

## Capturing a Transnational, Digital Cuba in the Documentary *El matadero* (Fraguela Fosado 2021)

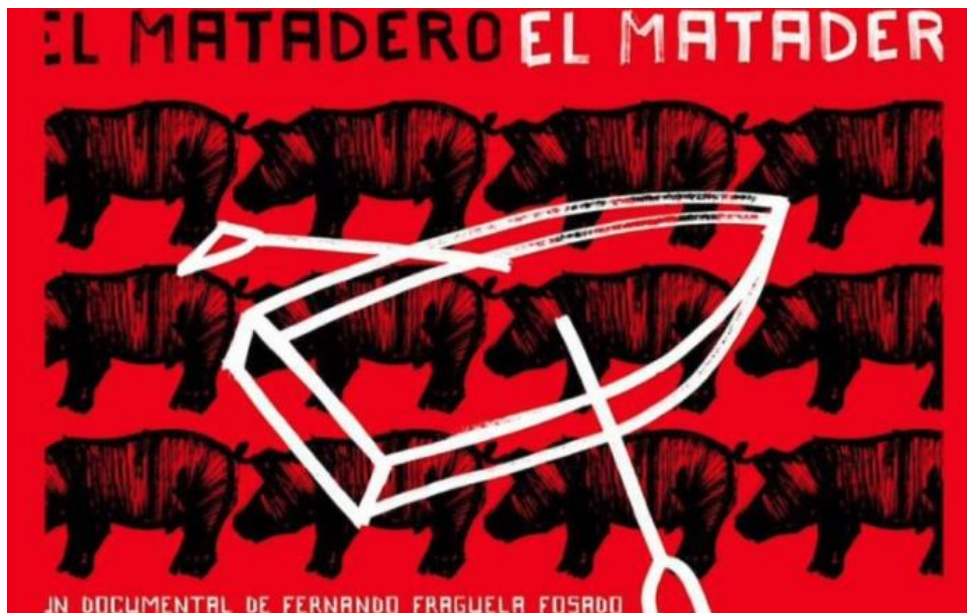
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### Abstract

I offer a close look at the Cuban film *El matadero*, which premiered virtually in December 2021 from Havana via the 2nd annual streaming INSTAR Cuban Film Festival. In this documentary, independent Cuban director Fraguela Fosado combines a pastiche of digital modes to tell the personal story of two friends: one on the island - the filmmaker himself - and one off. I argue that the film's uniqueness is in its use of digital and geographic spaces to capture Ana López's concept of a "Greater Cuba." I examine how the on-island filmmaker co-creates a platform with his off-island interlocutor enabling collaborative authorship through the use of the digital platform WhatsApp. In doing so, the film explores the friendship between the two young men through memory, archives, memes, and a particularly Cuban sense of humor. The result is a film that achieves a personal narrative of contemporary Cubanness across a digital diaspora both in the making of, the plot, and its subsequent distribution trajectory.

**Keywords:** Cuba, independent film, *Greater Cuba*, digital diaspora, documentary



Film poster: *El matadero* (*The Abattoir* Fraguela Fosado 2021)

### The Digital in the Cuban Context

The Independent Cuban filmmaker Fernando Fraguela Fosado's fifty-five-minute documentary *El matadero* (*The Abattoir* 2021) premiered as part of the second annual streaming INSTAR Film Festival in Havana, Cuba, from December 4-11, 2021. The film serves as a digital platform, combining personal archives with public images to form an inclusive and open narrative of transnational Cubanness. In doing so, the resulting documentary contributes to what Venegas has noted as the duality of the digital landscape in Cuba specifically and in the Global South more broadly—as both opportunities for connection and surveillance (24). I examine how this film adds a third use of the digital in Cuban filmmaking: to serve as a platform to co-create with “a Greater Cuba” an expansive notion of Cubanness that includes the people living beyond the island.<sup>1</sup> As such, the film documents the traces of exile in daily life while also providing a space for the on and off-island friends to be present and co-author a shared digital present narrative despite their distance.

The film, which centers on the digital world in its production and plot, has a limited island streaming presence. Barely reaching on-island Cuban audiences through its streaming premiere, the nascent INSTAR Film Festival does find Cuban audiences—particularly those beyond the island. It exhibits Cuban films in parallel to the nation's longest-running state-organized film festival: *El Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*, known as the Havana Film Festival for short. In direct response to the

state-organized Havana Film Festival's censorship practices over four decades and a heightened crackdown on spaces for Cuban independent film since 2020, the parallel online INSTAR Festival was created as an alternative exhibition platform committed to activism through art. The festival reflects the intention of the INSTAR Institute (established by over 900 artists, including the famous Tania Bruguera) to foster art “to energize democracy in Cuba” and create a “civil rights literacy campaign.”<sup>2</sup> The Festival correspondingly delineates the need for its existence with a focus

on independent audiovisual production carried out in Cuba from 2019 to date, a period marked by the global pandemic, the absence of the *Muestra joven* [the Young Film Showcase], and an escalation of the climate of censorship and repression against alternative and anti-establishment art on the island (INSTAR)

For works without an opportunity to premiere in official on-island spaces due to explicit censorship or a more ambiguous falling out of undefined graces with the state film institute ICAIC (*Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*), the online Festival provides an opportunity for exhibition.

