper in 13 hand silk-screened sections (serigrafia) matching the original proportions of the design. All the materials come from Cuba, including the glue, which is made from yuccas. A design usually turns into 5 or 6 billboards lasting between 1-2 months each. Under the sun and rain the paper peels off and must be changed. The limiting factor is actually the weak glue. Editora Politica has just over 100 sites to mount designs throughout the city that do not change. Generally speaking, Papiól says that the function of any given billboard is to be specific and short-term.

Propaganda production in Cuba makes some use of modern technology. On special occasions Editora Politica prints posters for political rallies. These are digital,
costing $25/meter, which is out of range for regular use. Papiól also describes a few special locations for digitally produced billboards, although they are not the norm. In addition the tourist bureau produces some signs, including advertising for hotels, tourist services, rum and tobacco, which appear only in specifically designated locations.

Meeting me in his home, Papiól was welcoming, informative and friendly. He offers the official perspective and an insider understanding, but the most illustrative data came from around the city.

The propaganda billboards are diverse in aesthetics and setting. Generally the signs take prominent positions at major intersections throughout the city and are not in isolated residential areas. They are not ubiquitous. There does seem to be a typical size and composition with a figure or icon alongside a slogan or quote. However, there are notable deviations in size, style, message and positioning. The seventy-eight billboards for which I have data can be organized and analyzed in a number of ways. I have chosen to categorize based on two characteristics: content and location.

Content Analysis: Creating Revolutionary Heritage

Content categories address common themes, taking into account visual references in the messages, colors and images. It is difficult to make absolute groups and again there are inevitably some overlaps and outliers. I identify seven themes: revolution, culture, memorialization, the Cuban 5 campaign, anti-US imperialism, elections and tourism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>IMAGES</th>
<th>MESSAGE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revolution</td>
<td>Flags and text</td>
<td>Socialist Ideology</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorialization</td>
<td>Historical figures and symbols</td>
<td>Anniversaries, Associations</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Children and cultural symbols</td>
<td>Cultural promotions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-US</td>
<td>Cartoons, Photographs</td>
<td>Embargo, Justice, Imperialism</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuban 5</td>
<td>Faces of the 5</td>
<td>Freedom and struggle</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>Buildings, cityscape</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections</td>
<td>Flags, hands</td>
<td>The People, Voting</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Photographic Examples Included in Appendix)*

**Revolution**

These billboards are nationalistic. The messages are purely ideological. Quotes and slogans define the revolution and its socialist values. Cuban flags are on 8 of the 20. 6 are text only. Che Guevara's image is on 4, although only one of these features a quote by him. None have specific dates. The colors are simple: blue, white red, mimicking the flag and the occasional green. This group is iconic, making use of metaphors. The messages are direct, but the ideas abstract. "Revolution is: not to lie anymore or violate ethical principles." They speak both to and for the people. "What's ours is ours," and "We have and will have socialism." Hugo Chavez, president of Venezuela and close ally to Cuba appears on one with Cuban and Venezuelan flags and the phrase, *triumfaremos,* "We will triumph!" Quite a few (5/20) are in disrepair, peeling and fading. These are brazen propaganda promoting socialist values.

Photo 1. Revolution Billboard in Industrial Area
"Revolution is: modesty, unselfishness, altruism, solidarity and heroism."

Memorialization

These signs are historical and commemorative. Anniversary dates and organizations motivate many of the messages, making them current. They promote themes of communal struggle and victory, narrating the national history. The colors are varied with some brighter highlights and colorful backgrounds. Only one is a digital print, although they are considerably more graphic and symbolic than the Revolution group. Generally, an important figure, one of Cuba's many martyrs from the war of independence and revolutionary struggle, accompanies a phrase of commemoration. For example, "A better world is possible," next to Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos and Julio Antonia de Mella. Below José Martí on one, it reads, "He will be immortal who deserves to be." Logos of the Young Communists League (UJC) and the Association of Revolutionary Combat Veterans suggest co-sponsorship of some messages. Out of 15, 11 depict historical figures and 9 of those 11 feature faces. Most are recent Cuban history with twice as many figures from the revolutionary period as from before.
Simón Bolívar and José Martí:
"I am a child of America: I am in debt to her for the alternative Bolivarian vision for the Americas in the struggle against the FTAA".78

Culture: Contemporary Issues

These billboards announce events, sponsor organizations and promote literature and cultural values. The images are of ordinary Cubans as well as symbols of progress and leisure such as, computers and sports. 6 of the 14 depict children, 4 have computers. They are generally bright and playful, with minimal text. Like the historical, these associate ideals with cultural symbols and events, many with dates. Some are abstract, for example "This revolution is the child of culture and of ideas." Others are inspirational, such as. "To educate is to believe." One found in multiple locations promotes a show by a children's theater group called, "The Little Beehive" at the Karl

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1 ALCA in Spanish, or FTAA is the Free Trade Area of the Americas. 38 nations of the Americas including the United States signed the treaty, which initiated in 1998. Cuba is not one.
Marx Theater. The cultural values promoted by this group are generally less informational than contemporary displays of revolutionary ideas.

