REVOLUTION
There was this big man (Fidel) that, together with many, did necessary and grandiose things in response to a historical moment. These were good, positive things: Possibilities for poor people, attention to public policies and health care for poor people. These things still exist today. But my generation (I’m 41), and maybe a little of the next generation, believe that the act of revolutionizing, of progressing, can’t be and shouldn’t be stopped.

We do this through literature, art and music. And a little bit of common sense. So now is the time to ask: Where are we now? What is the way—the direction—of today? We must renounce this romantic dream of “Cuba,” this utopian idea of the collective, and start treating each citizen as an individual. My view of revolution is very personal and painful. In my case, I grew up with this idea that everyone has equal rights to everything. But the reality is very hard, very different. Since Eastern Europe fell, it was a good occasion for us to rebuild Cuba in our own way. Sometimes we think that we are in the worst situation in the world. Maybe this is because we are an island, and people who live on an island think in a different way. Sometimes you also have to think about what people in other countries are experiencing. There is a massive generation gap between those who remember a pre-Castro Cuba and those who do not. The result is two-fold. You have one group who believes that the control and military force are the proper and just way to rule. Their psychological perspective is driven by their military training and has led to the mentality that the current state is both fair and proper. Then, there is the other group that has seen and perhaps experienced what freedom is. This group of young and driven people has led to human rights movements. It is now matter of nurturing the positive and freedom-driven groups to support the youth of Cuba. I’m over seventy years old, and I’ve been a member of the Communist party for fifty years. In fact, I’m an official in the party. In the late 50s, I confronted a higher up because I didn’t agree with certain procedures. I had no fear to do this because Communism isn’t about just following an ideology. It’s about responding to the ideas of other people that are really invested in what you do and those who believe in you. I’m a Communist: One who feels connected to the ideas. The country has experienced constant militarized control from the Castro brothers since the 1959 revolution. Institutionalized military service at a very young age and military schooling have led to generations that no longer remember a pre-Castro free Cuba but only a stagnant 1959 scene that shows no real change in sight. In Cuba, the “Socialism” title is merely a way to appease its international partners. Don’t forget, Cuba is in fact a Communist nation that controls all aspects of daily life: Media, religion, social and individual freedoms, politics and economies.

MEDIA
Before I studied journalism, I wanted to be a writer. I was traveling a lot and thinking about the problems of the world. In 1959, I was in Poland during the year of solidarity, and this experience opened a window to socialism for me. I came back to Cuba and finished my high school studies. Very quickly, I realized that I didn’t want to be a journalist. Here in Cuba, there is a big problem with journalism. It’s not journalism; it’s like a science fiction! You read the newspaper, and you say, ‘I don’t live in this country.’ We definitely have underground media. However, it’s extremely dangerous and difficult to access these forums. People like Yoani Sánchez, who has a blog called Generation Y, write about daily oppression in Cuban life and the political actions needed to resolve this. Underground forums like these are lifelines for people in Cuba. However, there needs to be more done to help expand these efforts. Since most Cubans have little information about what’s going on in the U.S., it’s not important to them. Remember that most people don’t have Internet access. You can’t get American newspapers. Our family and friends don’t talk about the U.S. But, of course, elections are always big news here. The fact that an African-American Democrat was elected to be president was really significant in Cuba. There were expectations that our relationship with the U.S. would improve, just as we expected with Kennedy, Carter and Clinton.

HEALTH CARE
I had surgery at the hospital for the elderly, and it was similar to staying in a hotel. Pretty good service and the food was amazing. I just got out of the hospital and look at how positive I am. My son treats pediatric patients and he’s one of the most prestigious doctors in the city. The problem with the hospital is not that the government doesn’t actually keep them operating effectively; the problem is that they’re pretty old. Most hospitals were built in the 1940s and ’50s, and the buildings and equipment need to be updated. We are a poor country, and we just don’t have the money to fix them. I’m not going to blame the system or government, but I will admit the problems. I will also say that I’m very proud of our health care. The health care situation is not simple. By law, everyone in Cuba is entitled to much more and better medical treatment than here in the U.S. (and elsewhere). But the extreme lack of resources makes it very difficult for the Cuban health care system to deliver properly on its promises. Much of the equipment involved in routine diagnostics and treatments is from the U.S. and because of the blockade, Cuba must buy and pay for replacement parts through a third country. This is extremely expensive and not efficient. Some countries also demand cash payments and do not offer credit. So, preventive care in Cuba is wonderful, for the most part, but more serious health care is compromised by the economic and political situation. Also, there are certain hospitals for foreigners and others for common folk.

ARTS
This year is the 11th Havana Art Biennial. It’s going to be in public spaces and have direct exchange with the public. I don’t think Havana is ready for that. There are so many levels of bureaucracy that will limit the artistic possibilities. Cuba is a country that is interested in art and cultural exchanges, but it is always ready to participate, and this is very gratifying for artists. It’s just the bureaucracy that will stop this interaction from happening. Back in 1993, many people in my town would rig their antennas to get U.S. programs. My first exposure to modern music was hip hop on Soul Train (Public Enemy, Q-tip and Busta Rhymes). I liked everything about it. The sound, the flow, the energy. In 2001, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs gave a speech saying that he was about to legalize rap music. No one ever knew that it was illegal! The government began institutionalizing rap music as a way of controlling it. There are very few spaces for youth to express themselves in politics. We do that through hip hop. For us, it’s the music of this generation’s coming revolution. Humor is inherently political. Before the revolution, humor was dangerous and taboo. People knew that if they laughed about the government, they would be arrested. Even dictators like Batista knew the power of humor. He persecuted comic artists. After the revolution, the political corruption stopped, but the directness that one asks for in humor stopped as well. When the official press refused to reflect reality during the 1980s and the special period that followed, we were fortunate that the visual arts stepped up to provide a space for critical expression. Artists used their creativity to push the boundaries of what was allowed. Artists created posters and murals that spoke of the need for change, including allowing the privatization of businesses. When I was in the Soviet Union, I lived that moment of transition to Russia. They did what I think Raúl is creating: The appearance of privatization. This lie will keep people happy for a while. But it will not solve the biggest problem: People need money to have a choice beyond survival.
COCINA DEL CONFLICTO