

Art Therapy Online: ATOL

Tropical Path (Part 2): The Life and Work of Antonia Eiríz

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Vereda Tropical

Voy por la vereda tropical, la noche plena de quietud con su perfume de humedad.

I am going down the tropical path,

The night is calm

With its perfume of dampness

Y es la brisa que viene del mar, se oye el rumor de una canción canción de amor y de piedad.

And with the breeze that comes from the sea

The murmur of a song is heard,

A song of love and pity

Lyrics: Gonzalo Curiel

Translation: Maria Coelho and Margaret Hills de Zárata

Abstract

The second part of this extended paper traces the life and work of the Cuban artist Antonia Eiríz Vásquez from 1968 (when she stopped painting) to 1993; when she left Cuba for Miami where she died in 1995. Drawing upon archival materials and interviews, her involvement with *Arte popular* and specifically one aspect of it, papier mâché, is described. Her activity in this area is contextualized with reference to the political and economic climate of the period and with reference to the support and recognition this work received

from the Cuban establishment.

It is proposed that her involvement with *Arte popular* does not represent a complete break with her previous artistic, social and political concerns but rather provided a different route for their expression. As such, it is suggested that her innovative work in establishing *Arte popular* constitutes an example of cultural democracy which in turn provided the backdrop to the development of art therapy practices in Cuba and that this by implication positions her as a 'forerunner' of Cuban art therapy. The term 'forerunner' is used here as it is employed Ben-David and Collins (1966) and latterly by Waller, (1991) and Gilroy (2006) to describe how a profession develops from the interests of a few people, the 'forerunners', who pave the way for a 'new idea' to emerge. This 'new idea' or path is developed by others who establish an 'interest group' and so 'found' a discipline; the 'founders' then teach the 'followers'.

Key Words: *Art Therapy, Arte popular (popular arts), papier mâché, cultural democracy, personal autonomy, revolutionary politics, Naturalistic Inquiry.*

Introduction

Arte popular

The term '*Arte popular*' can be literally translated as popular art but this rather distorts its meaning; implying that it is art which is popular with people whereas *Arte popular* is art made by the people, that is, people who have not received any formal art education. This is not to suggest they have not been taught but rather that what they have been taught is a particular skill or set of skills as opposed to receiving a broader artistic education. *Arte popular* is not 'folk art'; this is an inappropriate translation implying traditional art which has its origins deeply embedded in a given culture and expressing something of that culture. Whilst the latter is true of *Arte popular*, it has a relatively short history in Cuba. Folk art, or art deeply rooted in tradition, is in the main represented in Cuba by the religious artefacts of *Santería*, whose roots are in the ancient religious practices brought to Cuba by the slaves during the colonial period. These artefacts are often embodied with magical and

healing powers and used in particular rituals by *Santeros* or practitioners of *Santería* to affect cures. This area of therapeutic practice and its use of art objects or artefacts has been documented by ethnographers such as Ortiz (1940), Ortiz and Deschamps Chapeaux (1974) and Guanche (1996).

The *Arte popular*, which is examined in this paper, is confined to the development of the work initiated by Antonia Eiríz Vásquez in the 1970's and limited to a discussion of works made of papier mâché. In one sense this is a narrow definition. *Arte popular* includes jewellery, work with textiles and enamels, however, the area of work which was drawn to my attention by respondents while conducting research between 1999 and 2001 in Havana was for the most part sculptural works, objects and artefacts made of papier mâché (Plasencia, 2005). The fact that this particular aspect of an artisan movement began in full modernity, that it spread and was taken up by ordinary people as a means of supplementing their income is notable. However what is perhaps most interesting is that this movement took several directions; 'it didn't stay as the making of little souvenir objects or utensils, large works were made, and also art' (Nasser, 2000).

The contribution of Antonia Eiríz

In 1968 Cuba was approaching what came to be known as the second of the 'dark periods'. These were 'bouts of stultifying orthodoxy with the temporary ascendancy of Soviet influence during 1961-62 at the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion and again from 1970-75' (Craven, 2002, p.76) The preface to this latter period was the Soviet invasion of what was then still Czechoslovakia and Castro's delayed but eventual endorsement of the repression in Prague which was to install a gray regime in Cuba itself. As Hitchens (2008) puts it, this capitulation helped to dispel the 'Third-World-as-revolutionary-vanguard illusions of at least one section of the Left' (Hitchens, 2008). In Cuba, what was left of the urban private sector, in the wake of nationalisation, was swept away by the "Revolutionary Offensive" of 1968, thereby eliminating the last remnants of pluralism. These events form the backdrop to Eiríz's self-imposed censorship when following the condemnation of the poet Heberto Padilla's book, *Fuera del Juego* (Out of the Game) by the Writers and Artists Union and in the wake of criticisms of her own work at the National Salon of 1968 she stopped painting. In 1969 she resigned from her position as a teacher at the Cubanacan

National School of Art in Havana and retreated to her neighbourhood of Juanelo in the Municipality of San Miguel del Padrón.