**Photo 3. Cultural Billboard at the Stadium of Latin America**

"Cuban Sports. Commitment and Patriotism."  
Background sign: "Ready to Overcome."  
(Sponsored by INDER, the National Institute for Sport, Physical Education and Recreation of Cuba. Founded in 1961.)

**Anti-U.S. Imperialism**

This group is directly targeted. The messages are threatening and accusatory, rooted in an oppositional national identity. The images are vivid and photographic, with some cartoons. There are three prominent campaigns among the 13 Anti-U.S. billboards. The first, with 5, is a series called, "Bush's plan…" Each looks like a pleasant scene in mellow colors of happy Cuban families and friends, with one or two people removed and left as a silhouettes. They suggest President Bush's plan is to take away Cuban's fundamental rights and enjoyments. The second series is in commemoration of the 1976 Air Cubana flight bombed between Venezuela and Cuba. These 4 vilify Luis Posada
Carriles and Orlando Bosch, prominent Cuban American Anti-Castro activists. Carriles was recently detained and released in the United States enraging the Cuban state. The billboards contain images of crashing airliners and mourning families, demanding "Justice." The last series is on strong black backgrounds with mocking images of George Bush and his policies towards Cuba and Iraq. They play with words. For example, "Se van a emBushar" after the Spanish verb empujar to push, to suggest Americans are going to push Bush out of office. Two others denounce the US Embargo against Cuba, referred to as the "Blockade." Each campaign appropriates the American political rhetoric of "Terrorism," "Freedom," and "Justice. A subscript on many reads, "Be thankful you already live in a free Cuba."

Photo 4 Anti-US Billboard at the US Interests Section on the Malecón.

"Mr. Imperialist, we have absolutely no fear at all."

The Cuban 5 Campaign
This group mobilizes the masses with a siege mentality. The 5 men's faces are common to all, particularly their eyes. These enter a similar dialogue about "Terrorism" as the Anti-US group. They offer slogans like, "Incarcerated for fighting against terrorism" and demand, "Freedom Now!" The colors are bold and bright, mostly blue, red and white. Two have symbolic backgrounds of chain link fences, each with a citation to an English language informational website about the case: www.antiterroristas.cu. Some of the Cuban 5 signs are a small format, about a third the size of the standard billboards. The five incarcerated men are depicted like martyrs, their faces and information are present on posters, murals and photographs in all parts of the city.

**Photo 5. The Cuban 5 on the Highway**

"Freedom already!"

Tourism
Tourism-related billboards are informational and relatively apolitical. The Tourist Bureau rather than *Editora Política* is responsible for them, so these are exceptional to the other groups. The images are of the city and its inhabitants. Two announce the Historic District of Old Havana, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Crossing through municipalities on major streets, billboards also announce new districts with landscapes and icons. Some tourist billboards simply have photographs, digitally printed with street scenes from Carnival celebrations. These contribute to the staging of 'authentic' scenes in destination sites for tourists.

**Photo 6. Tourist Billboard near Old Havana**


**Elections**

The elections campaign represents a general announcement of the national municipal elections. They are not for individual candidates. The design layout is simple, with images of flags, hands and ballot boxes. They proclaim, "Cuba in Elections, the people
nominate and vote." These are the only group that feature an *Editora Politica* logo in the corner. The colors are strictly patriotic blue, red and white. They seem informational, but lack the election date and any registration or candidate specifics. During the survey, three locations changed signs to Election posters. According to Papiól, at the time of the survey this is the most current campaign.

**Photo 7. Elections Billboard Near the National Cemetery**

"Cuba in elections, the people propose and nominate on merit and capacity."

**Fidel Castro**

The selective use of Fidel Castro's image is worth noting separately, because of contemporary political implications. Castro's face appears in only 6 of the 78 billboards surveyed. To compare, Che Guevara is in 9, and José Martí in 4. Fidel is depicted equally in his younger years and in present day with white hair and beard. The older images are from the triumph of the revolution with Castro and other revolutionary heroes
riding on tanks or with rifles in the air. These are used to pronounce anniversaries of revolutionary events, while new ones are accompanied by famous speech quotes. On signs, he always wears green fatigues, although in the recent images, he smiles and appears to be speaking. Many billboards from the revolutionary ideology group have selected quotes from the same speeches.

