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WAITING FOR THE BLACKOUT

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF AN INSTITUTIONALIZED WAITING PROCESS IN CUBA

ESPERANDO EL APAGÓN. ANÁLISIS OPERACIONAL
DE UN PROCESO DE ESPERA INSTITUCIONALIZADA EN CUBA

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Palabras clave

Cuban blackouts, Discontinuous materialism, Waiting, Operations, Institutional waiting

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Resumen

This study explores the waiting processes associated with blackouts in Cuba from an operational perspective grounded in Discontinuous Materialism (DM). By conceptualizing these processes as sociohistorical institutions, the research examines culturally established actions and strategies, transmitted across generations to confront these phenomena, through empirical case studies and sociocultural analysis. This approach reveals the historical and social impact of blackouts and the associated waiting processes on contemporary Cuban life, as well as the learning and transmission of skills needed to face these challenges. The operational perspective highlights community resilience and solidarity amid instability, offering valuable insights for managing similar crises by social actors and communities alike. Although limited by the sample size and its geographic and cultural scope, this study aims to lay a foundation for future research on waiting processes and the contemporary social history of Cuba.

Key words

Apagones en Cuba, Materialismo discontinuo, Espera, Operaciones, Espera institucional

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Abstract

Este estudio explora los procesos de espera asociados con los apagones en Cuba desde una perspectiva operacional basada en el materialismo discontinuo (MD). Al conceptualizar estos procesos como instituciones sociohistóricas, la investigación examina las acciones y estrategias culturalmente establecidas, transmitidas entre generaciones para enfrentar estos fenómenos, a través de estudios de caso empíricos y análisis de fenómenos socioculturales. Este enfoque revela el impacto histórico y social de los apagones y los procesos de espera asociados en la vida contemporánea cubana, así como los procesos de aprendizaje y transmisión de capacidades para afrontar estos desafíos. La perspectiva operacional destaca la resiliencia y solidaridad comunitarias en contextos de inestabilidad, ofreciendo información valiosa para la gestión de crisis similares tanto por actores sociales como por comunidades. Aunque el estudio está limitado por el tamaño de la muestra y su enfoque geográfico y cultural, busca sentar bases para futuras investigaciones sobre procesos de espera y la historia social contemporánea en Cuba.

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INTRODUCTION

The pervasive and recurrent historical occurrence of *apagones* (*blackouts*) in Cuba imparts significant societal relevance. Based on historical and empirical evidence, the hypothesis can be established that these phenomena are deeply embedded within the Cuban social imaginary and constitute actual social institutions. They are closely associated with periods of acute economic, social, and political crises, forming a distinct socio-historical, cultural, and political phenomenon. These phenomena have served as particularly potent symbols of the so-called "*período especial*," Cuba's social and economic crisis following the collapse of Eastern European socialism. Furthermore, they have been widely linked to the severe Cuban crisis that spurred the mass protests of the summer of 2021, referred to in Cuba as 11-J (Ayala & Behar 2023, García 2022, Vasconcelos & Mason-Deese 2021). In the Cuban context, blackouts stand as a tangible reminder of the collective traumas (Alexander *et al.* 2004) endured by the Cuban people during all these periods.

The blackout seasons in Cuba do not occur randomly; rather, they unfold over specific periods that extend across time and space for various reasons. Alongside these "no light" periods, there are times when services function, but people are aware that this stability is temporary and will soon end. As a result, actions must be taken to prepare for the next power outage. Cubans colloquially refer to these intervals between blackouts as "alumbrón" (light-up), describing those moments when power is restored briefly before the next blackout. People adjust their activities and routines within these intervals, anticipating the upcoming disruption.

One of the most common associations identified when examining these phenomena and their impact on Cubans is the classification of blackouts as a waiting process, demanding a range of actions, strategies, and dynamics—both individual and collective—to endure extended periods without electricity. Within this operational framework, the blackout emerges as a social waiting process with two sides, both shaped by the actions required to navigate the alternation between periods of electrical service absence. These actions are articulated individually and socially.

This dynamic, filled with a multitude of actions, challenges the conventional understanding of social waiting processes as primarily passive periods. Far from being ad hoc or improvised responses, these operations are part of collective dynamics rooted in established operational frameworks, where shared cultural practices, symbols, rationalities, and logics are evident. Furthermore, this institutionalization plays a crucial role in the sociocultural and historical transmission of these successful mechanisms within social memory, enabling resilience across generations and sustaining the capacity to endure these cyclical periods throughout contemporary Cuban history.

This paper examines the characteristics of waiting process related to Cuban blackouts in three short case studies. These cases were observed within the larger research[2]

2 The cases analyzed are part of a broader investigation into social waiting processes amid Cuba's social

conducted in the summer of 2022 in Camagüey City, Cuba. These three cases encompass the significant aspects of waiting within institutionalized blackouts, among more than twenty cases analyzed. The study period is framed at the beginning of the major social crisis in Cuba in the Twenty Century.[3] The waiting operations of Cubans, as social waiters, will be described utilizing a set of categories specifically designed to analyze waiting processes from the perspective of Discontinuous Materialism[4] (DM) (Bueno 1972, Pérez-Jara 2022). Theoretically, this paper inscribes itself in the major effort that seeks approach the waiting studies among the social sciences to the gnoseological field of institutions. Empirically, it also aims to leave a testimony of one of the most recent Cuban social crises, yet marginally studied by the social and historical sciences.

