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26/01/2018



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Photo: Yuris Norido / CubaSi

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—The 27th International Book Fair will be dedicated to your work. How did you take that news?

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"When I look at all that, I consider that I have done something, I would have wished to do more; once and several times I said that I would need a loam of one life, another more, to be able to do what I want, with the same dedication, as when I climbed stairs in three steps together, as when I travelled long distances daily to reach places".

"I remember that once an old man approached to me, perhaps he arrived in a timely moment of my life and said: "Listen, I know a technique that perhaps you may remember from your childhood; mothers used to preserve the first year's little shoes turned into metal: I own that technique; but I am leaving and I do not have family or anyone to leave it with; I am not coming to give you the secret of my work; I am coming to ask you to give me your shoes, those which you have walked through Havana with".

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"Suddenly, children, youngsters began to appear... Even, in a meeting among intellectuals, Fidel told me: "There's a boy here, son of a friend of ours, Katiuska Blanco, who has replied to me that he wants to be Eusebio Leal's successor, when I asked him what he wanted to be".

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—Havana will celebrate its 500th anniversary next year. How will the historic center of the city take on that festivity?

—Havana has many historic centers. I have already renounced to speak with absolute sense about the historic center. The historic center is perhaps a starting point. But, there are many starting points: in El Cerro, in Marianao, in Miramar, in La Vibora, in Diez de Octubre, in San Francisco de Paula.

"When we talk about the anniversary we not only talk about that past event of the ceiba tree: that is very nice, and we will remember it: El Templete is restored, as well as the paintings, the columns; and the 500th anniversary tree is planted. Two years ago, the other tree showed signs that its time was over and we had to plant another. This morning, I went there early and saw that the ceiba tree was full of green vine shoots.

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"Everyone who arrives in Havana says "What a wonder! What a mystery! What city is this?" Even decadent, as Havana is, when you touch it, it revives. Wherever you touch it, except what falls beaten that will always be less than what has been lost in this continent; in the interests of a misinterpreted modernity it was savagely demolished ...

"Havana, for a series of events, has remained in its urbanism and splendor until today. We must touch it with love and prevent its "suburbanization". And above all: we must take care of those who live in it.

"Being a Havanan cannot be a sign of superiority, but to be so (as Alfredo Guevara rightfully said), you need certain refinement, which is born from culture.

"Fidel used to say (and I do not like to quote him very much, I prefer to follow what he taught me instead) that Revolutions were daughters of ideas and culture. Without culture there is no idea, without ideas there is no culture: this is a dialectical and harmonic relationship.

“It is necessary to see what Cuban culture does from this city. It is the 500th anniversary for a ballet, for all Cuban music, for poetry, for legal tradition... But this is also the city of the literacy teachers, the city of the sugar-cane cutters, the city of the glorious and unyielding militia, the city of students, the city of workers, where political movements sprung up...

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