Two of the Fidel billboards are unusual. One lacks his likeness altogether, proclaiming, "Fidel is a country." Next to the words is an image of the boat, el Granma, which the guerillas took from Mexico to launch the revolution as well as six young boys in school uniforms. The other shows an aged Castro, smiling in profile with the words, "Vamos bien," - we're doing well. Each of these subtly address questions about Fidel's status as the nations leader as his health declines in old age. There is one other reference to the Granma on another billboard next to Fidel and cheering crowds. "With a strong helmsman (timonel), the Granma plows through history." Billboards with Fidel do not offer information, rather reassurance.

The revolutionary heroes do not have statues to commemorate them or streets in their names, like Máximo Gomez and other the figures from the movement for national independence. Castro's face can be found on some posters and photographs, displayed in windows and offices, but is not often visually present in public. More common are murals with quotes from inspirational speeches. Murals of Che Guevara always feature his iconic image and often the phrase, Hasta la victoria siempre or sometimes, "Your example lives." Although many would agree with the one billboard that, Fidel is the country and he is the Revolution, the propaganda office is careful not to turn his image into a personality cult, which could be counter-productive.
"We're doing well."

Location Analysis: Transforming Public Space

The billboards are not distributed evenly or arbitrarily. Concentrations of billboards are notable around the Plaza of the Revolution, the University of Havana, and the US Interests Section, for example. These three are socially important places, but not all such places demand or allow for the presence of billboards. In Old Havana, where space is at a premium, billboards only dot the periphery. Spacious residential areas in Vedado also have few or no billboards. The highway, a radical example, displays billboards of all types. It is difficult to divide a large city into categories of public space. I only attempt to classify the places where billboards are present. I base the variables contributing to spatial distinctions on observations: who seems to use public spaces and what they do there. The data includes observations of: transportation, buildings use and
conditions, commercial activity, street size, and some general reflections about the scene and placement of the sign. From this information, I identify 6 broad categories of public space: national/political, historic, residential, commercial/distributional, industrial and highways. These are not absolute distinctions, there are inevitably some crossovers and outliers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Billboard #</th>
<th>Highway</th>
<th>Commercial</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Industrial</th>
<th>Residential</th>
<th>Historic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placement</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free Standing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wall Mounts and Elevated</td>
<td>Free Standing on Road</td>
<td>Wall Mounts</td>
<td>Free Standing at Intersections</td>
<td>Free Standing on Road</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**National**

National space is both functional and symbolic. The center of governmental power is at the Plaza de la Revolucion, around a monument to José Martí. This is both a tourist destination and a highly regulated bureaucratic space with guards controlling traffic and behavior. In the vicinity are the government ministries and administrative offices. The Plaza is also the site of major demonstrations on May Day and the 26th of July. An iconic sculpture of Che Guevara covers the side of the Ministry of the Interior and looks out over the vast plaza. Billboards are present in the Plaza, and around the Ministry buildings, but more line an approach from the Avenida de la Independencia, which feeds into one side of the Plaza and on the Avenida de los Presidentes, extending from the other. 11 Billboards line the routes in and out of this area including: Revolution, culture, and memorialization, - mostly on free-standing kiosks.
Residential

Billboards are not common to small residential streets, like those in the Centro district. By residential here, I refer to two general areas. The first is the working class districts of Cerro and Santos Suarez in the southern section of the city center. These places have a little commercial activity and some factories, stadiums and hospitals. Generally there are housing blocks with large streets cutting through. The second region that falls into this category is the sprawling Western portion of Havana from Vedado to Miramar and Cubanacán. These are green and airy neighborhoods with detached housing and some major hotels and business districts, but mostly homes. Bus routes and communal taxis run through the residential districts in and out of central Havana and billboards line these routes, primarily revolution, culture and memorialization. The 8 billboards in these areas are mounted on kiosks prominently at major intersections at street level. The residential spaces are somewhat isolated, at least from tourist traffic, although the roads through them are major paths for traversing the city.

