RICE UNIVERSITY

Havana (After)Life: Touring the Entropics

by

Nicholas Moore Risteen

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE Master of Architecture

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Albert Pope, Professor, Director Architecture

John J. Casbarian, Associate Dean Architecture

Clover Lee, Assistant Professor Architecture

HOUSTON, TEXAS

MAY 2007
INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.
ABSTRACT

Havana (After)Life:
Touring the Entropics

by

Nicholas Moore Risteen

While Havana’s status as the ‘Pearl of the Caribbean’ dissipated in 1959, Cuba and its capital survived the subsequent 30 years as a relatively prosperous Caribbean nation under communist control. Soviet communism’s dissolution in 1989 left Cuba’s international and economic support structure in tatters. Extreme rationing returned, imports and exports fell, and life as usual came to a grinding halt. To save its economy and future, Cuba turned back its clock to a former source of international attention: tourism. But what form can tourism take in this remaining communist stronghold? How can Havana embrace a new economic engine without decimating its most enticing features and avoid turning itself into a Caribbean tourist ghetto? As the fragility of Castro’s hold on the island becomes ever more apparent, how will the changing power structure of Cuba’s government affect relations on the world stage? When greenbacks enter red cities, what happens next?
Acknowledgments

Many hands and minds took part in the development and execution of this thesis, without whose help the outcome would have been greatly diminished. Françoise Fromonot provided invaluable advice early on in the generation of this thesis, as did Kent Fitzsimmons (and both from abroad). Classmates added their voices throughout, in particular Andrea Manning, Nicholas Hofstede, Maria Gabriela Flores, Wendy Gilmartin, and Laura Baird. Longtime friend and roommate Jonathan LaRocca, ever ready with an opinion, provided invaluable help and encouragement, not just with this thesis but throughout my tenure at Rice. John J. Casbarian, through an incredibly well-timed letter, provided important support that allowing me to travel (legally!) to Cuba as an independent researcher with the support of the School of Architecture. Mayra Alonso, of Marazul, coordinated a rather hectic travel schedule to and within Cuba, without whose help I would have literally be adrift in a foreign land. Marc Brossa, at Field Operations, took a great deal of time to help translate some rather sensitive communications before my departure. Marilyn Jordan Taylor helped put me in touch with a number of important people in Cuba, in particular Mario Coyula. José Parapar, ever gracious, provided a unique living experience in Miramar and a good deal of candid opinions on his homeland.

A great debt is owed to Albert Pope, whose voice throughout this process has been incredibly important. Without his extensive feedback and advice, this thesis could never have come to fruition.

Of course the final debt is owed to my parents and brother, who have all been unfailing in their support of my endeavors in this field, and towards whom I can never fully express my gratitude.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 ~ PREMISE: ....................................................................................................................................................p. 1

2 ~ HISTORY ....................................................................................................................................................p. 5

3 ~ MASS TOURISM .........................................................................................................................................p. 14

4 ~ PROJECTIONS / PROPOSALS ....................................................................................................................p. 30

5 ~ LA HABANA : PICTURES ............................................................................................................................p. 36

6 ~ URBAN PLAN ..............................................................................................................................................p. 47

7 ~ HOTEL .......................................................................................................................................................p. 53

IMAGE CREDITS .............................................................................................................................................p. 70

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..............................................................................................................................................p. 71
Havana is an anomaly in contemporary urban history. Its image in the 1950s as an Antillean metropolis that was destined to become another nexus in the Las Vegas and Miami triangle of gambling and tourism was frozen in time on January 1, 1959.

-Joseph Scarpaci, Roberto Segre and Mario Coyula

*Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*
While Havana’s status as the ‘Pearl of the Caribbean’ dissipated in 1959, Cuba and its capital survived the subsequent 30 years as a relatively prosperous Latin American nation under communist control. Close ties with the Soviet Block provided markets and subsidies for Cuban export alongside military and material support, allowing the newly communist nation to prosper despite international economic, political and military hostilities. Dramatic increases in literacy rates, access to healthcare, and availability to higher education placed Cuba as a ‘model’ of communist accomplishment; however, these achievements elide the physical and material devastation and deprivation that accompanied the shift to Soviet dependency and the abolition of private enterprise. Restaurants, small businesses, the trades...all of them dissapeared with the nationalization of virtually everything.