Waiting as institutions, a new theoretical and methodological approach for its analysis

This work is distinguished by its interdisciplinary approach, integrating concepts and methodologies from social history, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology in the empirical analysis of waiting processes. Through the application of the Discontinuous Materialism (DM) paradigm, it offers a novel perspective for understanding complex social and historical phenomena, demonstrating how diverse disciplines can converge to provide a deeper insight into crises in complex contexts, such as those in Cuba.

The DM is a Philosophical Materialist system developed by Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno Martínez (1924-2016), which differs from idealism, spiritualism, monism, formalism, and the Positivist Materialism often associated with historical and Dialectical Materialism (Alvargonzález 2024). It breaks the dichotomy between the spiritual substance (non-material) and the material substance (non-spiritual) by proposing a notion of matter broader than tangible objects (Pérez-Jara 2022).

From the DM perspective, some social waiting processes could be analyzed as social institutions (Ongay 2008) embedded in what Gustavo Bueno (1978, 2009) calls the "anthropological space", which is no other than the framework of humans' relation with phenomena of their surrounding world. From this institutional perspective, in the waiting processes could be identified all the "*cumulative characteristics*" (Ongay 2008) that Gustavo Bueno's DM associates with social institutions.

crises. In addition to institutionalized waits due to blackouts, the study examined waits for essential goods, migration processes, and access to foreign currency. Given the extensive material, this article addresses only a selection of cases, acknowledging the limitations of this brief sample.

3 This study is set at the onset of the current crisis, highlighting its importance in understanding a chapter of Cuba's recent history. Unfortunately, as of late 2024, Cuba is experiencing one of its most severe blackout seasons in recorded history.

4 This philosophical framework is often called 'Discontinuous Materialism' (DM) in the English translations and commentaries of Bueno's work (Ongay 2022, Pérez-Jara 2022). In Spanish, it is termed 'materialismo filosófico' (Philosophical Materialism –PhM–). Throughout this paper, I will predominantly use the term DM for the convenience of English-speaking readers, as this is the most commonly used English designation.

According to this theory, it is possible to say that, as institutions, there are social waiting processes that have 1) *hylemorphic structure*; 2) they are *morphological cultural* units of a *systemic order*; 3) present a *recurrence or coexistenciality*; 4) a *rationality*; 5) a *normativity*; and 6) an *axiology* (Bueno 2010).[5]

From this perspective, certain waiting processes can be understood as objective phenomena that transcend the specific temporal nature often attributed to them (Dobler 2020, Gasparini 1995, Schweizer 2008). In other words, these processes are not ad hoc phenomena that solely result in negative experiences for the individuals immersed in them.

Following Bueno's institutional approach, one could argue that certain waiting processes are "corporeal totalities in which a matter and a form can be distinguished" (Bueno 2005, p. 21), aligning with the first cumulative characteristic (1). This corporeal entity allows these processes to be observed from an external (etic) perspective, while also presenting an internal logic (emic) for those involved (2).

Additionally, regarding waiting as an institution, it can be argued, consistent with Bueno, that these processes exist because they "coexist with other" (Bueno 2005, p. 23) institutions (4). This coexistence is evident in institutional waiting processes, as they follow the inherent internal logic of this type of waiting (5), often exhibiting a normative structure. Finally, institutional waiting processes are undeniably axiological, imbued with ethical or moral significance, which is often perceived as negative.

To further elucidate this theory, I will examine empirical waiting processes related to blackouts and "light-up" periods in Cuba through the lens of these characteristics.

DISCUSION

The blackouts as sociocultural institutions in the Cuban context

Blackouts are certainly cultural institutions in the Cuban social context, but they are not only observed in Cuba. They are also present across the Hispanic-American sphere, influencing this area's artistic, literary, and other artistic productions. *El apagón* (*The Blackout*) entitles short movies, books, stories, paintings and principally songs all around the continent. It is possible to find examples in countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Panama, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Cuba and many more. Blackouts are portrayed in various ways in these productions, reflecting each country's cultural fabric.

In Cuba, the subject has been addressed in no small measure. Its popularity among composers and artists is generally reborn with the successive waves of blackouts the island historically suffers every few years. In the 1990s, during the acute economic crisis resulting from the fall of the socialist camp, the above- mentioned "special period"

5 To gain a comprehensive understanding of the institutional nature of the waiting process in its entirety, please refer to: *Waiting as institution. Notes for an institutional analysis of human waiting processes from a Discontinuous Materialism perspective* (Avila 2023).

(Celaya 2019), the constant *blackouts* that overwhelmed the Cuban population inspired very popular songs and artistic creations. This is the case of the painter Pedro Pablo Oliva, who paints *El Gran Apagón* as a sort of Picaso's Cuban *Guernica*,[6] which is reflected in the multitude of symbols associated with the *apagones* on the island.

Similarly, the Cuban singer-songwriter Frank Delgado, in his 1995 song, "Cuando se vaya la luz, mi negra" ("When the blackout came, my love"), features verses such as these:

> When the lights go out, my love, we are going to undress early, it has its charm, like people in the countryside. The bad thing is that without water and a fan we will end up sticky and sweaty like in a marathon.[7]

Although *blackouts* decreased after the most severe years of the special period, they did not disappear completely (Vazquez *et al.* 2015). An example of this is the song by Cuban popular music singer Cándido Fabré, who in 2005 released *El apagón* (*The blackout*), in which he addresses the problem through neighbourhood scenes of the phenomenon.[8]

However, it is not only in popular art that we can see the recognition of these realities. Other parts or dimensions of society in Cuba have also echoed this phenomenon. This case is common in Cuban political discourse, where this theme has remained constant. On July 26, 1994, Raúl Castro pointed out the most important date in the revolutionary calendar in his traditional speech. Thanks to "the heroic resistance of the country" and Fidel's leadership, Cuba had withstood a fall in "domestic GDP" of up to "34.8 %", a significant deterioration in the food supply of Cubans, who also suffered "blackouts of 16 and up to 20 hours a day" (...) (Martínez 2022).