Industrial

These places are less common in the surveyed parts of the city. Around the port and train station and between residential tracts in the southern neighborhoods, there are a number of industrial compounds. Government centers of production are not often well labeled but are identifiable by the fences and walls that separate them from the street. 10 of the billboards surveyed are in these industrial areas, usually posted on their outer walls and along the broad streets that cut through industrial areas. The billboards are oriented facing the street for the bus routes and share-taxis. They tend to be facing outwards
perpendicular to the street, suggesting that they are also for pedestrians. The content includes: revolution, culture, memorialization and the Cuban 5. Billboards in these areas are also noticeably in disrepair, peeling and fading. They tend to be wordy, especially near bus stops and none are digital prints.

**Commercial/Distributional**

Classifying commercial space in Havana is not a simple matter. There are, as in most cities, different types of commercial spaces. Given the fact that there are two separate currencies operating for tourists and citizens, the spaces I refer to fall generally into two distinctions which I describe as commercial and distributional. But the distinctions are not absolute, for example *La Rampa* runs between the two major hotels in Vedado and has a number of shops and restaurants mainly for tourists, but is frequented by Cubans as well. Some locals with access to the convertible tourist currency also patronize these stores, especially those receiving remittances from foreign family members or those working in the tourist industries. The tourists themselves also attract hustlers who participate in a large black market economy. Generally, Cubans are not allowed into hotels and other areas that are prohibitively expensive. Police have significant presence, regulating these places.

The dense district of central Havana has its commercial streets, such as *Galiano* or the many restaurants in China Town. These places are relatively less tourist-oriented, because of the neighborhoods around them and have more heavy foot traffic. Recently, farmers markets have been allowed and are located in non-tourist commercial spaces. The 'distributional' refers to government ration outlets, which are mixed in with offices,
schools and shops throughout commercial districts less visited by tourists. Commercial
districts are architecturally unique with covered colonnades lining the streets, but not all
arcades are commercial spaces. Furthering the confusion, shops and outlets are not well
marked, lacking small identification signs. The 12 billboards in commercial areas tend to
be attached to walls across from these arcades including Cuban 5, Anti U.S., tourism and
elections. Commercial spaces are also the only places where billboards are mounted on
top of buildings, visible above the streetscape.

Historic
These places are also important nationally, but they have not recently served any directly
political or administrative purposes. Havana has many historic sites, but most important
is the former walled city Habana Vieja, the Malecón, the Castillo de Morro at the
entrance to the bay, and the Necrópolis de Colon cemetery. Habana Vieja is a UNESCO
World Heritage site and is undergoing a major renovation effort aimed at preserving the
architectural heritage and attracting foreign visitors. It is the tourist center of town, with
hotels, restaurants, galleries and museums. The Malecón is a promenade on the
waterfront that is popular with young people and tourists. The historic sites cater directly
to tour groups that visit places of interest on established routes, but they are also lived
spaces for residents.

Billboards are not a prominent feature of the historic parts of the city. A total of 4
billboards ring Old Havana on prominent routes into the district, and a few others line
parts of the Malecón, but are not usually mounted on the older and narrower colonial
streets. More common are murals and sculptures of national heroes, with similar types of
quotes as some billboards. In Old Havana, all public buildings and most streets have
revolution-oriented names and uses. Former colonial mansions are now anything from
tenement housing to dance schools. Because of the tourist traffic, Old Havana has more
functional and informational small signs than other parts of the city, but few billboards.

Highways

The first highway that I have data for is to the Airport, located south west of the city.
The second extends beyond the tunnel under Havana Bay towards the Eastern sections of
Havana. Tourists often travel both of these routes in buses and taxis. The roads are not
by any means exclusively for tourists. In each direction, billboards face traffic on large,
elevated structures. The most billboards of any category, 26, are on highways. Highway
billboards tend to be image-heavy with less text. They have to be read in a flash both
because the viewers are moving and because not all speak Spanish.

The general relationships between content and location suggest that there is logic
to how the billboards combine meaning with use of public spaces. The highway is mixed
space used by many types of people and so appropriate for all types of messages. The
quantity of signs on highways also demonstrates the cost-effectiveness of placement
there, because of heightened visibility. Commercial spaces also cater to mixed

Table 3. Content and Location Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revolution (20)</th>
<th>Transitional Space</th>
<th>Socialist Space</th>
<th>Global Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highway (26)</td>
<td>Commercial (12)</td>
<td>National (11)</td>
<td>Historic (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
audiences, and therefore have a range of types of messages. More radical ideas however, such as the revolution and history categories, are less present there. In national, industrial and residential spaces, tend to be messages relevant to a national collective (revolutionary values, culture and history). The Cuban 5 and elections are also present there. Historic spaces, oriented towards foreign visitors, present signs that relate to the history and to tourism, but not Anti-US or revolutionary values. In short, the data suggests that the billboards are site specific and so messages are meant to relate to specific urban environments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Anti-US</th>
<th>Cuban 5</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
<th>Elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 'Anti-US' located at the US Interests Section omitted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Map of Central Havana: Billboard Locations by Content Categories
Polycentric Havana:
1. The colonial Center (1519-1898)
2. First Republican Center (1902-1930)
3. Second Republican Center at the Plaza Civica (1930-1958)
4. Third Republican Center (1956) proposed by Jose Luis Sert (Not surveyed)
5. A Complementary Center consisting of residences, hotels, and night clubs.\textsuperscript{79}