We temporarily lose sight of her until she re-emerges in the literature pertaining to the development of *Arte popular* in the 1970's. The first published article describing Eiríz's work in popular arts was written by Onelio Jorge Cardoso in 1973 and appeared in the October edition of the magazine Cuba. The article describes an exhibition of papier mâché work at the mansion house which had once belonged to the Countess Revilla Camargo; making much of the contrast between the privilege of the previous occupants and the exhibition of work by the *papielistas* (papier mâché artists) from the poor neighbourhood of Juanelo. It is today the home of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Havana.



Figure 1: The Museum of Decorative Arts, Havana.

Cardoso (1973) interviewed Eiríz who described how she began working with her neighbours.

In 1970 Mercedes Rodríguez Lazo, then president of the local Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR) in Juanelo had wanted to make a party for the local children.

Rodríguez Lazo had the role of neighbourhood organiser for the local CDR in Juanelo, while Eiríz had responsibility for education and culture. Apparently, Eiríz suggested

making puppets and a puppet theatre as an alternative to a sack race. The children themselves created the plot and dictated the characters parts. Eiríz transcribed their dialogues. Amongst these pieces of theatre were: Teo and his Friends, a Magician in Juanelo, The Mysterious Box, The Indecent Queen and The Little Clowns. None of these works were longer than four sheets of paper.

The first puppet theatre performance written, created and performed by the children took place on the 21st September 1971. Mercedes Rodríguez Lazo (2000) described the *comparsa* (group of people at a carnival often wearing the same costumes and with masks) which followed this performance.

'The children...all dressed in newspaper...the clothes, the suits...everything made of paper...paraded from here all over the neighbourhood. Afterwards they were invited to parade in Guanamacoa... all the children from the neighbourhood...and I...dancing in front of the procession with all of them... with drums and everything...the people in the street...lighting matches to illuminate the clothes. It was tremendous, because imagine...this had never been seen before.'

In 1970 Eiríz and Rodríguez Lazo started to give classes in papier mâché. Eiríz radically simplified the traditional techniques. A form or shape was made of a figure, a bird or a fish in paper. It was so simple that according to Rodríguez Lazo 'anyone could do it'. Eiríz was proactive; she went to her pupils as opposed to her pupils coming to her. Although they began working with children they were soon teaching families. Children would take their work home but their mothers would throw it out as rubbish. The children would then come crying to Eiríz who decided to integrate the parents in the activity so that they could appreciate their children's work. Every night a house in the neighbourhood was designated. A bucket of flour-based glue was prepared and newspapers, paper and wire were taken there. The whole family worked. The finished objects were at that time painted with old tempera paint, which was boiled up with water to make it usable. This old paint, which was Eiríz's own, was also used by the local housewives to paint the walls of the

street with flowers and birds.

She outlines her rationale in the following extract from the film *'El Arte del Pueblo'* (1974), which was commissioned by ICIAC (Cuban National Film Institute) and written and narrated by Eiríz.

'In order to guarantee the incorporation of the children in that which, they, as well as their parents, perhaps thought of as a simple training, it was necessary that the parents had a better comprehension... this, I thought, could be best obtained by working with them directly in their own homes...this could only be obtained by working directly within the nuclear family as an integral part of our community cederista (CDR community). In this way a pedagogical experience, which has been repeated in other social situations, began' (Eiríz, 1974).

In the same short documentary film *'Arte de Pueblo'* (1974) she locates this work within the new socialist reality

'As the person responsible for education, I proposed a new perspective which could substitute disorganized games and take advantage of the children's natural talent and imagination. Through a creative game, educational and cultural results were obtained, not in an abstract way, but within the new socialist reality' (Eiríz, 1974).

María Gutiérrez (2000) describes Eiríz's papier mâché classes in her own particular way: *'One Sunday night she came and said 'María, I'm going to give papier mâché classes'. I said, 'Ay no, no, I don't want any of that, I don't understand it nor want to learn how to do it'. She went to another neighbour and when she came back I had made a butterfly, in my manner, my own idea'*.

The Development of Arte popular.

A later interview with María Rosa Almendros (2000) clarified how the work begun in Juanelo developed. In the 1970's Almendros worked for *El grupo de desarrollo de comunidades'*; (The Communities Development Group) working in *los pueblos nuevos*

(new villages). These villages were constructed after the Revolution and inhabited by *campesinos* or peasants. Previously Cuban peasants had lived in relative isolation. According to Almendros they preferred to live this way – ‘they did not like to cluster...living several kilometres apart from each other’. However, new villages were constructed in order to provide access to amenities, such as schools, doctors and so forth. Apparently, this change was difficult for some and welcomed by others– ‘people didn’t like it...some liked it, the young people, they liked moving to a new village, because they had a cinema...the children had a doctor, it had a *bodega* or shop...everything’.

El grupo de desarrollo de comunidades’; (The Communities Development Group was primarily involved in a very pragmatic form of social work, teaching the people of rural communities how to use basic utilities like running water, how to clean and so forth. As a trained artist, Almendros was interested in culture and in developing cultural activities.