The 1989 implosion of Soviet communism, and the following thaw of Eastern Europe, ground much of Cuba’s economy to a startling halt. Rising unemployment, failing public utilities and services, and a continuously crumbling built fabric left much of the city as an inhabited ruin. Attempts to stave off the small nation’s downward spiral - most importantly the ‘Special Period in a Time of Peace’ inaugurated in 1990 - proved relatively ineffective. Increasing national debt, rotating creditors from Soviet times, and a new requirement for Cuba to pay for its imports in hard curency (as opposed to the sugar quota that structured the economy for 30 years) placed Cuba on the brink of a devastating crisis. As the price of sugar plummeted on the world market, Cuba faced the necessity of re-structuring the nation’s economic generator or face destruction.

Recognizing its position as a tropical island in a sea of holiday destinations, Cuba made a somewhat paradoxical turn to save its economy and embrace and industry thought long-dead on the island: TOURISM.

Only now, in 2007, does Cuba begin to fully realize the potentials of its tourist industry. What does that realization portend for Cuba’s future?
By the early 1980s, nearly 1/3 of the world's population living in 25 countries lived under communist regimes.

In 2006, only five communist states remain: China, Cuba, North Korea, Laos, and Vietnam.

the communist world today
Close your eyes and visualize this scene: Night - a magical night with sky and velvety midnight blue scattered with a thousand glittering stars; low in the east the moon, incredibly large and golden.

A warm breeze tantalizingly scented with the intoxicating perfume of strange, exotic tropical flowers.

Music, warm sensuous, entrancing with Latin rhythms which set the blood to stirring and the feet to tapping.

Glamorous, lissome Latin lasses, black-eyed señoritas, languorously, enticingly swaying as they glide over a polished floor in a smooth rumba.

The bright excitement of gaming tables, the whir of the roulette wheel, the age-old chant of the croupier.

A dream you say? A dream that only the rich man can make come true?

How wrong you are! This is the night-time in Havana...the “Paris of the Americas.”

tourism brochure copy from a ca. 1950s advertisement for Havana
20th century Cuban history, however, notes numerous (and continuous) challenges to Havana’s lifestyle, culture and urban fabric. Since Cuba’s independence from Spain—won in 1898—and the subsequent influence of the United States (drawn into Cuban history through the sinking of the SS Maine), Cuba’s inner social, economic and cultural practices have changed dramatically.

The relatively late abolition of slavery in Cuba (1880) required a quick restructuring of sugar and tobacco plantations, accomplished mostly through an influx of migrant labor from China and other Caribbean neighbors. Quickly laying aside past animosities, Spanish penisulares came to the island in droves to take advantage of new economic prospects at the turn of the century.

Spanish elites were not the only interested parties flocking to Cuba at the time. Foreign entities buying up Cuban farmland and industry—particularly Americans—led to the construction of prestige factory projects close to the city center, as well as the expansion westwards in search of suburban developments to accommodate the rising upper class. One of those factories, the Partagas Cigar factory directly behind the Capitolio in central Havana, attests to the continued importance of industrial sites within the city centre, as Partagas still makes cigars today and stands as one of the more popular tourist attractions in Havana (as the myth of Cuban cigar greatness continues apace).

These new neighborhoods, catering to the burgeoning Creole elite on the island alongside a growing expatriate population, elicited a real estate and leisure boom in prestige areas, with the construction of the Country Club (capitalizing on the growing interest in golf in the US as well as its slowly increasing popularity in Havana) and the Racetrack. Growing westward from the old city by the bay, these developments increased in size and scope with each passing iteration and urban plan, first in the highly rational and uniform blocks of Vedado and La Rampa, and later to the more auto-friendly (and focused) layouts of
Miramar and Quinta Avenida. The wide calzadas of Havana's urban past, which initially marked the extents of Havana's development, became the rubric and norm for 19th and 20th century expansions of the middle and upper classes of Cuba's emerging urban economy.