In most of revolutionary Havana, the government is constantly reaffirming a social construction of space founded on the revolutionary socialist ideology. The national, industrial and residential categories of space where billboards are present reflect this. For example, the Plaza of the Revolution, a decidedly "Mussolinesque"\textsuperscript{80} place, is the same early 1950s Plaza Civica, bureaucratic center of Batista's regime. The monument to Jose Marti standing at its center is now unquestionably a symbol of the

\textsuperscript{79} Segre, Coyula, and Scarpaci. Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis. 1997.84.
revolution. Common recreational public spaces are also nationalized for public consumption, like beaches and sports clubs, which had been private before the revolution. Formerly wealthy neighborhoods now favor low-income worker housing by subdividing mansions.

This socialist construction of space through appropriation does not apply for commercial and historic areas. Parts of Havana are opening-up to the outside world. Since 1993, the "Special Period in Times of Peace," brought on by the fall of the Soviet Union, has allowed for limited foreign investments and isolated restorations that further complicate Havana's already contested public spaces. The historic architecture of Old Havana has created an international tourist destination. By connecting this "patrimony," as the Cubans call it, to the global grid of UNESCO world heritage, Old Havana has been lifted out of its contemporary surroundings. Tourism related investments are directed to make Old Havana feel in a controlled way--even older, not more modern. Hill argues that, "The flows of international capital, tourists, commodities, and information technology more readily situate Old Havana in relation to these forms of circulation than to the context of the Cuban nation-state." The restoration of Habana Vieja and its elevated status into the globalized world is prompting new types of disputes over public space.

Tourism and socialism now uneasily coexist in the form of a dual economy, which can only be explained by necessity. The mantra has been, "Capital yes, capitalism no," as external economic elements buoy Cuban socialism in a post-socialist world. Market reforms allow foreign currency investment and consumption through "dollar

stores" in select places. Segre explains that, "The main purpose of these stores is not to increase the options available to habaneros, but rather to capture the greatest amount of hard currency in order to finance the continuation of the prevailing system."\(^{84}\)

Commercial districts in Vedado on La Rampa, as well as Obisbo St. in Old Havana, Galiano in the Centro district, and the Miramar suburb, all operate to a degree outside of the socialist system.

The effects of tourism and foreign investment are not limited to the economy. External influences create further divisions of public space by modes of transportation, degrees of policing, condition of the buildings and even racial differences. Economics divide Havana socially because a select few have access to foreign currency through dollar remittances and tourism-related jobs.\(^{85}\) The market economy is creating divisions in the social and physical structures of Havana. Quiroga explains that, "What this means is that revolutionary images, cultural objects and products, as well as revolutionary ideology, now tend to engage with the outside world strategically."\(^{86}\) The appearance and spatial arrangement of Havana is currently reconfigured to allow for isolated global spaces to support isolated socialist spaces.

Castro's "Battle of ideas," is now more clearly than ever also a battle for the city and the billboards are one of the Revolution's few weapons against its own dubious reforms. Revolutionary control over Havana is also highly contested because Cuba is a nation divided over the straights of Florida. Since 1959, a number of conflicts have galvanized each side of the divide. Celebrations of the 1961 victory at Playa Girón in Havana are remembrances of the spoiled Bay of Pigs invasion in Miami. Rallies for the

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\(^{84}\) Segre, Coyula and Scarpaci. Havana. 1997. 175.

\(^{85}\) Sarduy, Pedro Perez and Jean Stubbs. 2000. 7.

\(^{86}\) Quiroga, Jose. Cuban Palimpsests. 32.
return of Elian Gonzalez mirror memorials across the sea for his deceased mother.\(^8^7\) The "Battle of Ideas" depends on these sporadic mobilizations.