Almendros recalled how in 1971 she received a call from Eiríz (whom she knew but not well) to invite her to the procession of puppets previously referred to by Mercedes Rodríguez Lazo. She went, although preoccupied with ‘*el frente*’, (literally the front, a military term employed to describe the continuing revolutionary activity in social development) for which she had the responsibility of developing cultural activities without a budget. When she saw the puppets made of newspaper, she found her solution. As she pointed out to me, at that time newspaper and flour were available. Paint could not be found but Eiríz had used alternatives from the pharmacy; gentian violet, blue methylene, red aseptic and some pastilles for the kidneys which were yellow. Eiríz, observed Almendros, had found a solution for everything. She immediately saw the possibilities for rural communities and asked Eiríz to come and help her.

‘She said to me ‘yes, why not’...we went to the communities...we had three or four communities here between Havana and Varadero; Jibacoa, the new communities not the traditional ones...Flor de Itabo, Peña de Leon and another ’.

These new communities were Almendros and Eiríz’s ‘laboratory’. They tried things out, which if they were worked, could be applied at a national level. Almendros recounted how well it started. She went on a weekly basis with Eiríz mostly to Jibacoa where they gave classes to women; at first men were reluctant to become involved, although finally some

did. Eiríz was apparently surprised at how well things went because as Almendros explained 'in the cities people are permeated by culture and we are speaking about subculture'. At that time there was no television in these communities; the inhabitants were relatively isolated. However, according to Almendros they spontaneously made magnificent objects.

Almendros and Eiríz went further afield travelling to different parts of the island to give classes. In Havana, Almendros gave classes in one of the CDR's, the Community Development Group, and in primary and secondary schools concluding that 'it worked with everyone'. However, it soon became clear that they could not continue alone. *'There many new communities at that time 300 or so. therefore we decided to bring a person from each community here to Havana and make a course of 15 days, a little course, so that they could learn and afterwards go back and teach...these women (shows me a photograph) who more or less had a certain affinity with culture and with art or had a manual ability'*.

This short course took place in a house lent to them in La Coronela near the neighbourhood of Miramar. The course started with art appreciation. A teacher came and showed slides, introducing the students to the history of art; from cave paintings, classical art, and art from different cultures (including Chinese and Indian art) to modern art. Students were asked to draw something that they liked and the majority drew a Greek vase. María Rosa Almendros did not offer an explanation for this preference. However, it is interesting to note as these forms are admired for their structural simplicity and for their decoration which in the best examples achieve a unity, in the sense of a near perfect marriage, of form and decoration.

The students were also taken to the National Museum:

'We were in the gallery that held English painting...and one said to the other: 'Look well because probably they are going to make us draw something of these ...concentrate!'. Poor thing, but well all of them made wonderful work, they were very happy, I was too and so was Antonia. It was a beautiful course. Afterwards each one returned to their village and taught'.

Almendros recalled that in one of these villages, El Tablón, a museum was made in an old 'bohío' or hut. These simple traditional buildings have thatched roofs and earth floors. They have one or two rooms, simply furnished, and an area for cooking with wood and coal. Large papier mâché figures were made; an old woman cutting wood, a peacock, a goat, a man. Some children and local people donated items from their own homes to

depict the traditional lifestyle of the Cuban *campesino* (peasant). She also mentioned the participation of the *papielista* (papier mâché worker) in the theatres which were opened in the new villages. Their participation and that of musicians, actors and other artists made a significant contribution to helping consolidate these new communities by introducing a shared cultural life. Apparently, Eiríz never made anything of papier mâché herself nor did she ever paint any finished object apart from on one occasion recalled by Rodríguez Lazo. She made a Russian soldier for her son Pablo who was studying Russian. María del Carmen Cernuda, curator of the Municipal Museum of San Miguel del Padrón, confirmed this; a large jar or vase for flowers in the museum's possession which some people said she had a hand in making.

Nasser (2000) who worked with and was taught by Eiríz suggests that there are more objects, although very few, which she made but did not sign. His view, based on conversations with Eiríz, was that she did not make papier mâché work because in the beginning, 'when people started to see the things that the children, the old people, the common people, were capable of making, it was said that it was a lie, that they hadn't made them and that it was Antonia who had made them'. He does however refer to the vase in the Municipal Museum of San Miguel del Padrón, which she begun and which she finished because the people, to whom she gave the work, and who were to known to Nasser, never had time to do it.

Influences

Eiríz was no stranger to artisan work on the contrary it is possible to trace a trajectory stemming from her own work in assemblage to the developments she initiated in the uses of papier Mache. Already in 1964, when referring to her assemblages and the use of found

objects, Eiríz spoke of the 'magical world of the everyday' (Eiríz in Bruzon, 1964). When traditional painting materials were difficult to obtain, out of necessity she looked for elements of rubbish and worked with those. In 1970 in an even more difficult economic situation she adapted traditional papier mâché techniques which basically involved using rubbish or very cheap materials as alternatives. Here it is important to emphasize, that like assemblages a piece of papier mâché is three dimensional, it is a painted sculpture, that is to say, it involves sculpture and painting. Over more, *manualidades* or arts and crafts was not a new domain to Eiríz, as noted in Part 1 of this paper; her mother and sister had been dressmakers and she herself taught in the School of Arts and Crafts Instructors from 1962 to 1964.



