TRESPASSERS ON THE HEREAFTER: The Cemetery in Post-Soviet Cuba

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Opened in the late nineteenth century, Havana’s Necrópolis Cristobal Colón is one of the most imposing cemeteries in Latin America. In the decade following Cuba’s 1959 revolution, state-based performances of national mourning and rhetorical strategies that appropriated religious tropes in the consolidation of state ideology cast the cemetery as a site of the revolution’s ostensible immortality. But post-Soviet Cuban cultural expression mines the cemetery as a rich target of inquiry, satire, and critique. This talk explores representations of the cemetery as a cultural “vortex of behavior,” to use Joseph Roach’s term, for unpacking, demystifying, or refashioning residual revolutionary ideals. Drawing on films by Daniel Díaz Torres, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and Fernando Pérez and literary work by Abilio Estévez and Antonio José Ponte, among others, this talk examines the cemetery on the one hand as a ground zero of confrontation with state claims of the revolution’s timeless power and on the other as fertile terrain for dismantling the all-encompassing national communities modern cemeteries—and revolutions—aim to embody and for generating more permeable and exploratory congregations of attachment.

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