The latest cause to keep up Cuba's siege mentality and oppositional identity is the "Cuban 5" campaign. "Five agents now known as the Cuban 5 were detained, thrown into solitary confinement for seventeen months, prosecuted for conspiracy to commit espionage and given maximum sentences ranging from fifteen years to double life in prison."\(^8^8\) The Cuban state is mobilizing collective memory around the "Fallen Comrades" in connection to the airplane bombing of 1976, called a "terrorist" plot against Cuba. "Twenty-five years ago Cuba was victim to a premeditated and heinous crime that shocked the whole nation and remains in the collective memory of our people."\(^8^9\) Jose Quiroga maintains that the cause is important, but the Revolution uses the 5, "For its own continuities, in spite of the cosmetic changes it suffered since the collapse of the Soviet bloc."\(^9^0\) The same language of struggle from directly after the Revolution is common to each of these epics in the "Battle of Ideas."

Underwriting radical Cubanismo is the constant threat of American imperialism even more than Marxist-Leninist principles. In 1960, Che Guevara remarked on the revolutionary ideology. "The principal actors of this revolution had no coherent viewpoint. But it cannot be said that they were ignorant of the various concepts of history, society, economics and revolution being discussed in the world today."\(^9^1\) The

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\(^{8^7}\) Quiroga. Cuban Palimpsests. 2005. 222.
\(^{9^0}\) Quiroga. Cuban Palimpsests. 2005. 76.
comprehensiveness of the revolutionary ideology allows it to operate differently in varying contexts.

A common series of signs begin with the rhetorical question, "What is Revolution?"—before answering it. The message is a passive acknowledgment that the Revolution may not presently have a clear definition. It is also an assertion that the Revolution is all encompassing.

Revolution is: a sense of the historical moment;  
It is to change all that needs to be changed…  
Revolution is unity, it is independence, it is to fight for our dreams of justice for Cuba and for the world.  
That is the base of our patriotism, our socialism and our internationalism.\(^{92}\)

Under socialism, government centralizes and controls all means of production. Castro's words in 1961 established such an authoritative control. "Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing."\(^{93}\) Each economic, social and cultural action is therefore included in the socialist discourse. Verdery describes why this is so. "For a Party bent on transforming consciousness, control over language is one of the most vital requirements… The semantic structure of such discourse is static, and its terms have been cleansed of all but one meaning."\(^{94}\) Papiıl speaks to this challenge, which is compounded by cultural tendencies to make plays on words. "Cubans are sharp and they have time. They're always looking for the double meaning." Although billboards have distinct categories of messages: revolutionary values, history, culture and Anti-U.S., they express the same unified ideology.

*Editora Politica's* self-defined mission to promote unification is designed to create a particular sense of the national collective, a socialist public. The official

\(^{92}\) Author's translation of "Que es revolucion?" billboard at the University of Havana.  
\(^{93}\) Castro, Fidel. "*Palabres a los intelectuales.*" 1961.  
discourse that, "We have and will have socialism," as one billboard states, is grounded in
a solidified understanding of the past. Propaganda communicates a complete history that
is all encompassing and without faults, from which a revolutionary identity can be drawn.
The Revolution is turned into heritage by reconnecting it with memory through
anniversaries and associations with national organizations. The thinking is that today's
challenges are endurable because it is part of the same long struggle. In this sense, the
'Revolutionary values' billboards, which profess adherence to socialist ideals, build on the
'Historical' ones. The culturally themed billboards take a place in bringing notions of the
historical collective right up to the present through a similarly unified national culture. A
mural in Centro makes this idea perfectly clear. "What are we and what will we be
without a single history, a single idea and a single spirit for all time?" The campaigns
consolidate disparate ideas of the present and past and keep history alive and relevant to
the revolution.

A key to understanding the billboards is how socialism instrumentalizes space
similar to notions of history. Public space under socialism is part of the authoritative
discourse. Propaganda physically enters a debate over the social meaning of public
space, revaluing differentiated spaces throughout Havana and realigning them according
to the socialist ideology. In the socialist spaces of Havana, there is no question in the
official discourse that, "We have and will have socialism," as one billboard states.95
Shops, signs and symbols of competing ideologies have been appropriated or removed.
Without private business, the revolution creates new types of public spaces, "That [can]
serve as ideological arenas, in which the collective identities of socialism [can] be forged in a vision outlined by the leadership." 96

The placement of billboards accentuates the ideas. Messages are embedded into existing architecture by mounting them, typically in commercial and industrial spaces. Billboards are also erected in contrast to adjacent buildings demonstrating an oppositional identity, like in the case of the U.S. Interests section. Global, transitional and socialist spaces are therefore brought into the monolithic socialist ideology with the aid of propaganda.