Figure 2: "Homenaje a Lezama Lima", Assemblage, 1964, Private Collection

Nasser (2000) recalls that Eiríz's original idea for the Juanelo puppet theatre involved sewing puppets but it turned out that the mothers didn't know how to sew...and the

mothers of the boys and the fathers... 'because of machismo... would not let the boys sew'. Afterwards it occurred to her that they could make puppets with plasticine or putty, but that also wasn't possible due to severe shortages as a result of the failure of the 1970 *zafra* (sugar harvest); one of the two main means of production in Cuba, the other being tobacco.

For Eiríz, the problem was that there were almost none of the classical materials that were used in papier mâche to make the paste, therefore she innovated a much more simple technique and radically minimised the fundamental elements to glue, paper and a little paint. In 1975, Eiríz wrote a pamphlet for a course given by the Department of Public Relations of the Community Development Group in Buena Vista which was the responsibility of María Rosa Almendros. In this publication, Eiríz explained the origin of the papier mâche technique and how she was inspired to pursue this work by the necessity which had surfaced in her own CDR in Juanelo. In 1998, Miriam Lao'Izaguirre, the director of the Gallery of Art in San Miguel del Padrón produced a document entitled 'Work and Influence of Antonia Eiríz in Cuban Papier Mâche: Stages and Attributes'. In this paper Lao'Izaguirre's aim is to offer a résumé of the work initiated by Eiríz in Juanelo from 1970 and document and evaluate the development of papier mâche work in Cuba. She also offers a synopsis of the aforementioned pamphlet which provides an invaluable insight into Eiríz's approach.

Eiríz (1975) discusses how to prepare for the work, emphasizing that the approach which she advocates is as appropriate for a rural community, as for an urban CDR. She goes on to outline her adaptation of the traditional papier mâche technique in some detail. As Lao'Izaguirre (1998) notes it was possible that amongst the materials at the disposal of most families would have been medicines that could be used as colours and waste paper. Other materials could be found, for example fine wire (which could be found in old motors), fine rope or pieces of cloth to tie the armature; flour or maize or starch to make glue (which Eiríz notes doesn't need to be in a good condition); white paper of any type which could be pages of used jotters without lines or the residues from printers; scissors, varnish and coloured products from the pharmacy; and sticks of wood of different thickness padded with cotton at the ends, which could be used as paintbrushes. Aware of the social characteristics of her neighbours Eiríz suggested using everything possible that they

would already possess.

At the stage of decoration, she exhorts prospective teachers to encourage the most timid students and stimulate them to take initiative, adding that 'one should use the term decorate, not paint, already this term is more related with the painting of pictures and intimidates people who don't think of themselves as artists'. She also emphasises that 'the arrangement of colours does not have to be related to reality but with the concept and function of the decoration and ornamentation of the piece... in the case of children, how to use the materials should be explained to them but the form and positioning of the colours should be left to their free election' (Lao'Izaguirre, 1998, p.10).

Regarding the decoration, which is sometimes referred to as the 'Antonia Eiríz style', she emphasized the basic elements of decoration such as repetition, alternation, superimposition and geometry. Likewise, she drew attention to the distribution of elements in rows or lines, with defined rhythmic movements and the repetition and alternation of them (Lao'Izaguirre, 1998). Colours were placed next to one another, which seems to have been more difficult to teach people, for while there was no prescription relating to colour, it was difficult to teach people that if two brilliant colours placed together, they would fight for attention. Mixing colours was taught; how to make a green from blue and yellow for example, but the use of tertiary colours was discouraged as this was seen as being 'too far away from popular art'.



Figure 3 : Bandeja (Tray), Artist Unknown. Courtesy of Miriam Lao'izaguirre

A later conversation with the Cuban artist, Antonio Vidal, revealed that Eiríz had drawn upon the work of Fritz Winter, who had written a book on Eastern European Folk Art, called 'Art of the People'. Vidal remembered Eiríz showing him this book and suggested that this had informed her papier mâché work (Vidal, 2000). The art historian, Dr. Teresa Crejo, later pointed out to me that the expressionist movement in Eastern Europe had been deeply influenced by folk art and that it followed that Eiríz would have been interested in such art as she herself was very much an expressionist painter.

Lao'izaguirre (1998) points to other influences and mentions a book entitled 'Art of the Family' published in 1954 by the Contemporary Art Museum in New York which was amongst those in Eiríz's collection. This publication described various artisan techniques that could be practiced in the family including papier mâché. Also mentioned were the existence of various catalogues referring to artisan work conserved in famous museums and galleries and notes methods and projects in art education which Lao'izaguirre suggests nourished Eiríz's work. Apparently this collection of materials, which was

archived by Lao'Izaguirre following Eiríz's death, was 'carefully guarded amongst her most precious belongings' (Lao'Izaguirre, 1998, p.5).