In 2020, during the previously discussed situation, Cuban President Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel Bermudez pointed out that priorities had to be established and all sources of savings had to be sought because much electricity was still being wasted. He said it was necessary to be efficient "to get out of peak hours with large consumers, to protect the population and also essential production such as food production. The important thing is to think and manage, to maintain priorities, amid constraints" (Martínez 2020).

In 2022, amidst a surge in Cuban blackouts, the Minister of Energy and Mines stated, "We must work to achieve a reliable, stable, and safe electrical system to support our country's development" (Díaz 2022). According to the leader, some large-scale events occurred in 2022, which added more problems to the existing ones.

The government position reflexed in the articles illustrates the *rationality* and *normativity* of blackouts, two of the already mentioned cumulative characteristics of these phenomena that classified them as social institutions, observable across the social structure. Moreover, it evidences its *systemic ordering*, which is also observed in Cuban

6 https://pedropablooliva.com/project/el-gran-apagon-un-guernica-cubano/.

7 Translated from the original Spanish: *Cuando se vaya la luz, mi negra, nos vamos a desnudar, temprano tiene su encanto, como la gente en el campo. Lo malo es que sin agua y sin ventilador, acabaremos pegajosos y sudados, como en un maratón.*

8 https://www.jiosaavn.com/lyrics/el-apagon-lyrics/SQUBeztocAs.

social networks where numerous allusions to blackouts and their multiple structural causes and consequences.[9] Many of these posts also provide evidence of the *hylemorphic structure* and the *normativity* of this institution in Cuba, revealing the supposed logic and orders behind the systems and algorithms that organize and plan the blackouts. These systems are socialized in governmental alternative networks where people also share information, based or not, about the possible future of the crisis.

Concerning *coexistence* and interaction with other institutions, the blackouts are inserted in a big institutional structure that connects culture, social life and even internal and international policy. In this sense, the Cuban energy minister's speech mentioned above points out that "*the responsibility for the blackouts lay with the economic, commercial and financial blockade of the* US government" (Díaz 2022) against Cuba. These statements show how the phenomenon and its associated waiting coexist with multiple other institutions with which they establish constant dialectical relations.

Finally, regarding the *axiology* of this institution, it is clear that people are not indifferent to these phenomena. Several empirical examples highlight the generally harmful perception associated with these institutions in Cuba. This *axiology* is evident in the wave of protests during the summer of 2022, where blackouts were suffered along the whole island. One such example is a series of spontaneous protests in various Havana neighborhoods and other municipalities, including Holguín, Matanzas, Boyeros, Habana del Este, Marianao, and Cerro. These protests occurred on the third consecutive day of general blackout and were sparked by growing social discontent over widespread electricity shortages after Hurricane Ian. Participants engaged in pot-banging and road blockades, with the events gaining attention on social media and news outlets such as Deutsche Welle (2022). While awaiting electricity restoration, these protests highlight the negative perception of blackouts. They are significant enough to impose their normative values as moral references.

In summary, the waiting before, during, and after blackouts in Cuba are undeniably embedded within the fabric of social institutions, reflecting their influence and impact on society. In the coming sections, we will examine these waiting processes from the operational perspective developed throughout this research, delving deeper into the complex interplay of factors contributing to blackout institutionalization and their associated waiting processes in Cuba.

The operational framework of the waiting processes; its analysis through the institutionalized waits due to blackouts and lightning in the Cuban context.

Historically, research into social waiting processes has predominantly focused on the temporal dimension, frequently necessitating more substantial representation or ar-

9 https://www.facebook.com/Chatelaine.Larzabal/posts/pfbidoTvet1tKj78Dj4rFNm9t3xYQbPyKYojCnspZxbqNdWjJuMNbdXV9yKnXfw3rQwFkCl.

ticulation of the operational elements within these processes. Nevertheless, some scholars such as Barry Schwartz (1978) Gray (2009), Lungu (2019), Bourdieu (2000), Bailey (2019), Tang (2012), and Fujita (1985) have endeavored to weave operational facets into their explorations. Although these authors have acknowledged the significance of operations, their research predominantly echoes a hyper-temporalization of waiting processes, overwhelmingly focusing on time as the principal component. Gray (2009) and Lungu (2019), for example, concentrate on time's subjective and social value, often equating waiting with squandered time. Bailey (2019) and Tang (2012) propose two types of waiting, 'pure' and concurrent with other activities, yet their work continues to perpetuate an image of waiting as a largely passive, temporal activity. Schwartz (1978) and Fujita (1985), conversely, recognize the operational nature of waiting, but primarily within an organizational or conditional context.

Despite these significant advancements, a comprehensive understanding of waiting necessitates a holistic analysis that recognizes its inherent operational, spatial, and temporal dimensions, while refraining from depicting it as wasted time or an operational void. Unfortunately, until now, studies on waiting have lacked this multidimensional perspective.

From a Discontinuous Materialist (DM) perspective, I assert that social waiting processes possess not only an operational dimension that is crucial to understanding these phenomena. Furthermore, I propose that if any dimension could serve to approach the others in a waiting process, it is precisely the operational one. This does not imply that it is the most important one, but rather that it holds more potential for encompassing the other two, as operations are inherently bound by time and space. Therefore, if my hypothesis is correct and there are no waiting processes devoid of operations, these ones become a suitable variable for a multilevel approach to the waits.