Havana's fast-paced growth also benefited from the hurricane of 1926 that ravaged Miami, killing 1000 people and derailing the burgeoning tourist infrastructure of south Florida and shifting that focus to Havana only 90 miles away. Favorable weather conditions—due to the trade winds—made Havana an even more desirable location than Florida, as its climate conditions made for warmer winters than Miami and cooler summers.

The sugar bust in 1921, while devastating to one segment of the economy, initiated the national turn towards tourism as a not only viable but desirable means of diversifying the economy and saving the nation from a drastic economic downturn. Connected developers and politicians were more than willing to accommodate, instigating an almost 40 year process of graft and corruption that led to political upheaval (in 1959 but also in 1933) and enormous prosperity. The Second World War also benefited Cuba to a great extent, as the price of sugar spiked once more with production stalled in other parts of the world.

Havana's first foray into tourism starting in the 20s quickly developed into one of the prime destinations in the Americas, filling in the triangle of leisure sites alongside Las Vegas and Miami. This classification—and the intricately connected political and economic ties to the United States—brought not only economic prosperity but a much more insidious presence as well: organized crime. America's crime families had first been present in Havana in the 30s (Al Capone set up a billiard hall that quickly closed within a year, deemed untenable as the political climate was even more hostile to his "kind of business" than back in Chicago), but after the legalization of gambling, an established resort culture, and the construction of the racetrack, there was no looking back.
While Havana never faced the rapid urbanization many of its Latin American counterparts underwent during the 20th century (while Havana's population doubled in the last 40 years, Lima, Peru's population grew sevenfold), a new wave of both legal and illegal urban migration puts pressure on an already tight housing supply. An aging service infrastructure, most notably the city's water supply, compounds the crisis for shelter even more; currently, civic engineers estimate that over 50% of Havana's water supply leaches into the soil due to rotted pipes and cisterns, leading to not only disintegrating public amenities but the erosion of building foundations as well. (Scarpaci et al 2002)
With the fall or the Berlin Wall and dissolution of the Soviet Union, Cuba's economy officially entered free fall. Subsidies for fuel and consumer products, inflated sugar prices, and material and military support suddenly disappeared. In its place, the new Russian State provided Cuba with the option to maintain its current import loads - but at world market rates, and paid for in US dollars.

Given the needs of the state and its people, Cuba sought new means of floating its economy, turning full-steam towards tourism and enacting a series of social, political, and economic transformations.
FOREIGN INVESTMENTS
direct and implied

In September 1995, Law No. 77 passed by the National Assembly broadened the legal and institutional framework for foreign investment. This law substituted Decree-Law 50, approved as the Cuban-Foreign Economic Association Law of February 1982. Decree-Law 50 required the Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration (Ministerio para la Inversión Extranjera y la Colaboración Económica [MINVEC], formerly known as Comité Estatal para la Colaboración Económica [CECE]), to work on trade with the Soviet Union and the now defunct socialist countries of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) as the maximum Cuban government entity in charge of business opportunities with foreigners. The Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Collaboration monitors business operations and defines the ways in which foreign investors, both companies and individuals, can do business in Cuba. The law establishes certain guarantees for investors and defines the authorized ways of investing: joint ventures, international economic associations, and a completely foreign capital firm.

In the mid 90s, after the initiation of the Special Period, the tourist industry in Cuba surpassed sugar, long Cuba’s mainstay economic engine, as the primary source of foreign exchange. Cuba officially estimated an approximate 1.6 million tourists visited the island in 1999, with an estimated 1.9 billion in gross revenues.

The more visitors that arrive, the more money there will be to invest in the restoration [of Habana Vieja]. –Juliet Barclay, Havana: Portrait of a City

While an elaborate bureaucratic process still inhibits the easy flow of investment into Cuba, law 77 does allow the “total foreign capital firm to exist without the participation of a Cuban counterpart,” in a system similar to the WOFE (Wholey Owned Foreign Enterprise) designation in China.
As this new law helps clear the way for foreigners to invest in Cuba, particularly in the real estate market, specialized investment firms have developed to meet the growing need. Functioning as joint real estate enterprises, Cubalese, Habaguanex, and Eproyiv work towards bringing foreign capital into Havana’s ailing urban fabric, both as new development and re-development. Habaguanex stands out as a firm that utilizes a portion of its revenues (from mainly tourist industry functions like hotels and restaurants) to fund the renovation and preservation of Old Havana, fueling in turn the more enticing qualities of Havana’s tourist draw: it’s history.