Eiríz's signature appeared on the first copy page of 'The New Vision' and 'Review of an Artist' by Lázló Moholy-Nagy (1963). This caused Lao' Izaguirre (1998), trained as an art historian, to speculate about the link between Eiríz's art and ideas and the Bauhaus, the German school of design founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar in 1919, which was based on the principle that art should serve the needs of society. This school propelled architecture and the applied arts in the first part of the 20th century. Gropius, its founder, emphasised the great educational value of artisan work. In Lao'Izaguirre's opinion Eiríz put into practice this philosophy. This is quite plausible given that Gropius visited Havana in 1945 at the invitation of Ricardo Porro the architect responsible for the National School of Art at Cubanacan where Eiríz taught from 1965 to 1969. Furthermore, *Los Once*, the group of artists with whom Eiríz was linked with and with whom she exhibited in 1959 and in 1963, was allied with *Arquitectos Unidos* (United Architects). Guido Llinás who she cites as her mentor (Blanc, 1994) and Consuegra who wrote the introduction to her first solo exhibition in 1964 were both members of this group as was Nicolás Quintana who was involved with Porro in the '*quema de los Viñola*', in 1947, the event which the architectural historian Loomis (1999) cites as influential in ushering in a more modernist programme in Cuban architecture.

A significant number of these individuals associated with Eiríz chose to leave Cuba. Llinás left Cuba for Paris in 1963 the year in which Ricardo Porro resigned from the School of Architecture. Hugo Consuegra resigned from his faculty post in 1966 and subsequently left the country (Loomis, 1999, p.13).

But is it Art? And is it Therapy?

It is notable that in all the interviews conducted, what is considered as 'therapeutic', does not involve verbal exploration. The emphasis is on the activity, the key words being 'work' and 'making'. This emphasis on making and doing suggests an activity more akin to occupational therapy in its earlier incarnations than a form of psychotherapy. However to draw this conclusion would be to impose an *a priori* category upon the data, that is, to analyse it according to predetermined constructions. There is no mention of these

activities providing a distraction. Rather the data points to the activity as a form of engagement with a process which was essentially non-directive. Apart from explaining the basic procedures, the theory of contrast and some very basic elements of design Eiríz did not impose any restrictions on her pupils. On the contrary, she encouraged each individual to create according to his own 'canon of beauty'. What appears to be being communicated here is that the making of art itself is inherently therapeutic.

Eiríz's courses and workshops were open to everyone and everyone and anyone came. When papelista and teacher, Migdalia Hernández Delgado (2000), was asked if she considered any of the activities in which she had been involved to have had a therapeutic aspect she replied that she was convinced that they had; albeit that they did not set out to give courses in papier mâché with this result in mind. The basis of her conviction was that she herself had found these activities therapeutic. She spoke of the pleasure of experimentation, and the satisfaction which one feels to be able to make something with one's own hands, 'a beautiful thing, an object which can transmit something to others...is a great personal satisfaction'.

Almendros (2000) refers to the invitation of an Argentinean psychiatrist, Dr Dina Dinski to work with women refugees from the Pinochet regime during the 1970's.

'She (Dinski) was working with a group of Chilean women who had been in prison and whose husbands had disappeared...she asked me if I could go one afternoon to Alamar where they were living. They were women amongst whom some were at the edge of suicide... and she saw that making these things (papier mâché) was a treatment, or rather, it functioned as a therapy, and it functioned very well'.

Almendros described how one woman who had been in prison gave birth. The child would not sleep. It transpired that the women, who had been tortured in prison, never put the light out. Almendros describes the work made by these women as beautiful. When asked if the women had shared their problems with her during the papier mâché workshop, she replied, 'Yes, they spoke, but little. They spoke more to the psychiatrist, but when one is making these things one doesn't want to speak about anything, one wants to make'. Of the

work itself she responded that they 'made beautiful things...they tried to make beautiful things'...but continued with an anecdote that suggests that this in itself was an important expression; not necessarily implying denial.

Frankl (1959) notes, that a major source of meaning is through the value of all that we create, achieve and accomplish and this may go some way to explaining why the subject of beauty so often surfaces in situations where we might least expect its presence.

There is no evidence that Eiríz set out to do therapeutic work although there is some evidence of therapeutic outcomes. Julia González (2000) made this point explicit. When asked if Eiríz was interested in psychology or if she in any way saw herself as a therapist, she responded that, in her opinion, one of the implications in 'waking up' people's creativity is that they will then express themselves and that Eiríz was aware of this.

'There are people who go more concretely to achieve determined objectives...she may have achieved these same objectives almost without proposing them, that is to say, helping to wake up nothing more than these...feelings, these sleeping faculties'.

Another key point which emerges from González's commentary is the notion of context. When people came to participate in the workshops they were not going to see a psychologist or to receive therapy. Ostensibly they were attending a workshop in papier mâché. Any therapeutic benefit was achieved almost as a side effect of their engagement in the creative process because it seems quite clear that this was not Eiríz's stated objective. However, she did provide a context, materials, encouragement and an understanding that creativity and the expression of personal material were intrinsically linked.

In the case of one of her most productive students 'Papo' there is some indication that Eiríz became aware that her role had changed. She was no longer his teacher.

'She said to me, laughing,' Now the artist and the creator is 'Papo'. 'Listen Julia, it is very curious because now it's turned out that it is as if I am acting for Papo. He comes and asks me, I need this and I need that...as if I were his supplier...of all the

things he will need. Now he is the artist and I am something else'.