Following a DM analysis, it is not only possible to affirm that waiting processes involve "operative" actions but also to assert that the individuals engaged in these processes, the waiters, are "operative subjects" (Bueno 1992). When examining any empirical instance of waiting, it is essential to consider this premise, as the operations carried out within these processes are not arbitrary or random. On the contrary, they are purposeful and goal-oriented, they are "*intentional objectives*" (Bueno 1992). In other words, they are driven by specific objectives that are either achieved or not, employing strategies that aim at short-term, medium-term, or long-term goals.

According to the definition offered by Gustavo Bueno, *intentional objectives* can be of three types: *aims*, *plans*, and *programs*. Bueno defines aims as "the objectives in their relation to the proleptic subject that proposes them (finis operantis)" (Bueno 1992, p. 11). Plans, in contrast, are understood as "the objectives in relation to other personal subjects they affect". Finally, *programs* are "the objectives considered in relation to the proposed materials (finis operantis)".

These categories prove instrumental for the theoretical framework proposed in this paper. We argue that for a process to be defined as "waiting", it must be rooted in a

structural framework composed of aims, plans, and programs. Without this structure, a process, irrespective of the reasons why it is considered "waiting", cannot be categorized as such. This specifically pertains to waiting processes in a categorical sense, which are the focal point of my analysis and the overall theoretical proposal in this paper. A process failing to meet these criteria may be considered a different phenomenon but cannot be recognized as a waiting process.

These intentional objectives or outcomes are pursued in operational sequences that eventually culminate in the completion of the entire waiting process. I term this final juncture as the "consumptive end," a point where waiting is brought to a halt and all associated operations are finalized. This event signifies the culmination of the waiting process, thereby serving as its definitive terminus.

The concluding moment holds paramount significance for the waiter, as it distinguishes this process from other phenomena, whether similar or not. Among other reasons, a process is identified as "waiting" because we are aware of, or can predict, its possible conclusion. This projection provides a particular point for the waiting process, to which all operations are ultimately linked that I call the final *referent*.

It is worth noting that the progression towards the *consumptive end* of a waiting process is not always a direct or linear journey from start to finish. Institutionalized waiting processes often comprise distinct spatial, temporal, and operational segments. Despite the fact that the consumptive end influences all these segments, each segment may possess its own unique morphology or characteristics.

From the perspective of the entire waiting process, certain operations determine, conclude, or seal these chains of operational segments. Reaching any of these closure points often signals the arrival at a premeditated temporospatial location within the operational strategy. These boundaries or *segmental ends* are not merely abstract or logical; they materialize as tangible and observable objects, processes, moments, signs, or symbols. We might find doors, fences, documents, borders, ceremonies, or calendar dates, among others, in this context. It will employ the term *referentials* to categorize these marker phenomena.

Cuban composer Frank Delegado's in one of his songs exemplifies this segmental morphology referring to Cuban blackouts.

> When the blackout come my love, as a social therapy and so that you don't get a headache from the electricity, we will be sitting around the bonfire, we are going to talk about the same things that Neanderthal Man must have talked about long ago.[10]

The verse highlights both *referentials* and the *referent* of this waiting process. The waiting operations "*sitting around the bonfire we are going to talk*" use as a *reference* "*so that you don't get a headache from the electricity*". These operations form *plans* and *programs* devised in two segments, before the blackout occurs and during the waiting process for

10 Translated from the original Spanish: "*Cuando se vaya la luz, mi negra, Como terapia social, Y pa' que no te calientes, El coco por la corriente, Sentados en la hoguera vamos a conversar, Las mismas cosas que hace tiempo debió hablar, El Hombre de Neandertal*".

the *light-up*. The first segment will start when the second finishes, and the second begins when the first concludes. In other words, one waiting has its *referent* – "*the blackout comes*" – where the other has its *preceding inflection point* or starting moment in time and space.

Another characteristic of waiting operations that can be observed in this context is the construction of an operational framework based on known experiences, whether they are personal or not. According to Bueno's theories, I have referred to these operations as "proleptic" operations implemented by the waiters in these processes. This means that these waiting operations are configured as a prolepsis, aiming towards a specific proleptic end. These proleptic operations involve the recomposition of action chains that are directed towards a distant or projected goal, using past knowledge and experiences rather than future predictions (Bueno 1984). When planning operations within waiting processes, the focus is on the past rather than the future, as some authors consider. In Delgado's song used as an example before, the poet devises a "*social therapy*" to maintain peace at home during a blackout based on his experience in similar situations.

Indeed, the operational reminiscences within waiting processes enable the development of plans and programs for various purposes. This is evident in the analyzed song extract, where the presence of these operational reminiscences allows for the formulation of strategies and actions within the waiting context.

> When the lights go out, my grandmother will start to unleash her bad temper and speak ill of the government. And my grandfather, who is a ñángara, is going to retort to her that it's the fault of imperialism, OPEC and the world market (Delgado 2019).

Drawing on past experiences and knowledge, individuals involved in waiting processes can devise or represent plans and programs to navigate and manage their waiting effectively. These re-presentations are called *anamnesis*,[11] and refers to realized forms or models that inform the constitution of *prolepsis* (plans or programs). The projected future is an effect of anamnesis, based on known experiences rather than creating or anticipating fantasies. It represents the unknown future based on the known past. "*When the lights go out, my grandmother is going to start unleashing her bad temper (...), And my grandfather, a ñángara,*[12] *is going to riposte*".