Spaces for Cuban independent filmmaking have become even more limited since the February 2020 cancellation of the *Muestra*. For the 2020 *Muestra*, the ICAIC censored Aparicio and Fraguera Fosado's previous documentary *Sueños al paio* (*Dreams Adrift* 2020), citing “political differences” and later, when further questioned, the ICAIC claimed “misuse” of archival images (Dirección ICAIC). This censorship decision resulted in fellow Cuban filmmakers pulling their films from the showcase in an act of solidarity with Aparicio and Fraguera Fosado.<sup>3</sup> Given this response and the subsequent cancellation of the *Muestra* space for independent films, the INSTAR Online Festival serves as a crucial albeit limited platform for Cuban cinema. The 2021 offering premiered thirty-three films, including two films explicitly censored on the island: *Corazón azul* (*Blue Heart*, Coyula 2021) and *Quiero hacer una película* (*I Want to Make a Movie*, Ramírez 2020). Totaling forty-one streaming films, independent filmmaker José Luis Aparicio and Cuban poet Katherine Bisquet programmed the INSTAR 2021 festival (Suárez n.p.).

Despite providing a digital setting for independent Cuban film, the 2021 INSTAR Festival's digital distribution does not reach most on-island film audiences. As *El matadero* director Fraguera Fosado explains in a personal interview,

Sí he recibido buenas críticas de las personas que la [*El matadero*] han visto, sobre todo en el extranjero, pues, aunque participó en INSTAR, los cubanos no tienen un internet suficientemente asequible o rápido para ver toda una película. De hecho, no conozco de nadie que la haya visto en esa plataforma estando en Cuba.

(Yes, I have received positive critiques from those who have seen it [*El matadero*], primarily from abroad, because even though it participated in INSTAR, Cubans do not have enough Internet accessibility or connection speed to see an entire film. As a matter of fact, I don't know anybody that saw the film on that platform while in Cuba. (Fraguela Fosado)

At first glance, the limitations of digital exhibition can offer ambiguity. While having increased internet connection rates across the country in the past five years, providing the internet speed needed for streaming films still needs to be improved on the island.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there is no mechanism to enable local audiences to pay via credit card, making streaming INSTAR's premieres a near-impossible practice for most on-island Cubans for the 2021 version.

INSTAR's role as a digital alternative to the state-controlled festival and censored showcase, while facing limited accessibility to on-island audiences, contributes to the complex duality of the Cuban digital landscape. The digital world in Cuba works as a space that increases opportunities for possible forms of individual expression while simultaneously creating new spaces for state surveillance (Venegas 24). Although Cuban individual expression has increased via Facebook, blogs, and digital distribution of materials created with Internet access, the Cuban state has developed its ability to censor access to said content and track personal expression as material for surveillance of its citizens while at the same time, remaining the sole internet provider. However, the Cuban digital world is not only accessed through state-managed online connections or monitored streaming platforms. Instead, the homegrown Cuban offline internet, *paquete semanal*, serves as a window into the ways in which internet connection, content production, and distribution work differently in Cuba, beyond statistics and subscribers. As Cearns explains the *paquete semanal* is

Cuba's peer-to-peer digital file sharing network . . . viewed as a domestic response to a widespread scarcity of internet access . . . from an island that remains prohibited from officially consuming much international digital content (by both the embargo and Cuban state internet restrictions) . . . becom[ing] the primary source of information and entertainment for the majority of Cubans across the island; indeed, some even consider it the island's largest (unofficial) employer. (99)<sup>5</sup>

While *el paquete semanal* is a far-reaching offline inventive answer to state control, simultaneous streaming distribution during a limited time, such as the case with the INSTAR festival, remains a significant challenge for on-island audiences due to connection speeds and censorship. Additionally,

given the extensive use of the offline *paquete* to access content, a streaming festival's impact on local audiences would be difficult to measure since access occurs in an underground way.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the repeated digital practices of censorship and control, the internet's impact and access in Cuba may have influence beyond traditional digital infrastructures used in the Global North (Venegas 33). While the INSTAR Festival does not target on-island Cubans due to streaming obstacles, it can still result in high impact reaching Cuban audiences in López's concept of "Greater Cuba" (López "Memorias" 5). With this concept, López points to an expansive notion of Cubanness that includes the peoples living beyond the island. Within the greater concept of the larger Cuba, INSTAR's ability to reach Cuban audiences internationally could be its most significant contribution in terms of exhibition and expansion of the Cuban digital landscape despite—or possibly because of—restricted on-island streaming capabilities.