Having 'awakened' his creativity she assumed the role of facilitator or to use her own words his 'supplier'. Ulises Cruz who of all my respondents was most familiar with the notion of art as a therapy knew Eiríz. His opinion regarding her intention was remarkably similar to that of Julia González. Both respondents state that she assumed this role without conscious intention.

Money

However, Julia González pointed out another important factor in relation to Eiríz's intentions and this brings us to the subject of money.

'Another important thing was that she helped many of these people find a way of sustaining themselves economically, for example, these pieces which they made of papier mâché, were sold afterwards to a department of tourism in Cuba, to sell to tourists...that was very important, one part the medium of artistic expression and the other part a possibility to create new sources of material revenue which were very necessary for these people'.

The issue of money is an important one and marks an important distinction between practices undertaken in what is referred to as the 'developed world' and the realities of its 'underdeveloped counterpart'. I am well aware that the idea that patients might make money from a therapeutic activity would be an anathema to some therapists. In art therapy as it is practiced in the UK the art object is regarded as clinical material and usually held in safe keeping by the therapist, at the very least, for the duration of the therapy.

Quite apart from therapeutic considerations such as containment, confidentiality, data protection and so forth the idea of selling a work made in a therapeutic context carries other negative connotations. The sale of work is often associated with industrial therapy or occupational therapy workshops in the old state mental hospitals when objects, often assembled from kits, were made up by patients and sold. However, Calzadilla Fierro's (1998) account of Cuban psychiatry before the Revolution makes no references to such

activities. Workshops, including basketry and pottery, for example those at the Mazorra Hospital were established under the new medical regime post 1959; as such they were viewed positively.

Artefacts made by patients are sold to visitors and do not involve any menial or subcontracted work from any other agency. This suggests that there are not the negative connotations connected to this practice as there may be in other contexts with different histories. As such the importance of money is relative to need and survival and must be contextualised. The economic situation in Cuba in 1970 previously described must be borne in mind as must the ongoing and shameful correlation between mental health and poverty which is not confined only to developing countries (Patel and Kleinman, 2003).

Empowerment as a Therapeutic Outcome

While it has not been the objective of this paper to assert that Eiríz was an art therapist or that *Arte popular* was a form of therapy, it is suggested that there were therapeutic outcomes.

These outcomes appear to be increased personal autonomy and self esteem as a result of a combination of variables; the process of making itself, the realisation that one is able to create beautiful things and the fact that these objects have worth and can then be sold which must then be contextualised with reference to the impoverished economic situation of the participants. The perception of aesthetic and/or economic value can be framed in broadly therapeutic terms with reference to the concept of personal autonomy which is central to the notion of independence (Rodgers and Neville, 2007).

The word 'Autonomy' is derived from the Greek words '*autos*' meaning 'self' and '*nomos*' meaning 'rule', translating literally into the term 'self-rule' (Johnstone, 2004). Applied to practice the concept refers to exercising individual choice, freedom of will, and assuming responsible for one's own behaviour and/or self. Agich (2004) defines autonomy as: equivalent to liberty, self-rule, self-determination, freedom of will, dignity, integrity, individuality, independence, responsibility, and self-knowledge; it is also identified with the qualities of self-assertion, critical reflection, freedom from obligation, absence of external

causation, and knowledge of one's own interest.

These definitions are helpful in understanding why the artist Roberto Fabelo, referred to Eiríz's work as, 'was one of the most revolutionary things that was done in that moment (the Dark Period)...to activate a group in the direction of creation'.

Fabelo's (2000) assertion leads me to reflect the writings of Ernesto Che Guevara (1965) where he discusses the relationship between artistic production (particularly experimental art) within a revolution and the revolutionary production of the New Person; maintaining

that the creation of one presupposed an immediate creative engagement with the other. In brief, in a monumental rereading of Marx and Marxism, Ernesto Che Guevara (1965) discussed the connection between artistic production within a revolution and the revolutionary production of the New Person. He maintained that the creation of one presupposed an immediate creative engagement with the other. In stating that a revolution makes Marxists as much as Marxists make a revolution, Guevara (1965) posited an argument which constituted an opposition to Soviet-style economics, whereby revolutions do not first construct economic changes in order to change other spheres of society subsequently, but rather that revolutions produce the New Person (aesthetically, ethically, and ideologically) simultaneously with the production of a new economic base and new workplace relations, all in relation to new political formations.

Guevara's opposition to the Stalinist doctrine of so-called 'socialist realism' a visual language, which the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera also subjected to withering criticism, was argues Craven (2002), of 'fundamental significance for the emergence of a new concept of 'revolutionary art' – or at least a revolutionary way of making art and had a noteworthy impact on the innovative cultural policies within both the Cuban revolution and the Nicaraguan revolution' (Craven, 2002, p.13).

Guevara's (1965) statement is important. His rejection of a social realist aesthetic; his references to free inquiry or freedom of artistic expression; and his assertion that more great art will be produced if greater cultural opportunities and possibilities are created were influential. There is considerable evidence to suggest that to some degree Guevara's

ideas were in fact not only influential but implemented. Certainly, there appears to have been no sustained attempt to impose a Socialist Realism aesthetic in Cuban Art in the early years of the Revolution. The 'Dark Periods', as they are called in Cuba, when there were 'bouts of stultifying orthodoxy, were to come later; the last of which extended from 1970-75 and corresponds to the advent of Eiríz's self-imposed censorship (Craven, 2002, Hills de Zárata, 2006).