Examining waiting processes demands careful consideration of the operative framework, which defines objectives and contributes to the established strategies to achieve

11 *Anamnesis*, a concept originally formulated by Plato to mean "knowing through remembering" or a "soul's self-dialogue," was later expanded by Discontinuous Materialism (DM) to include Epicurean ideas of prolepsis —anticipatory projection or planning. Essentially, anamnesis involves the recollection of established forms or models, which serve as blueprints for the formation of prolepsis or future designs. This does not imply that the envisioned future is merely a reverie derived from anamnesis; rather, it represents a reconfigured future. Through the transformative lens of anamnesis, existing elements can be reshaped, reiterated, and interwoven with new components. For example, when the Neanderthal crafted an axe, he was not guided by an image of a future axe but by the memory of a familiar axe or similar tool. Thus, it can be said that prolepsis —the forward-looking projection— emerges from anamnesis, the act of recalling past forms (Bueno 1984).

12 In Cuban slam, sometimes, *ñángara* is a person who collaborates as a compromise with the government.

their global *ends* or *referent*. The category of *reference* aids in identifying segmental ending points of operational chains inside this operational framework. The concepts of *prolepsis* and *anamnesis* reflect the anticipation and retrospective planning mechanisms inherent in the operational dynamics of waiting. These categories underscore the need to comprehend waiting beyond its temporal dimension, demonstrating its operational dimension depth.

Blackout and light-up operational waiting processes, methodological notes for studying them in three case studies in the Cuban context

This study can be classified as descriptive research, adopting a dialectic and critical methodological perspective (Palumbo & Vacca 2020) and analyzing diverse sources related to recent blackouts in Cuba, specifically focusing on the past five years. These sources include magazines, academic papers, journalistic reports, and social media publications. Additionally, it utilizes the micro life history or micro-narrative method (de Pinto 2006, Lara & Antúnez 2014, Man 2013) to describe three waiting processes during blackouts in the city of Camagüey, Cuba, in August and September 2022. These narratives offer insights into participants' social interactions, illustrating how sociocultural, historical, and political contexts shape their personal histories (González 2003).

Data were gathered through participant observation and semi-structured interviews based on three case studies, where participants shared their experiences, testimonies, and perspectives on this pervasive social issue. To protect participant identities, pseudonyms were used, and identifiable information was modified or omitted. The information provided in no way permits the specific recognition of the participants.

The collected data was analyzed according to categories developed for studying waiting processes from the institutional perspective applied here, with the aim of testing the effectiveness of this framework in a real world, empirical context of waiting. This was precisely my intention in this research: to use a focused sample to provide in-depth insights and refine analytical categories, thereby contributing foundational knowledge that may inform and support larger-scale studies in the future.

While limited by a small sample size, this approach highlights the value of focused cases in descriptive research, as they allow for detailed analysis and category refinement, serving as a foundation for broader studies and the advancement of theoretical frameworks.

Discussion. Waiting for the blackout and the light-up in Camagüey city; three micro-stories.

Case 1. Pavel.

During a blackout, I found Pavel, thirty-six, opening a hole in a wall to install grille on a room door in his future family home. He is a software engineer married with Magalis,

thirty-three, who was in the final weeks of her pregnancy. While waiting for the baby to be born, they were building, literally, a tiny house on the empty rooftop of Pavel's mother-in-law's house, who agreed to give it to them so they could be independent. Pavel hammered a chisel to open a hole where he could fix the grille in his door house, to provide protection and comfort to the family. Magalis told me that one of the problems with this house is that it is very hot because it is made of a slab and has a very low ceiling. In Magalis' state, this is dire, causing severe discomfort during blackouts. Pavel said the grille would enable them to sleep with the front door open, allowing air circulation without the risk of theft.

While I was helping Pavel with the chiseling, we talked about other alternatives to this quasi-crafting operation. I told him that we could get an electric drill and that I had a friend who could lend it to us. He replied to me that it was not necessary, he actually had one electric drill, but due the blackouts, it would be a waste of the few hours of electricity if he employs this time opening the hole, which can be done "by hand". According to Pavel, he had to use the limited electricity to complete orders for his foreign employers, whom he works for as a freelancer IT, and his 'official' work at a biotechnology company. "I can install the grille without electricity using a torch, but for web page programming, I need electricity".

Pavel's original idea was to build the room on the house's ground floor. He had the resources to do it quickly and efficiently. However, "these blackouts", he told me, "changed everything". With the intervals between lights and blackouts, I cannot build during the lightning because it would put the whole family in trouble when doing things. "If I had built down there, everyone would have had to suffer because when there was light [electricity], we would have to clean up the dirt that every construction site produces". "Magalis' mother works on a computer at home. If there is electricity, she also must cook meals and catch up on backlogs at the university where she is a professor". "Here, I can get ahead without bothering anyone, I can do it myself, and the women can be quiet downstairs doing other things without me getting in their way with the noise, the dirties and construction work's disturbing".

Magalis told me that these months of waiting for the pregnancy to end "have been terrible". Enduring the heat of the Cuban summer and the plagues without electricity "is a torture". To this must be added the fact that life in the city becomes more complicated with the blackouts. "Imagine yourself, I'm pregnant, but I can't stop doing the normal things in life. I have to queue like everyone else, and I also have to look after the house and go to the doctor. All that, without electricity, is more complicated. More so, without light, it is slower and more complicated. Only now that my belly is showing, I can have priority in the queues because I'm pregnant, but at this point in my pregnancy, I can't stand for so long, so Pavel or mummy have to go and queue, but they are not pregnant, so they don't have priority". All of these she tells me while laughing at the situation's absurdity. Magalis is a lawyer in the same biotechnology company where her husband works. However, due to the advanced stage of her pregnancy, she is currently on leave, as she could give birth at any moment.