Changing decades of economic policy in the early 90s, the Special Period inaugurated not only sweeping reforms, it effectively establishment of a dual economy. Legalizing the dollar for Cuban nationals reinvigorated domestic trade alongside opening new opportunities for foreign investment, with twenty-three money-exchange houses operating in Havana by August of 1996, with 200 contemplated for opening throughout the rest of Cuba over the subsequent five years through the new private Cuban corporation CADECA S.A. While obtaining dollars still posed some difficulties for the average Cuban citizen, the new infusion of greenbacks raised the value of the Peso sixfold in two years, prompting the government to remove 250 million pesos from circulation during the first semester of 1996 (Scarpaci et al 2002).

New sites of real estate development in Havana - and elsewhere in Cuba - tend not to interest the authorities unless the projects are large in scale and scope. As such, the Cuban government’s main interests have been towards large-scale redevelopment as accomplished through a series of masterplans, both urban and social, drawn up over the last few decades.
2004 saw a marked change in US policy towards corporations engaging in economic transactions with the Cuban state as UBS, the Swiss banking corporation, received a hefty fine from the US government for “laundering” money for Cuba. While the dollar was legal currency within Cuba, the US government was far from thrilled at this “breach” of the embargo.

In consequence, Castro de-legalized the dollar as currency in Cuba, relying instead on an increased use of the Peso Convertible, in circulation since 1994 and pegged 1-1 with the dollar. All transactions carried out in dollars were subsequently levied a 10% service charge for the “risk” involved in translating them into other currencies (mainly the Euro) to help Cuba purchase imports from abroad (who demand to be paid in a hard currency).

While present before, the widespread use of the convertible peso (CUC), useless as currency outside of Cuba, has solidified the state-sponsored dual economy into a tourist currency and a native currency, effectively denying native Cubans access to a wide array of consumer products priced to sell at the inflated prices tourists expect on foreign visits. As such, restaurants, bars, hotels, and most shops become financially (and in some cases legally) off-limits to Cuban nationals.

1 CUC = 24 CUP
As cities compete in a global market for tourist dollars, the differentiating factors lie not in "labor, lax regulation, or tax incentives but in their perceived appeal as places for play" (Holcomb 1999). Perception, play, and desire form an enticing triad of touristic enterprise, as the commodification of leisure leads to the packaging of cities as a marketed whole, with angles towards ‘cultural’ or ‘heritage’ tours vying with ‘eco’ and ‘industrial’ packages for tourist capital. A city that decides to fashion an economy around tourism “must project itself as a ‘dreamscape of visual consumption’” requiring “large doses of mythology, folk memory, and popular fantasy” to round out its brochure copy (Fainstein and Judd 1999).

Banking on marketability, though, has its dangers. As Brian Holcomb remarks in ‘Marketing Cities for Tourism,’ “obviously, history sells and heritage is hyped.” That approach encourages a kind of Faustian bargain as a city’s projection of itself and its life becomes more and more entwined with a transient population. Holcomb warns his reader (in somewhat dramatic terms) that “packaging and promoting the city to tourists can destroy its soul.”
mass tourism

cities on the market?

MASS TOURISM involves more than just the movement of large numbers of people. It encompasses, first, the consumption of a complex array of tangible goods, including souvenirs, food and drink, rental cars and jets, plus physical facilities in the form of lodges, hotels, and convention centers...Finally, tourists consume advertising and experience; in this sense travel involves desire and culture as much as products and services....To appeal to tourists, cities must be consciously molded to create physical landscapes that tourists wish to inhabit.

~Susan Fainstein & Dennis Judd, The Tourist City
The origin of the spectacle lies in the world's loss of unity, and its massive expansion in the modern period demonstrates how total this loss has been: the abstract nature of all individual work, as of production in general, finds perfect expression in the spectacle, whose very manner of being concrete is, precisely, abstraction. The spectacle divides the world into two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation of the world, and is superior to the world. The spectacle is simply the common language that bridges this divide. Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its separateness.

~Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tourist numbers have gone up dramatically over the past decade, from roughly 745,000 in 1995 to an estimated 2.2 million in 2005. Expectations for tourism, though, have often disappointed, as the 2 million goal for 2000 was not reached (numbers for 2000 are estimated at around 1.8-1.9 million visitors).

The numbers are even more startling given the history of the revolution. 1967 saw approximately 2000 tourists enter Cuba, that number rising to only 340,000 by 1989. More than doubling with the advent of the Special Period in a Time of Peace, tourist almost outnumber Habaneros, and account for the largest insurgence of foreign currency into the country.
Many things have changed over 40 years, rather more have remained the same, for one of the usually forgotten charms of Communist governments is their capacity to stop the clock.

-Richard Gott Cuba, a new history
It is only a promenade, nothing more.

- Carme Pinós, The Havana Project, 1995

Stopping the clock in Cuba means more than a quaint, slumbering communist city, as the continual lack of funds and materials to maintain Havana's infrastructure has thrown much of the city into a state of monumental decay. In a kind of entropic decline, Havana's almost 500 year history slowly crumbles away. Coupled with overcrowding in many of the oldest parts of the city, the situation becomes even more dire.

Habana Vieja 'boasts' approximately 70,600 inhabitants living in 22,500 'units,' many of which are the result of multiple subdivisions of existing spaces over the course of the century. While efforts to improve and restore the historic city center are well under way, Habana Vieja still faces the challenge of a major structural collapse roughly every three days. Traditional methods of restoration and reconstruction face an uphill battle with such daunting numbers.
In history as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life.

- Karl Marx, as quoted by Georges Bataille in an epigraph to "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix sur"

Photograph, Robert Polidori
Glancing up uncertainly at the high distant ring of the jungle looming out of the darkness like the encircling lip of an extinct volcanic cone, Kerans led the way across the pavement to the nearest buildings. They stood in the entrance to one of the huge cinemas, sea urchins and cucumbers flickering faintly across the tiled floor, sand dollars flowering in the former ticket booth.

Beatrice gathered her skirt in one hand, and they moved slowly down the line of cinemas, past cafés and amusement arcades, patronised now only by the bivalves and molluscs. At the first corner they turned away from the sounds of revelry coming from the other side of the square, and walked westwards down the dim dripping canyons. A few star-shells continued to explode overhead, and the delicate glass sponges in the doorways glowed softly as they reflected the pink and blue light.

"Coventry Street, Haymarket..." Kerans read off the rusting street signs. They stepped quickly into a doorway as Strangman and his pack charged back across the square in a blaze of light and noise, machetes slashing at the rotting boards over the shop-fronts.

"Let's hope they find something that satisfies them," Bodkin murmured. He searched the crowded skyline, as if looking for the deep black water that had once covered the buildings.

~JG Ballard, The Drowned World
What may well be forgotten is the problematic human agency in this naturalization of history any, with it, the question of in/authenticity.

—Christiane Hertel, *Beyond In/Authenticity: Dresden’s Frauenkirche*, from *Architourism*, ed. Joan Ockman.

Joan Ockman, in a symposium titled “Architourism” held at Columbia University, proposed four categories for demarcating the manifestations of urban tourism: the authentic, the escapist, the exotic, and the spectacular.

Havana’s case falls, at present most closely with the authentic, figured most stridently around Habana Vieja’s designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982. Adhering to UNESCO’s guidelines, Habana Vieja and its fortifications fall within their purview under Cultural articles IV and V:

IV: to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape, which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.

V: to be an outstanding example of traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.
. . . tourism functions as a Vatican-like state within a state, offering political asylum, internal escape, and immunity to all converts who would recognize and endorse its images. The tourist industry indexes the world by flight times from major cities, beachside water temperature, days of sunlight, quality of sand, and length of stay. Its spatial products are designed to be free to spread into growing territory unencumbered by political inconveniences like taxes and local laws, and the spin that accompanies them bathes them in peaceful neutrality.