In 1972, the Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal interviewed Castro on his position regarding the arts. He quotes Castro as stating 'I am in favour of the search for all types of style, in music, in painting, in poetry, in drama and in dance'. Cardenal (1972) goes on to suggest that in Cuba 'there is no attempt made to create an art that can be understood by the people, rather the attempt is to educate the people to the point that they can understand art...I was told that this has been the official policy of the Revolution...The socialist realism of the Russians was merely so much shit. Cuba, they said, had found its true socialist realism in Pop Art' (Cardenal, 1972, p.189).

It may also have found its true expression of cultural democracy in *Arte popular*. Following the definition offered by Adams and Goldbard (1995) cultural democracy encompasses several interrelated concepts. First, it posits that many cultural traditions co-exist in human society, and that none of these should be allowed to dominate and become an "official culture". It places great value upon **cultural diversity**; proposing the preservation and promotion of cultural activities from the full array of traditions present in any community, not from just one of those traditions. A second component is participation. Cultural democracy proposes a cultural life in which everyone is free to participate. This means several things. The right to free expression must be protected as censorship and restriction of freedom are obviously not compatible with a dynamic cultural life. People must have access to the means of expression, as well as help in learning to use them. Lastly, the idea of cultural democracy is that cultural life itself should be subject to democratic control. We need to participate in determining the directions that cultural development takes; from having a voice in the public cultural issues that concern us; from how we are educated and what we are taught...to how our political system operates (Adams and Goldbard, 1995).

'Culture, in this sense, is an all-encompassing idea: it contains the arts, politics, the built environment, and the entire array of voluntary activities that are part of human life. If we are to act effectively in the world, we have to understand the interrelatedness of all aspects of culture, rather than succumbing to the view that each aspect is a specialized enclave, best left to experts...culture must be seen as a public interest' (Adams and Goldbard, 1995).

Arte popular, as it developed in the early 1970's reflected these values which are not so far removed from what Guevara proposed in 1965.

Eiríz: A Forerunner of Art Therapy in Cuba.

I have asserted that there is a clear line of continuity between Eiríz's work in *Arte popular* and her work as an artist and art teacher.

Regarding Eiríz's contribution to thinking about art as a therapy, the documentary materials relating to *Arte popular* tend to emphasise the community involvement aspect of the work but as previously indicated there is a notable lack of definition, little analysis and no mention of therapy. On the other hand, the data collected from correspondents between 1999 and 2000 suggests that she initiated what appears to have been an early flowering of art therapy practice in Cuba and that this contribution was much more substantial than previously assumed. Despite the fact that Eiríz did not set out with the stated objective of offering 'art as a therapy' there is little doubt that she and those who worked with her were aware of the therapeutic implications of the work.

As Waller (1992) notes with reference to Dalley (1987) 'some art therapists maintain that it is the involvement in the process of visual creativity itself that aids integration of the self and is, therefore, healing' (Waller, 1992, p.87). While it is doubtful that Eiríz would have defined herself as an art therapist her general approach reflects this concept.

It is also suggested that Eiríz was ahead of her time in offering workshops to entire communities and that this practice constituted what is now known as social inclusion. The fact that these workshops were facilitated in community settings may in part explain why

the term therapy does not appear in any of the documentary material as such practices in Cuba, were and still are, generally thought of as clinical and the domain of health care professionals. There may also be a linguistic factor here as it is arguable that the word therapy in English is used more inclusively than in Spanish; the latter case having strong medical connotations.

A case can also be made for the positioning of Eiríz as a 'forerunner' of art therapy in Cuba. Waller (1991) in her history of the development of art therapy as a profession in Britain (1940-1982) draws attention to this term as it is employed by Ben-David and Collins (1966) to describe how a profession develops from the interests of a few people, the 'forerunners', who pave the way for a 'new idea' to emerge. This 'new idea' is developed by others who establish an 'interest group' and so 'found' a discipline; the 'founders' then teach the 'followers' (Waller, 1991, p.36). Gilroy (1998; 2006), referring to Waller's earlier work, also draws upon this construct in relation to reflecting on the development of art therapy around the world which suggests that it may be useful in thinking about the development of art therapy practice within an international comparative context.

Of particular utility is Waller's (1992) discussion of difference. Referring to the work of Ben-David and Collins (1966) she addresses the fact that art therapy means different things to different people. Waller (1992) shares their interest in 'knowing how it happens, that at a certain time the transmission and diffusion of ideas relating to a given field become strikingly increased in effectiveness' and draws attention to their suggestion that 'the ideas necessary for the creation of a new discipline are usually available over a long period of time and in several places' (Waller, 1992, p.87). In the case of Eiríz the influences and variables at play are both explicit and implicit.