Both cases involve the socially institutionalized waiting for blackouts, but Magalis is also waiting for a baby (Kowal 2009), which also involves waiting for her pregnancy's final stages. The operations described in both cases have time and space at their center. For Pavel, waiting occurs in operational segments dictated by the blackouts and the light-ups. First, the operations of the waiting process have as their *intentional objective* the completion of the construction works. To complete this purpose, Pavel has established *aims*, *plans* and *programs* to achieve this *referent* (end). As we have seen, Pavel sets intermediate ends (*referentials*) at different points in the standby process. During the night blackout, he opens the holes for the grille; during the blackout of the day, in a better light, he puts the grille in place. This strategy should fulfill his *aims*.

Moreover, he establishes *plans* that consider other family members' needs, accommodating their activities ("With intervals between blackouts and light-ups, I can't build during blackouts without bothering the family"). In addition, Pavel considers that the blackout takes place at night and that his house is mainly near another house, that of his mother-in-law.

Furthermore, since other houses surround their living space, Pavel must also consider their neighbors' activities. These operations include shared meals, sleep times, celebrations, or socializing during outages, like playing games or conversing. Construction noise could disrupt these activities during similar waiting for blackouts or light-ups. Hence, the surrounding community should be taken into account.

Finally, Pavel also established *programs* that ruled his operations. "I can do this (put up the fences) without electricity, but to programmed web pages, I need to have light (electricity)".

It could be seen that the operational chains led to specific points within the process, limited by specific *referentials*. For example, the three holes, six inches square and three inches deep, at 35 cm each, that Pavel made in the door frame wall during the blackout I interviewed him. These *referentials* delimited the *anchor points*, where operations would begin the next day when the grille would be put in place during the next morning blackout.

Case 2. Ernesto and Doris

Ernesto is seventy-nine-year-old retired men that lived with his wife Doris, seventy-three. He worked for over 40 years in a forestry research center, while Doris was an accountant in the city's hospital. Both are retired and earn the minimum wage a Cuban pensioner can earn. They live in a house located in one of the old part of the city center considered socioeconomically poor.

With two houses on either side and a third one in the backyard, the house has only one open space at the back and another at the front, where the air could circulate. Their house, and waiting space during blackouts, are constructively very decaying. The roof of the upper rooms is in danger of collapsing, so Ernesto and Doris have had to move all

their vital operations to the lower part of the house, which houses the kitchen, a small living room and the former dining room that now serves as their living quarters.

Like many Cubans, Doris and Ernesto rely on electricity for cooking. They discarded alternatives during the Energy Revolution (Guevara-Stone & Ávila 2009, Käkönen *et al.* 2014), when Fidel Castro replaced older cooking methods with modern, efficient electric appliances. The problem with this measure was that, although very beneficial at the time, it was impossible to maintain over the years. As noted above, blackouts come periodically but have never completely disappeared. By the 2022 summer crisis, many of these electrical types of equipment were already discontinued or obsolete and had to be repaired or replaced by others.

Because of their socioeconomic status, Ernesto and Doris cannot access or afford any renovation in this sense, so they have constantly repaired the old ones, using the inventiveness of the Cubans. As Doris told me, their *operations* are temporally structured as follows. From 3:00 am to 4:44 a.m., in the light-up, they cook the day's food while waiting for the blackout, as electricity is available, and they need to "get ahead" before it goes out. From 4:45 a.m. until 4:59 a.m., it is breakfast time. Here, they make coffee, and if *"by some miracle"* there is milk or something to put on the bread, it is also heated.

At 5:00 a.m., the blackout began. Ernesto and Doris have breakfast without electricity and await the next light-up. The operational *reference* is *chronologically* set at noon; they warm the food prepared early and have lunch when the afternoon light-up starts. They use the remainder of the electricity schedule to plan domestic operations such as ironing or washing clothes at certain moments. Simultaneously, they turn on the TV to watch the news, especially about the planning of the blackouts, the repairs of the thermoelectric plants, and the country's electrical generation capacity of that day.

"We, the Cubans, are experts in many things", Ernesto told me. "We know about hurricanes, COVID-19 cases, vaccine development, and now, blackouts. We're knowledgeable about thermoelectric plants, missing parts, generation capacity, and even fuel shipments". This information allows Doris and Ernesto to set their prolepsis more efficiently. Doris watches the news daily, hoping that the blackouts have been resolved.

Around 4:00 p.m., after pre-cooking the food for dinner, they turn on the only fan in the house and wait for some friends visit them. They "always come by" to make them their last coffee beforehand. In this temporal window before the arriving to the *referent* (the end of the waiting for the blackout), which will take place at 5.00 p.m., they also open the fridge for the last time to drink at least some fresh water before closing it in perpetuity until the next light-up. Doris told me that her fridge is "no longer good", that it is losing its coolness and that she cannot allow "the little food they have, spoiling because of the heat".

At 5:00 p.m., they eat their still-warm dinner and wait for the next morning's light-up. Doris and Ernesto's house is hot, with limited air circulation from the entrance door. Cool air brings in noise from the neighbourhood, where others' *waiting plans* often dialectically clash with their own strategies.

To wait for the lights-up and get through the blackout, activities such as chatting on the pavements, playing dominoes in the street, or playing traditional children's games, in which many kids participate, are implemented. In Cuba, it is common for children not to go to bed until the lights come on, as the heat is unbearable.