### **Documenting the Personal in Public**

In dialogue with Cubans in "Greater Cuba," while revealing the idiosyncrasies of the Cuban digital landscape, *El matadero's* distribution journey, plot, and conclusion parallel the nuances of the festival. In his analysis of the 2021 INSTAR Festival, Cuban film critic Dean Luis Reyes remarks on how *El matadero* is part of a wave of contemporary independent Cuban documentaries stepping away from the heroic focus on finding the next big story and the newsreel tradition of the ICAIC ("Día siete").<sup>7</sup> In his analysis of documentaries such as *El matadero* (2021), Reyes notes that many independent contemporary Cuban documentaries are becoming more autobiographical in nature. In doing so, they simultaneously offer a self-reflection while creating distance from the self through an off-camera first-person narrator who serves to question and rethink the nation. On *El matadero*, Reyes shares

constantemente hay una voz en off que está meditando, que está reflexionando con respecto a la realidad que se está representando, que está tratando de colocarse distanciada de ella y que también eso le permite al matadero convertirse en una suerte de alegoría . . . hacer grandes alegorías, de construir meditaciones más que representaciones directas de la situación de sus personajes y también de la situación en la cual o desde la cual los realizadores quieren pensar el país . . . Hoy aquello que conocíamos como documental dentro de la gran tradición, la tradición heroica épica . . . del cine cubano del ICAIC, hoy todo esto está sometido a renovación, a cuestionamiento.

(There is constantly an off-camera voice that is meditating on, reflecting on, the reality that is being represented, and trying to distance itself from it [that reality]. This allows the slaughterhouse to become a type of allegory . . . to create grand allegories and meditations, rather than direct representations of the characters' situations or the situation of the country. What we once knew as the documentary in the heroic, epic tradition of ICAIC is being questioned today.) ("Día siete")

Although Reyes reflects on the departure from the ICAIC tradition of documentaries celebrating the national narrative, I argue that *El matadero* does not completely abandon the national narrative. Reflecting on tensions between the national and the intimate in post-Soviet Cuban cinema, film critic Dunja Fehimovic posits that, while contemporary Cuban films are not preoccupied with grand national narratives, they are often not in opposition to them either. Instead, she explains, "these '*grandes temas*' cannot be separated from the '*microhistorias*': the private and the political, the individual and the collective, and past and present, all become very difficult to disentangle" (253). Indeed, *El matadero*'s intimate story asks audiences to bear witness to the revolutionary narrative's impact on individuals' private lives, making personal pictures and conversations part of a public documentary.

According to film scholar Gustavo Furtado, the inclusion of private archives in the public sphere is a trend occurring in Latin American documentaries across the region. Furtado asserts that incorporating the personal in documentary reflects "the migration of images from private archives to the documentary screen and conversely, the documentary genre's migration to terrains that were once considered to be of exclusively private interest" (144). From this lens, he analyzes archival footage and the notion of the archive itself as a concept rooted in official memory and power often negotiated by state institutions. Thus, placing the official archive beside private pictures and personal stories makes "the borders between the public and the private . . . porous and blurred in contemporary culture" (144). Incorporating personal archives places individuals in dialogue with state memory, institutions, and/or officials in ways that may otherwise be impossible off the screen. This inclusion does not necessarily co-opt the private into a single, resolved, national story. Instead, Furtado writes that the combinations of private and public can create "ways of including a diversity of voices without fully subsuming them to the framework of interpretation, allowing these voices, therefore, to retain their singularity, opacity, and epistemic independence" (145). This resistance to unity through fragmentation is most salient in *El matadero*, which uses multi-model collage to avoid resolving the experiences into a singular narrative. Combining these various modes and voices also creates ways to question the notion of a single author and a complete national story. This expansion of authorship

comes to light in the close reading of *El matadero* below. Through its polyphony, a significant dimension of *El matadero*'s use of digital filmmaking emerges—it serves to co-create a linked narrative beyond national borders—despite the Global North's measurements of Cuba's digital connectivity.