-Keller Easterling, "North Korea Love Boat" Architourism, 2005
Dollars & Sense

The impact of hard currencies (USD, Euro) into the Cuban economy is striking, particularly for the working-class Cuban. The graph above, listing the average buying power for specified fields, unequivocally shows how the tourism industry benefits Habaneros on an individual basis, as those with access to hard currencies increase their buying power immensely.

% of Monthly Income spent at Farmer's Market for:

1 lb. rice
1 lb. black beans
1 lb. pork chops
2 lbs. tomatoes
3 limes
1 head of garlic

=$44.25 CUP
SAY YES TO CUBA

without a license from the treasury department, all American travel to Cuba is banned.

The United States is Cuba's second largest import trading partner.

The US embargo bans the importation of all goods of Cuban origin.

Americans account for over 4% of tourists in Cuba.
The underlying context to tourism in Cuba - and in particular Havana - is political. Cuba has maintained its presence on the world stage through its revolutionary extremes: formenting dissent and violent uprising in Africa and South America, harboring Soviet missiles in 'America's backyard,' and providing ample displays of socialist rhetoric to keep the country's ideological spectrum to a minimum. As such, Cuba's somewhat na"ive ambitions have made it an anomaly on the world stage and within the community of communist states.

This political context also has distinct spatial characteristics: the city in decay. While some posit the stopped time of communist states as an almost quaint throwback to another era,

In desperation, Cuba's economy depends on the quick and fluid cash generated by global tourism. As a distinctly 'other' nation, Cuba's appeal lies in its ability to satisfy the political tourist of all stripes: those looking for the revolutionary zeal of decades past (packaged for a new future), those seeking evidence of its failures and abuses, and those nostalgic for the bygone glory of the island's past decadence.

All of these cases, though, fail to address the tactility of the city at hand. Displays of communisms physical consequences on the city abound. Stopping the clock in Cuba means more than a quaint, slumbering communist city, as the continual lack of funds and materials to maintain Havana's infrastructure has thrown much of the city into a state of monumental decay. In a kind of entropic decline, Havana's almost 500 year history slowly crumbles away. Coupled with overcrowding in many of the oldest parts of the city, the situation becomes even more dire.

Habana Vieja 'boasts' approximately 70,600 inhabitants living in 22,500 'units,' many of which are the result of multiple subdivisions of existing spaces
over the course of the century. While efforts to improve and restore the historic city center are well under way, Habana Vieja still faces the challenge of a major structural collapse roughly every three days. Traditional methods of restoration and reconstruction face an uphill battle with such daunting numbers.

The entropic nature of Havana works on two levels: as a mechanism of physical decay, and also as a push towards Havana entering the undifferentiated field of Caribbean and global tourism. Easy money and a desire to erase the past facilitates greenbacks in red cities simply turning the country brown. Cuba’s draw depends on its commodification of history, its future in its ability to attract tourists, and its stability on uplifting the general nature of the population.

Approaching tourism as a revolutionary act, the notion of being ‘invaded by tourists’ as a serious proposition, the force of spending power,

Should the aim be to posit tourism as the agent of its own destruction? The Cuban Communist Party claims that there will be no transition government when Fidel dies; will tourism, instead, act as this transitional phase? As small inlets of entrepreneurship and small enterprise enter Cuban life - paladares, casas particulares, the resurgence of independent trades (plumbers, electricians, carpenters, artisans) instigated by economic crisis and the thought of a quick return -

This hotel as a kind of ‘base camp’ of globalizing transition, tourism as the most subversive industry Cuba could embrace, as a new realm of desire develops in the wake of the international tourist. We no longer simple experience ‘them,’ but ‘they’ experience ‘us.’
embargo
the end is near?

In place since November 1960, the US Embargo on Cuba, aimed at preventing the import and export of goods between Cuba and the United States, finds less and less favor among the general American public. Set in place to destabilize the Castro government by denying access to essential goods and services (and thereby forment dissagection and dissent among the Cuban population), the embargo’s efforts have proven over time to be only moderately effective at best. Even with stricter laws, most recently enacted through the Helms-Burton Act in 1996 and further developments in 2004, Cuba’s economy has grown despite the world’s most formidable economic power refusing to do business.