In socialist functioning spaces, propaganda billboards are virtually the only signs. The visual landscape has been stripped of all other meaning. Even in the interior commercial-looking spaces, where foreigners are not often found, billboards do not have to compete with any other advertising. Despite the physical appearance of the arcades and storefronts, there is almost nothing to buy, and little for Cubans to consume. In these places, the dogmatic messages are appropriate. Messages like, "The Unity of the people: the Principal Weapon of the Revolution. –Raul Castro Ruz," and "The work of the revolution is indestructible," affirms the moral over the material.

At the university, billboards tactfully affirm the government's endorsement of education. Four exceptionally wordy signs gracing the approach to campus acknowledge an intelligent audience, but are carefully placed not intrude into the main neo-classical courtyard. Built between 1908 and 1932, the main campus of the University of Havana has been a politically important place. Christian, a psychology student at the University

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described how, “People read the signs. We debate their meaning in the park.” A billboard posted at the entrance points out that the government is putting its full support behind schools. "Learn for your future. Commencement of the 2007-2008 school year."

In historic Old Havana the communications are even more tentative. The narrow streets and ornate facades do not allow for an imposing presence of blunt socialist signage. In the Plaza de San Francisco a billboard that lacks any writing projects an image of Carnival festivities. This is an exceptional sign. It contributes to the 'staging' of an authentic event that is not actually occurring. It develops an image of Habana Vieja as cultural patrimony. This is a tactic in promoting national identity catered towards tourist consumption that is not directly at odds with socialism. It serves to make the global image of historic Habana Vieja align with notions of what is authentically Cuban.

Photo 9. Plaza San Francisco

In commercial districts where market transitions are obviously taking place, hard-line socialist values are also out of place. Those types of messages would be blind to

97 Interview translated from field notes.
reality, to the social and physical context. Alexander, a resident of Centro thinks, “The vallas are politics, purely. Only tourists and country-folks look at them.” Transitional space is brought into the socialist discourse delicately, with cautionary messages of the dangers of excess and the consequences of "Violating ethical principles." The physical placement and orientation is as crucial as an appropriate message. The luxurious Hotel Nacionál built by American mafia in the 1950s, sits on a bluff above La Rampa. A banner drapes over one of the towers proclaiming, "Patria o muerte!"--Fatherland or death.

Likewise, across the street, on the top floor of the former Havana Hilton, it reads Habana Libre for the entire city to see. In between is a commercial district with shops, an Air Cubana office, cafes and restaurants. This is a transitional space, patronized by foreign tourists and Cubans with access to hard currency. Hustlers roam the strip offering

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98 Interview translated from field notes.
discount cigars and introductions to their female "friends." Mounted above street level is a large light green billboard with two smiling children. A closer look reveals that their parents have disappeared and only their ghostly silhouettes remain. The billboard warns that "The Bush Plan…" will take away your daily enjoyments. It adds, "Thanks, we already live in a free Cuba."


Another "Plan Bush" billboard sits above the awning at Café Pelota further down the same street. It looks down on the shops and theater at the major intersection at 23rd and 12th st. Sitting above the streetscape, the sign places a limit on the controlled free-market experiment, without using overly repressive language. David Henkin explains how urban signage derives power from the interplay between text and altitude, which he calls the "Dictatorial perpendicular." Power is being communicated through the spatial arrangement of these signs in the built environment.

Havana does not have a clear center unlike most former colonial Latin American cities. It is polycentric, reflecting stages of expansion through a turbulent history. The colonial center is in the Plazas of Old Havana. The Presidential Palace, Capitolio and

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99 Henkin, David. City Reading. 68.
Plaza Civica are political centers of the republican era. The "City image" therefore consists of landmarks and iconic buildings of past regimes. Roberto Segre and Mario Coyula identify 5 recognizable nodes or centers in Havana's contemporary landscape. "These functional nodes reflect myriad political and economic forces that have left their indelible mark." The life of the city still revolves around these centers. It is no coincidence that billboards are concentrated at these points. (See Map of Central Havana)

A Master Plan for the socialist city in 1971 developed a new transportation scheme that recognized Havana's multiple centers, but proposed little new construction. Kevin Lynch participated in that planning process and later incorporated the unique socialist notions of historic preservation into his theory of the "Image of the City," in the 1972 work, What Time Is This Place? He found that the presence of the past contributed substantially to the city's image. "Perhaps the physical Havana of today not only resists change but also displays the wrong models of past styles of living."

The symbolic spaces of Cuban socialism had been created with relatively little capital investments. The Revolution appropriated some places for totally new functions, while others simply stood in contrast to the past. Today the Capitolio, a replica of the U.S. Capitol, and the former Presidential Palace are nothing more than museums memorializing these revolutionary transformations. Despite multiple centers with diverse historical significance, the Revolution attempts to unify the image of the socialist city.