### **Reading *El matadero* Close Up**

The documentary opens with the term “*Revolución*,” followed by the sound of a squealing pig. Switching to a lonely street, the camera captures a man walking away while pushing a metal cart. After three minutes of low-level street sounds and pig squeals, an off-camera first-person male voice begins speaking to an absent “you” (in the familiar second-person “tú” in Spanish). Without identifying the narrator or his addressee, the film jumps back to 1991 by focusing on family photographs of smiling parents proudly holding their baby, as the narrator explains that this was the year he was born. Each photograph serves to narrate this young man's life story from the beginning in the absence of memory, thus allowing the camera to capture both Cuban history and the ways the narrator has made sense of these occurrences using the resources at hand with each year in his development.

The film switches to archival footage of Fidel Castro visiting a rural community after a flood had wiped out an entire village. In this footage, a woman tells Fidel of the destruction, as the off-camera voice identifies her as the mother of the silent listener. The storm is why the woman, her community, and the silent listener moved from their valley homes to looming concrete apartment buildings near the slaughterhouse that gives the film its name. Indiscriminate block housing will hover over the streets for the rest of the film.

As the narrator retells a collection of seemingly disparate events from 1990 to 2021 in Cuban history and his personal life, the voice does not attempt to create a single coherent representation of the island. Instead, with the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent beginning of what Fidel Castro euphemistically coined as the “Special Period in Times of Peace,” the audience witnesses this historic time of scarcity through the point of view of a child. Fidel's voice announcing the USSR's end is superimposed onto televised cartoons, weaving both into a shared co-existence much like that of the narrator himself. A young child at the time, the mash-up of sound and image enables the audience to witness how such information would reach a child's ears through his daily references. The cartoons were the child's way of knowing and processing the official announcements, echoing much of the memory work that film and trauma specialists have found in Argentine director Albertina Carri's *Los rubios* (2003). In both films, by switching to child play or cartoons, the camera captures how these

moments were lived by those who did not have a political voice in the Revolution: in this case, the children of Cuba.<sup>8</sup>

The camera advances in time, capturing later chapters in the young people's lives interwoven with official archive, sound, and home videos. The voice speaks to the absent friend, reminiscing about their shared experiences. The shared time on the lonely streets ends abruptly as the narrator recounts that the absent listener had to “*salir*” [leave] “You spent your money on a plastic boat, and despite numerous attempts at leaving, it did not work out.” This ubiquitous concept shapes both the presence and absence of those on and off the island. While many Cuban films focus on or hint at leaving Cuba in precarious boats—including *Fresa y chocolate* (1993), *Habana Blues* (2005), *Santa y Andrés* (2016), *El último balsero* (2020), and *Sueños al paio* (2020)—documentary footage of the dangerous trip is repeatedly left off the screen. Despite lacking footage, the precarious trip continually shapes lives on and off the island, and the narration about leaving brings to the public an often private and hidden decision to go, shedding light on the necessity of multiple attempts and costs involved.

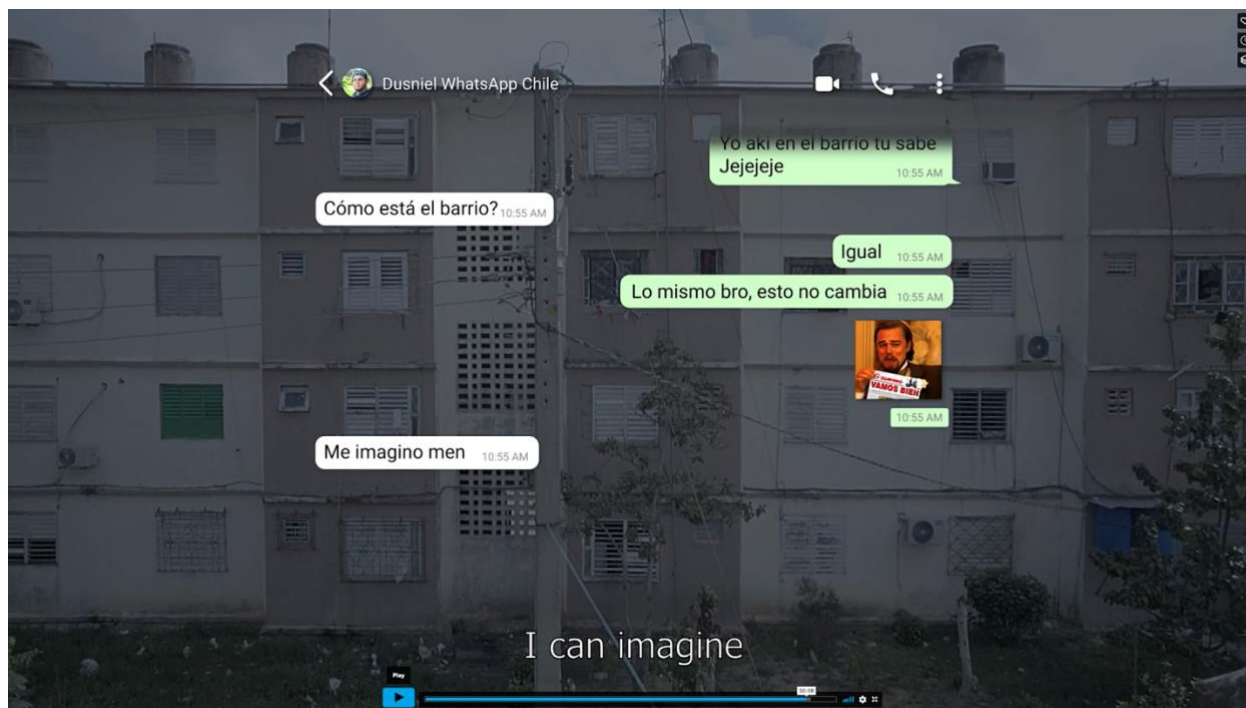
As a proxy to the missing footage of the raft passage between Cuba and Florida, the camera jumps to another visual genre: the videogame. Switching to a video game departure and combative boat travel serves as the referential code for the adolescent narrator. Gaming also challenges the limits of the documentary's aesthetics to represent that which is un-representable through footage. Thus, the journey is recreated via a medium once removed from the film and serves as a strategy to simultaneously fill in the missing archive while protecting the narrator's adolescent self from its trauma.