Arguments presented before Congress for the lifting of the embargo revolve primarily around the embargo’s effect on the Cuban people as opposed to the Cuban government. Couched in the terms of Just War theory, which stipulates in part distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants, the embargo appears to be not only ineffective but unethical, as those most affected are normal Cuban citizens unconnected to the government.

While these arguments circulate through Congress (made all the more topical with Castro’s illness and surgery in the summer of 2006), the question of ‘what comes next’ suddenly has a new interest.

Politically, economically, socially: what will the rush contain? How many American's will rush to Cuba's shores? How many exiles, made rich or poor from their migration north, will seek to reclaim what they lost in the revolution? What will be gained? What will be lost?
In the escapism and amnesties of tourism's pirate space lie powerful political mechanisms that, when deliberately manipulated, transport the tale not to the style pages but to the fictions of the international pages. Architecture and urbanism are critical pawns in a game within which tourism's supposed political neutrality is actually at the heart of its political instrumentality.

— Keller Easterling, "North Korea Love Boat" Architourism, 2005
TO WHAT END will architecture service the future of Havana? What future? What is being accommodated? What is being transgressed? In what manner does Cuba require new organizational and spatial configurations? Who is our client - this agent of society?

—Thom Mayne, ‘The Past is Not Where I Left It’ The Havana Project, 1995
HAVANA (AFTER)LIFE

Welcome to the Entropics

initial projection

WHAT IF ............ we let the city die?

is there potential in the necropolis? can we hype the disaster of revolutionary change, enhance the decrepitude of decades-long ruination, and speed Habana Vieja’s passage to the ‘other side’?

instead of restoration, can the city be put in archaeological deep freeze, a phantasmagoria of touristic discovery of the ‘true’ Havana? IS Havana only what it WAS?

a sensual geography of urban decay, with identified points of touristic insertion: masterplanning an excavation for the global embrace of Havana.
HAVANA (AFTER)LIFE
Welcome to the Entropics

WHAT IF ... we watch the city die?

Contradictions abound in contemporary Havana, as buildings fall and rise in what seems like equal numbers. New hotel construction accounts for 80% of current building in Havana. The City Historian's office, spearheading the restoration agenda with missionary zeal, has morphed into a multi-million dollar investment force transforming UNESCO protected areas into white-washed tourist corridors peddling tobacco products and Adidas to tourists in town from the beaches at Varadero. The Cuban population, separated from virtually all of this development through both economics and law, watches from the sidelines.

Street networks slowly decay (many back to earth), 289,000 habaneros live in shanties and inner city slums, water-loss through leakage tops 55%, trash collection is in decline due to lack of vehicles, open-air fumigation in the city battles periodic outbreaks of dengue fever....

the steady rise of an entropic city
HOTELEPHOTO
for Our Man in Havana

a space for the extended voyeur

when the exotic is cheap; the authentic unreal;
the escapist uncanny; the spectacular a given.

embracing the touristic desire to see without being seen

watch wait luxuriate
THE FALLOWS, la habana

a ferry, a spa, a park, & a plan

WHAT IF....... we seed a new tourism?

Creating a new instance of urban infrastructure to facilitate a wave of development on the eastern bay.

Embedded within that infrastructure: an resort positioned to generate its urban condition, catering to the present and anticipating an expanded wave of mass tourism in the city.

A small building, with potential for a large impact.
Two coasts, staring across the bay at one another, each an object of desire for the other, yet for drastically different (but connected reasons): the tourist stares across the bay at the 'authentic' Havana of the 16th century, while Habaneros stare back across the channel at the promise of future prosperity.
Step 1: New Transportation Links
Step 2: Parkscape Edge
Step 3: Supergrid to spur new scale of development
Implementation 1: Hotel placement at tip of development
Implementation 2: Newly scaled urban development eastwards
Photograph, Michael Schanbacher


Director: Albert Pope
Reader: Clover Lee
IMAGE CREDITS:

All images by Nicholas Risteen, unless otherwise noted.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY


THEORY


TOURISM STUDIES


ECONOMICS


CUBA || HISTORY / CULTURE / POLITICS