For Ernesto and Doris, many of these operations are impossible due to their precarious *logistics* for waiting. Doris and Ernesto do not have any battery-powered electrical equipment that flourishes in the Cuban informal market and allows some to maintain routines like those sustained when there is power. This lack of resources forces them to change their sleeping and waking routines. For them, the day would end around 6:00 p.m., at which time they would go to bed to try to sleep with doors and windows closed so that the "noise of the street" would not wake them up, for they had to get some rest before dawn when this whole cycle begins once again.

In tempo/operational terms, Ernesto and Doris' waiting processes are distributed in two large segments: blackout and light-up hours. When the data for this research was collected, the cycles within each segment changed at least three times. Initially, the time segments were distributed in cycles of 12 hours back-to-back, i.e. 12 blackout hours and 12 daylight hours, varying only in the start and end times of these cycles.

The electricity company later established 6-hour alternating cycles for "better organization" of operations. In this cycle, the distribution was as follows, from 5 a.m. to 11 a.m. blackout, from 11:01 a.m. to 4:59 p.m. light-up, from 5:00 p.m. to 10:59 p.m. blackout, and from 11:00 p.m. to 4:59 a.m. light-up. The first days of September 2022, when part of the research data was collected, was the cycle followed by the light-up and blackouts. Hence, this was the cycle of Ernesto and Doris' waits, which we have analyzed.

In September of that year, 2022, the same electrical company changed once again the blackout/light-up cycles. Although they were supposed to maintain the same length, the duration of the blackouts and light-up periods were reduced to different intervals, varying by zone and day of the week. The company provided a schedule for these periods through social media and other channels, but this measure only lasted a few days due to protests of Cubans. Instead, a random system was established where the electricity could be turned off or on at any time.

Just at the end of that month, a few weeks after my interview, the increase in the number of hours of blackouts led to a wave of popular revolts across the country demanding the restoration of electricity. Thus began the hardest days of the crisis. Given the impossibility of adjusting operations with a known temporal order, tasks such as preparing meals and charging phones became unviable due to service unpredictability. This whole situation meant that the waiters needed help to articulate their *plans* and *programs* as they had been doing. From the categories we have been proposing, the *prolepsis* became very complex due to the lack of *anamnesis*, as it was unknown when the electricity would come, which prevented planning.

This does not mean the institutional character of waiting for blackouts or light-up changes. On the contrary, it only adopted one of its possible morphologies. Specifi-

cally, it went from being in socio-family and socio-community relations to intensifying its socio-political dimension. In this sense, although the operations described above were maintained in the two orders mentioned above, family and community, this does not mean that the blackouts as an institution did not have a socio-political and socio-cultural dimension.

As the articulation of operations in these spheres was prevented by an unstructured normativity at the governmental level, in the communitarian spaces of the waiting process, bottom-up operations were activated, aimed at mobilizing, and demanding the normative restructuring of the blackouts, in order to be able to *"normalize"* the microsocial operations involved.

In short, standby operations shifted from pursuing domestic and micro-social goals to pressuring mezzo and macro-social levels to adjust temporal planning irregularities, enabling an organic and proleptical waiting operational framework.

Case 3. Waiting for the blackout at Aurora's talk show.

A qualified doctor, Aurora, is 62 and lives alone with a severe knee problem. Her daughter Ana Carla lives in the United States and provides Aurora all financial support to manage the difficulties in the new blackouts season. Aurora resides in a single-room house on a street corner that intersects with one of the busiest roads in the city center.

Aurora's situation differs significantly from that of Ernesto and Doris. She has a more stable financial situation, allowing better management of her waiting during the blackouts. Aurora's home is also better equipped to deal with power outages. While she has electric cooking equipment, she also has a liquefied gas cooker that she can use when there is no electricity. However, Aurora still faces challenges due to the blackouts and must plan her activities around restoring power.

She wakes up at 8:30 a.m. when a social worker arrives to assist her with mobility difficulties and prepares lunch around 10:00 a.m. or 10:30 a.m., using gas and electric stoves. When light-up start, around 11:00 a.m., all the appliances are turned on, and lunch is ready by noon. After lunch, she charges her mobile phone and rechargeable lamps while watching the news to learn about the latest blackout updates.

While charging her mobile phone, Aurora downloads photos and messages from her daughter and friends abroad at 5:00 p.m. During blackouts, she has only a two-hour window for internet access before the network goes down. Aurora explains that this is due to the old batteries in the transmission towers that last for a few hours before the antenna is turned off, cutting off both the internet and mobile phone signal. However, she also has another theory that the government intentionally cuts the internet in areas without electricity to prevent potential revolts or protests. By doing so, images do not circulate in real-time on social networks, preventing simultaneous mass uprisings.

Aurora *plans* her activities using information from various sources, including Cuban TV, WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook groups, and the electricity company's channels.

With this information, she can estimate when the power will go out and come back on and the expected duration of blackouts. The information she collects includes details about plant maintenance work, the availability of spare parts, the price of oil in the international market, and "even the course of the war in Ukraine".

Blackouts affect Aurora's life significantly in two aspects: sleep and communication with her family in the USA. Her house lacks windows, making it difficult to cool her room during hot nights. She cannot use the air conditioning unit even when the power comes on because she never knows when it will go off again, which might damage the air conditioner. Additionally, Aurora's daughter is pregnant with her second grandchild. She waits anxiously for news of the baby's birth, as she cannot go online to check for symptoms or hospital updates during power outages.

To wait for the early morning light-up (from 11:00 p.m. to 4:59 a.m.), Aurora performs her activities in the living room or on the pavement outside her door, where neighbors and friends, who also have no electricity, visit and chat. They discuss various topics, including the ongoing electrical crisis and its socioeconomic and political impact on the country. This time is known as "la tertulia de Aurora (Aurora's talk show).