100 Segre, Roberto, Mario Coyula, and Joseph L. Scarpaci. Havana: Two Faces of the Antilean Metropolis. 1997. 84.
102 Lynch, Kevin. What Time is this Place? 1972. 28.
Graphic design is important on the urban scale in that it contributes to the union of elements.\textsuperscript{103} It is not necessarily the text or image in every case that affects people as much as billboards being incorporated into social arrangements. Like the way radio advertising is designed to temporally intersect with people's daily routines, signs are meant to physically intersect with people moving about. "Outdoor advertising aims to tap into rhythms of the city and the people who move around the city to create a biographical dialogue – a rhythmic hybrid – linking the rhythms of the city and the rhythms of people in city space."\textsuperscript{104}

The cosmopolitan city therefore does not have to be razed to be re-conceived as socialist. Propaganda explains some of the inherent contradictions in the city’s structure. A peculiar sense of temporality in Havana, described by Quiroga, begins to make sense within this context. The socialist ideology is spatialized through the contrast with the past, which is still visible in the many layers of the built environment.

Walking around central Havana as late as 2002 invited the stroller to apprehend different temporalities within the same structure—the colonial or nineteenth century, pre-Revolutionary capitalist use of the building in the advertising and signs that still remained—neon lights with no neon, or the practically intact counter of what used to be a Woolworth's soda fountain counter—and then also the third stratum: the use that the revolutionary government gave to that structure. This last skin of the building had no relationship with what the building itself had housed in the past, but it allowed the perception of discontinuity to guide all visions.\textsuperscript{105}

Havana may or may not be a socialist city, however that may be strictly defined. But the rational for the disunity of the built environment is founded on socialism. The crumbling image of Havana, embellished with colorful propaganda, delicately balances the isolation imposed by the U.S. embargo with the insulation needed to achieve socialist

\textsuperscript{105} Quiroga. Cuban Palimpsests. 2005. 32.
transformations. Ideological campaigns act in the absence of building campaigns to
revalue public spaces. Propaganda then moderates structural differences in the functions
of socialist, transitional and global public spaces within the city. And so, the "Battle of
ideas" continues.
Conclusion

In Santiago de Cuba on October 16, 1953 history ended. Dr. Fidel Castro, appearing before the emergency session of the Court of Santiago declared in his own defense, “Sentence me. I don’t mind. History will absolve me.”\textsuperscript{106} At that point in time, images began to conceal reality. Many condemned the Cuban President long ago. For others he, appears to be immortal even as he nears death. Without Fidel Castro, there is no Cuban Revolution. “Fidel is a Country,” states the last billboard before reaching Jose Marti International Airport on the way out. Cuba, under Castro, has had a global presence disproportionate to its size and population. He is an icon. The language and actions taken by the Revolution have come to signify more than their accomplishments.

Propaganda makes metaphors. It has transformed Havana without changing anything but people’s ideas. The revolutionary rhetoric continues to persuade because the words and images are powerful. Even though Cubans struggle with daily shortages, blackouts, poor housing and substandard food, the revolutionary ideals still have an effect. The words and the icons inspire people. \textit{No es facil}, they say, even the director of the national office of propaganda.

The city is a metaphor also. Skylines represent people. The image of the city defines the life within it. How people understand and experience the city is an image making process. The unique billboards of Havana demonstrate that capital investment is not the only thing that constructs urban space. In the future, the history of Havana may have a gap in the story of the built environment. I hope that this project has well documented a phenomenon that may not exist in space forever.

\textsuperscript{106} Ruz, Fidel Castro. History Will Absolve Me. 1954.
Appendix of Images

U.S. Interests Section with Plaza of the Martyrs in foreground

George Bush + Luis Posada = Hitler
“Injustice wavers.”
At the U.S. Interests Section
Revolution Is: Not to Lie Anymore or Violate Ethical Principles
Playa

8.5 Million Children in the World Work Under Conditions of Slavery. None are Cuban.
At Police Academy
To Save Electricity Is the Task of All. CDR
(Committee for the Defense of the Revolution)

The Bush Plan at Café Pelota, Vedado
What is Revolution? University of Havana

The Little Beehive Presents… The Beatles!
Author at Plaza of the Revolution

Fidel Castro with Camilo Cienfuegos
48th Anniversary of the Triumph of the Revolution
What’s Ours is Ours
Playa del Este

70% of Cubans were born under the Blockade
Playa del Este
Sources Cited