As the voice weaves his personal story over the last thirty years with that of Cuba, the narrator continues to address his absent friend by recounting the chapters of the story that his friend did not witness firsthand due to him physically leaving the country. He shares how the Revolution has shaped political discourse and the food that Cubans eat, housing, and, on a personal level, his own health. Using his body as another archive of the Revolution, the speaker recalls when he contracted a rare form of reactive arthritis (Reiter's Syndrome) caused by eating salmonella-contaminated food during his mandatory military service and the subsequent three years of bed rest. Although brief, mentioning the narrator's health is yet another way in which the state and the personal sphere are deeply entangled. The narrator's corporal memory demonstrates the intimate cost of Cuba's national heroic narratives, making the body an archive of official power with mandatory military service, rationed food, and state housing. Yet, simultaneously, his body serves as a dynamic and untamable counterarchive for

resistance through activism, rupture, displacement, and even the act of telling one's story through the very documentary on the screen.

The fragmented documentary soon steadies its focus on a young man speaking to his mother in their kitchen. The young man's voice is revealed to be that of the off-camera first-person narrator: the filmmaker Fernando Fraguela himself, standing at the kitchen table. The filmmaker tells his mother of his plan to leave the island. It is a deeply personal story of many young Cuban filmmakers, journalists, and artists between 2018-2022 who have faced a significant attack on their rights and increased state oppression.<sup>9</sup> Felt across the island, this increased oppression reached an additional peak in the government's response to the nationwide July 11, 2021 protests.<sup>10</sup> Both Fraguela and his mother have their backs to the camera, inviting audiences to view the conversation as depersonalized and representative of one of many Cuban youth and their parents.<sup>11</sup>

As the film begins to conclude, the camera returns to the choreography of the slaughterhouse while men silently perform their roles in the process. However, the film does not finish there. Instead, the conclusion is composed of WhatsApp messages between the narrator and the off-camera interlocutor with whom he has spoken throughout the entire documentary, layered over images of the cement block housing:



After scenes documenting the interlocutor's absence, the off-camera friend, Dusniel, becomes part of the film—albeit from afar. Dusniel, who had previously worked in the slaughterhouse that gives