Importantly and of relevance to the present discussion, Waller (1992) notes that only a few of these beginnings lead to further growth and that this occurs when people become interested in the new idea as a means of establishing a new intellectual identity and particularly a new occupational role. Both the data and the literature point to the fact that Eiríz developed the first initiative in the early 1970's when, following her retirement from teaching and decision to stop painting, she took on the responsibility for education and culture in the CDR in her neighbourhood of Juanelo. Her ensuing involvement with

Almendros, Hernández, Rodríguez Lazo and Nasser illustrates the development of the 'new idea' and its dissemination via differing trajectories. This process is known as 'role-hybridization' which involves the individual moving from one role to another, such as from one profession or academic field to another (Ben-David and Collins, 1966, p.459). Furthermore, the conditions or variables at play leading to this process can be identified and, it is suggested, used as the basis for eventually building a predictive theory (Waller, 1992). Drawing upon these ideas, it is possible to postulate that Eiríz constitutes what has been defined as a 'forerunner' of the trend of therapeutically orientated community based work as documented by Cardoso (1973), Valdés and Chavez (1974), Eligio (1987), Martínez (1995), Lao' Izaguirre (1998), Nasser (2000) and Abreu (2004); a trend which is currently represented in the work initiated by the historian Eusebio Leal and the art therapist Ulises Cruz in Havana Vieja (Leal, 2000). Cruz knew Eiríz and was familiar with her work while Nasser who had worked closely with her went on to run workshops for redundant workers in Havana Vieja and viewed his intervention there as therapeutic.

Ben-David and Collins (1966) distinguished 'forerunners' from 'founders' by whether or not they had students who followed them. Those who were not the students of a discipline but who trained their pupils as such are the 'founders' of the new discipline. Their disciples are the 'followers'. Only 'founders' and 'followers' can properly be thought of as art therapists (Waller, 1991, p.36).

An examination of the Cuban experience suggests that while Eiríz can be thought of as a 'forerunner', the 'founders,' of art therapy in Cuba were Cruz, Nasser and Ana Maria Erra Guevara. However, apart from offering training sessions to interested groups, none of these individuals have gone on to train art therapists. Meanwhile, the 'followers' of the community based work inspired by Eiríz, although they remain engaged in community based work with vulnerable groups and train others in the techniques of papier mâché, have not identified themselves as 'founders' of art therapy

It therefore seems appropriate to describe Eiríz as a 'forerunner' of art therapy in the same current as Cruz et al. and as a 'founder' of community art; her 'followers' being Migdalia Hernandez, Mercedes Rodriguez Lazo amongst others; the 'forerunners' of community art would include figures such as Guevara, Fernández Retamar and others who promoted cultural democracy.

In 1993, following a period of ill health, Eiríz moved to Miami and returned with renewed energy to art-making and exhibiting (Martínez, 1995).

Vereda tropical (Tropical Path) was among the last paintings that Eiríz worked on. The title according to Anreus (2004) is derived from a popular song of the 1950's, in which a man remembers kissing a woman in the evening while walking on a tropical path toward the sea. While it is a romantic song intended to evoke a happy carefree life, it is in the context of Cuban-American exile, part of the narrative of nostalgia in which, Anreus (2004) suggests, the past is recreated as a lost utopia.



Figure 4: Vereda Tropical (Tropical Path), 1995. Oil on canvas, 60" x 66". Estate of Antonia Eiríz.

“ Eiríz transforms the idyllic tropical path of the song into a bleak road on a desolate night, loaded with human remains. A work like this shatters the

nostalgic baggage of the Cuban exile. Beyond this, it evokes contemporary Cuban history as a series of horrors and betrayals in which the human toll, both physical and spiritual, has been terrible...on both sides of the Gulf Stream” (Anreus, 2004: 8).

Antonia Eiríz Vásquez never returned to Cuba. On the 9th March 1995 she died in Miami. Shortly afterwards her house was opened and visitors came to pay their last respects. Miriam Lao’Izaguirre copied the pages of a book where visitors had written their thoughts. Most of these are addressed to Eiríz herself thanking her for having helped them. The shortest and most touching entry is by ‘Papo’ one of her most prolific pupils which reads “Muchos adioses Antonia de Papo” which in translation means “Many goodbyes Antonia from Papo”.

Conclusions

This paper is based on data collected from 1999 to 2001. At that point there was some evidence to suggest that if art therapy were to develop in Cuba in the immediate future it would be within the discipline of psychology. Conversely, developments at the Instituto Superior de Arte de Cubanacan suggested other possible trajectories with links to philosophy, aesthetics and psychology within the context of art education. This trajectory does not feature greatly in the data but stands out in a review of the whole. As such, I am reminded of Lincoln and Guba’s (1982) reference to the importance of difference. They suggest that the central aim of research which uses Naturalistic Inquiry is not the consensus of interpretation, thus illuminating majority views, but a search for the peculiar. The reason for this is that change is ongoing and the dynamic of change, in humans, can potentially and initially be identified in the minority. This can be said to be true of the Cuban Revolution around which this article revolves. It may also be true of what is to transpire in the development of art therapy practice in Cuba. It is certainly true of therapy itself. Ironically, and perhaps appropriately this note of difference emerges from the Instituto Superior de Arte de Cubanacan where Eiríz taught and which Herbert Read, arguably another ‘forerunner’ of art therapy, referred to as the most advanced art school in the World.

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Links:

Tito Cortez sings Vereda Tropical, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znv6BwCBLb4>