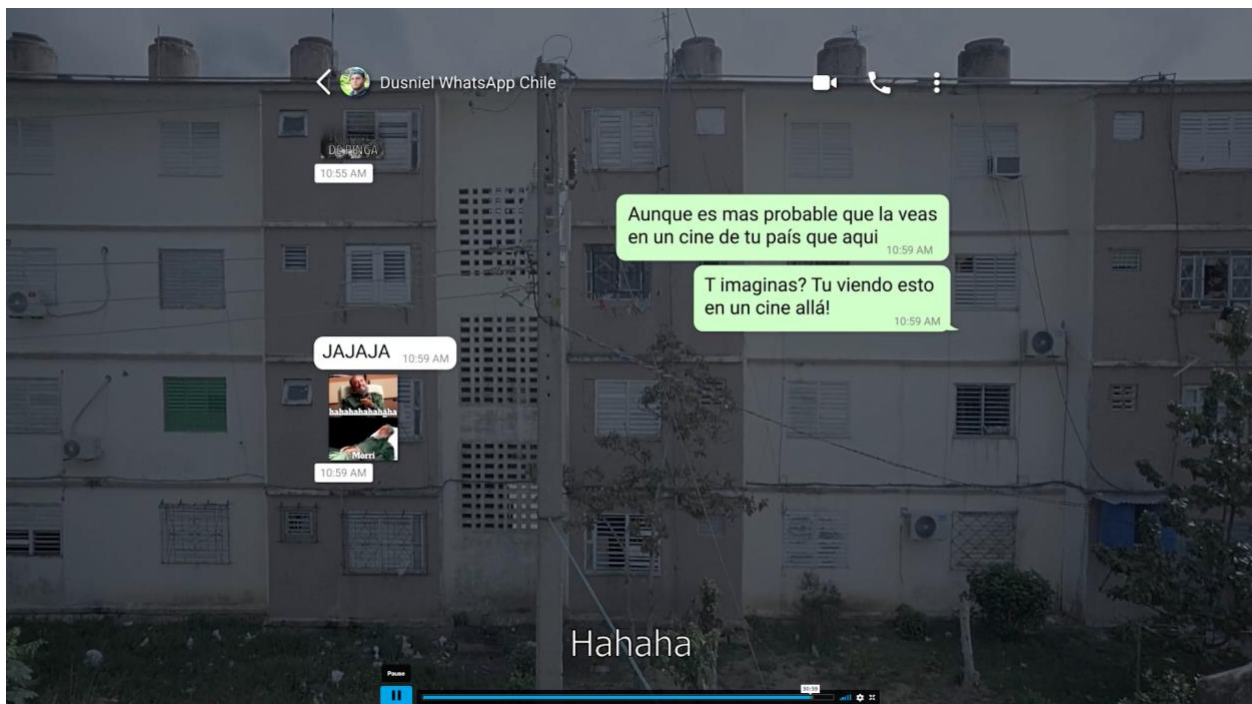
the title to the documentary, left the island for Chile but is not lost or silenced from his original community.



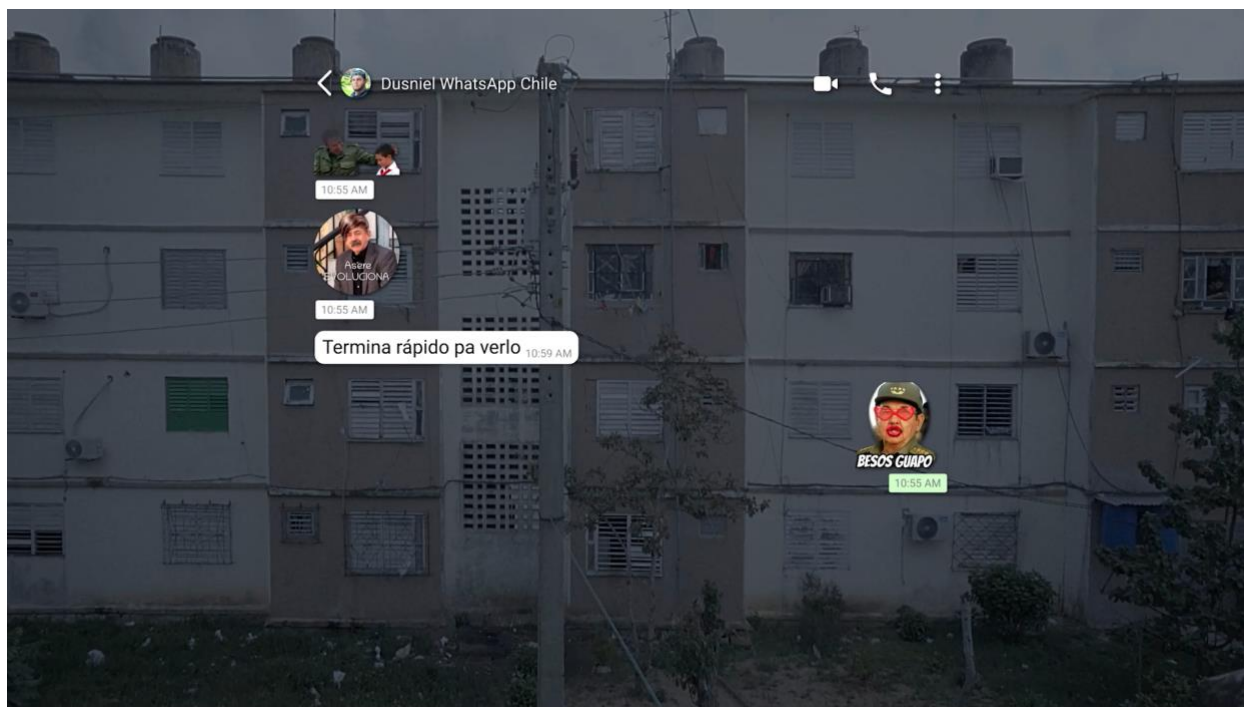
Through WhatsApp messages, the audience hears directly from Dusniel about his current job, humor, and family. The narrator tells Dusniel that he has made a film about their experiences in the neighborhood, the slaughterhouse, and Cuba—the same film the audience is watching. This begins a flurry of images between the two as they joke over WhatsApp. Moving from the cartoons of his childhood to the video gaming of his early adolescence, this final change in modes to the digital WhatsApp platform captures the codes with which the narrator negotiates to make sense of his current realities while also inviting a two-way dialogue to the screen. Yet again, the documentary visually rejects an understanding of a single, unified story:



Fraguela shares that he wants Dusniel to see the film in the *barrio*, but Dusniel explains that with the COVID-19 restrictions, he does not plan on traveling to Cuba anytime soon. Fraguela, instead, decides to share the film with Dusniel through the Internet and that he will be the first one to see it.



Fraguela's comments anticipate the documentary's exhibition realities. The film will be available for viewing by international audiences, and maybe even Cubans abroad, long before it is available to those on the island due to closed cinemas, implicit and explicit censorship, shuttered film festivals, and limited internet speeds for streaming.



Although the two friends acknowledge the state's control and even the future difficulties that the film will face to reach audiences, they also challenge the state's power, reaffirming their Cubanness through digital humor, creating stickers of current Cuban leaders.

This humorous digital conclusion on the screen through the free WhatsApp platform adds to the friends' agency in publicizing their private narratives. The app's interface itself also hints at the idiosyncrasies of the Cuban digital context and the encrypted space. While end-to-end encryption is key to the privacy of communication between application users, the Cuban government has repeatedly blocked apps such as WhatsApp, particularly during widespread protests of July 2021, due specifically to their encryption capabilities.<sup>12</sup> In this way, the private encrypted platform becomes the documentary's public fabric and a form of resistance by sharing with audiences the memes and stickers that the two friends use to laugh at and resist their Cuban realities on a platform that is an app that the state has wrestled with for control.

Using the app, the two friends create what memory studies specialists have called *disidencias narrativas*, or transforming new ways of remembering, while constructing the present and the future through dissidence, combining forms and genres (Añón Suárez and Forcinito 2). From this

perspective, the conclusion reveals how these friends work together to reshape present realities by poking fun at Cuban political figures and using multiple genres to show their agency.

Representing their present while guessing at the future of the documentary film, the conclusion is also steeped in the Cuban historical comedic practice of *choteo* or “no tomar nada en serio” (Mañach 57). As Jorge Mañach, one of the most celebrated Cuban writers of the early twentieth century, declared, “it [*choteo*] is a human and social activity whose instinctive purpose is to affirm one’s individuality against another’s that is considered superior or equally powerful” (57). The use of *choteo* in the digital conclusion is an opportunity for 1) shared authorship and subjectivity, 2) a rejection of authority, and 3) a coping mechanism.

The narrator and friend exchange political stickers and memes, placing themselves as subjects shaping an interpretation of a grand national narrative. Their subjectivity is directly linked to poking fun at authority, which, according to Mañach, is “*choteo*’s superior insight into what is comical about the authoritarian realm, is, at times, undeniable” (59). Through these political stickers, the friends bring the untouchable Revolution’s sacred cows into the digital slaughterhouse to be remade according to their comical and digital codes. The political leaders are then re-packaged into infinite comedic possibilities and are distributed in a private, albeit at times interrupted, WhatsApp space, becoming a form of digital *choteo*.

While this digital *choteo* ending highlights subjectivity and challenges authority, it also serves a third role as a national coping mechanism to use humor to coexist with years of pain and control. When asked about the use of *choteo* in the documentary’s conclusion in a personal interview, Fraguela Fosado explains:

En Cuba se vive con una tristeza tan profunda que yo creo que si los cubanos hicieran anagnórisis de esa tristeza se suicidarían en masa o no sé qué pasaría. Entonces, la estrategia para sobrevivir emocionalmente en esa sociedad es el choteo, que con la llegada de internet se transformó en toda una nueva cultura (que necesita pronto ser estudiada e investigada) de memes, stickers, gifs y todo lo relacionado, en función de burlarse de los dirigentes del país y de la situación en que viven los propios cubanos. El mismo Dusniel (protagonista de la peli) vivía en una extrema pobreza y su único patrimonio eran un par de cerdos, sin embargo, es un muchacho alegre, con una fe ciega en que se iría en algún momento de Cuba y así es casi la mayoría, personas que ríen y bromean todo el tiempo, pero que no son felices.

(In Cuba, one lives with such profound sadness that I think if Cubans recognized this sadness, they would commit mass suicide, or I do not know what would happen. So, the strategy to emotionally survive in this society is *choteo*, which, with the Internet, has become a whole new culture (that soon needs to be studied and researched) of memes, stickers, gifs, and related things, in order to make fun of the country's leaders and the situations in which Cubans live. Dusniel himself [the film's protagonist] lived in extreme poverty, and his only inheritance was a pair of pigs; nevertheless, he is a jovial guy who had blind faith that he was going to leave Cuba, and that is what the majority of people are like, laughing and joking all of the time, but they are not happy.)

Through the digital screen and texts, the friends signal their ways to survive the national histories while also creating spaces to reaffirm their subjectivity. Challenging private and public forms of communication, the conclusion rejects censorship of the digital platform, pointing to the film transcending the rigid geographical borders of Cubanness.

### **Conclusions in Digital “Greater Cuba”**

Adding to Venegas's work on the dual roles of the digital landscape in Cuba as opportunities for personal expression and surveillance (Venegas 24), *El matadero's* conclusion reveals a third role for the digital landscape. It serves as a space for co-authorship between and among Cubans in “*Greater Cuba*.” Through the digital platform, the two friends publicly continue to create a narrative together across geographical boundaries and beyond island vs. diaspora binaries. However, the shared authorship comes at a price: state surveillance pervades and has stunted the film's distribution and interrupted the platform that affords the film its collaborative conclusion.

In alignment with the predictions the friends offer in the documentary's conclusion, the film has had far more circulation off the island than on. *El matadero* has since won the Best Documentary Prize at the 2022 Courage Film Festival in Berlin. Additionally, it won the Best Documentary Prize at the 2023 Málaga Film Festival in Spain. However, when it comes to on-island distribution, the reality is different. Since the December 2021 streaming of the INSTAR Festival, *El matadero* has had nearly zero measurable presence in official on-island cinematic distribution. After facing censorship for his previous film, released in 2020, *Sueños al paio*, it is no surprise that *El matadero* would continually face obstacles for further on-island official exhibition. As a result, the documentarian has chosen to follow in Dusniel's footsteps and those of many contemporary and previous generations of Cuban artists,

particularly in independent film. Fraguera Fosado has since left Cuba and now lives in Spain, still making films from and with “*Greater Cuba*.”

In its digital conclusion over WhatsApp, the two friends allude to the documentary film’s awareness of its looming censorship and the difficulties it would face reaching local audiences in theaters or streaming. Despite this censorship, the documentary asks audiences to bear witness to the traces of the grand narrative through the private stories of Cubans while also recognizing Cubans’ agency in shaping, resisting, and laughing at that same national narrative beyond island boundaries. This article serves as another form of witnessing and working against *El matadero*’s censorship and the ongoing censorship of Cuban independent filmmaking.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For more on her concept of “Greater Cuba,” see López “Memorias of a home...”

<sup>2</sup> For more on INSTAR see <https://www.visibleproject.org/blog/project/the-institute-of-artivism-hannah-arendt-instar/>

<sup>3</sup> For more on Aparicio and Fraguera Fosado’s censored film *Sueños al páiro* and the cancellation of the *Muestra joven 2020*, see Farrell “*Sueños al Páiro*.”

<sup>4</sup> For more on internet speed maneuvering and disruptions as a form of explicit state control, see Freedom House.

<sup>5</sup> To read further on the Cuban offline digital distribution platform, *el paquete semanal*, see Cearns, Farrell, Henken, and Levine in the *Cuban Studies* dossier on *el paquete*.

<sup>6</sup> To read further on the multidirectional distribution in *el paquete*, see Cearns, “Connecting...”

<sup>7</sup> For access to Dean Luis Reyes’ reflections on the INSTAR festival see “Día siete” *Guía del cinéfilo*.

<sup>8</sup> For more on Albertina Carri’s *Los rubios* (2003) and the use of children’s materials at hand to revisit traumatic moments in dictatorships, see Añón Suárez.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the increase of oppression towards Cuban artists, see “Amnistía Internacional: ‘Represión en...”

<sup>10</sup> For more on the aftermath of the July 11, 2021 protests, see “Cuba confirma que...”

<sup>11</sup> For more, see Augustin, Ed, and Frances Robles’s “‘Cuba Is Depopulating’: Largest Exodus Yet Threatens Country’s Future.”

<sup>12</sup> See Freedom House section A3 for more on blocking WhatsApp and other similar encrypted messaging platforms during the July 2021 popular protests.

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