Aurora and her neighbors gather in blackouts to pass the time and share information. They share news, memes, comments from Facebook and other social networks, and press articles. They also discuss domestic issues and enjoy refreshments such as coffee, sweets, and soft drinks from Aurora or other participants. It is important to note that the waiting logistics for the blackout and operations during this time involve alliances between different waiters.

Aurora's gathering during the blackout usually includes three to six people with varying social and biographical positions. As part of my research, I participated in several of these gatherings, collecting testimonies from other waiters about their strategies for managing the waiting.

There, I knew Sonia's story. She is a young social researcher who works as a lecturer and researcher and also sells whatever she can to make more money for her family. She lives with her nine and seven-year-old daughters and her seventy-seven-year-old mother. Sonia is divorced with no permanent partner. Sonia's strategy focuses on *aims* and *plans* aligned with her daughters' schedules. Sonia implements a morning operations *program* that revolves around the morning blackout but is centered on the moment to take her daughters to school, around 7:00 a.m. After dropping off the girls, Sonia spends the rest of the morning running errands, gathering goods for her business, or going to her formal job to "clock in" since there is little she can do without electricity.

At midday, she usually returns home for lunch as Lucía, her mother, has prepared the meal for her and the girls, who need to be picked up at 1:45 p.m. On arrival, Sonia washes uniforms and irons clothes while ensures the girls do homework before the 5:00 p.m. blackout. When the girls arrive, they take the opportunity to do these chores and see them do their homework. At 5:00 p.m. precisely, and with no time for

regrets, Sonia instructs the girls to leave their homework for later and to get dressed for their dance classes. The youngest girl is taught classical ballet, and the eldest, flamenco dance.

At 5:15 p.m., Sonia leaves with the girls on her electric bicycle, taking them to their academies 4 km away, a 25-minute journey. There, she waits for them to finish their classes and returns with them to the house to carry out the night's operations. Like Aurora, Sonia has some rechargeable light-up equipment and uses liquefied gas for cooking when she cannot use the electric stoves.

In Sonia's case, waiting for blackouts/light-ups particularly affect her daughters. "I am an adult and I adapt, but it's hard for the girls, especially because of the heat, because they can't sleep well until the electricity comes on and we can turn on the fans. It's not easy to get them to do their homework when they don't have even good light to study". Sonia told me as she finished cleaning up the kitchen after dinner. "I can't constantly monitor them, so I had to find an alternative. I bought a mobile phone for each of them, and I gave it to them so that they could entertain themselves while I finished the housework. I know it's not educationally ideal, but what can I do? I don't let them go online without supervision due to poor networks and inappropriate content. I also don't allow phones in school, as it's not their place".

On a different blackout waiting, a retired accountant, Irma Martha, also shared her experience. She mainly talked about a good Samaritan neighbor who provided light to her during blackouts, using a cable from his to her house. She said, "That extension cable doesn't do much, but at least I can charge my mobile phone if I need to, or at least eat with light".

Rubén, the good neighbor, also installed a lightbulb at his door to provide a "little light" to his surrounding community. "The kids come like little bugs to the light when I put the bulb on", he told me when I asked about this action. This lit area became a social hub for children and adults. Rubén recounted, "Sometimes I've counted to 30 kids in front of the house. It's a hell of a row, a racket, but at least they have a place near their homes where they can meet".

When I interviewed him, he also narrated a history of this blackout and waiting days. "Three days ago Xiomara, a neighbor from my block who was a top sportswoman, brought all the children's neighborhood together during a blackout, and entertained them by teaching to play traditional games. You know, '*topao*' (hide and seek), '*1, 2, 3 curro ha he*'[13] and stuff like that. She made an improvised activities plan in the middle of the blackout. It was crazy".

These micro-stories show the incredible alternatives Cubans have implemented to make the waiting process more bearable. My observations revealed numerous dynamics like this, indicating that such stories are not isolated within the context of blackout/light-up waits. Walking through the streets of Cuba during a blackout allows one to see

13 *Topao* and *1, 2, 3 curro ha he*, are two traditional child games.

the tremendous amount of operations that waiters carry out during these processes, which could be thought of as passive and where "nothing can be done".

In Cuba, streets are filled with faces half-lit by mobile phone lights, rechargeable lamps, and various light-up devices not requiring a direct electrical connection. Cubans have learned to store electricity, making rechargeable items like lanterns, power banks, and battery-powered fans essential items. In this particular period, Cubans have learned that just as *anamnesis* of previous crises have taught them, where they have had to learn to store food, water, clothes and everything necessary to subsist, electricity can also be stored used when there lack of it.

In this new context, battery equipment symbolizes luxury and perhaps social status. All these devices and technologies are logistically essential to cope with the blackout/light-up double-faced waiting process. Cubans use technical innovations to make their waiting more viable, demonstrating their resilience and adaptability in adversity.

One night, an interesting phenomenon occurred in Irma Martha and Ruben's block, evidencing the ceremonial/institutional structure of the processes they expect and their operational architecture.

Rubén invited me to observe a Saturday night blackout in his and Irma's block, located in a more "popular"/marginal part of the city. The area is bustling with informal commerce and loud music. On weekends, the intensity of activities increases, and residents "entertain the neighborhood" with shared music.

That Saturday, I planned to see how the area would adapt their operations to electricity absent. However, to everyone's surprise, the power didn't go out. We expected normal weekend activities to resume, but the opposite happened: nobody played music or partied. The block remained quiet until Xiomara, the sportswoman of the anecdote, shouted in frustration about the uncertainty of the power situation and said:

Caballero! Have you seen this? Look at the time, and the light hasn't gone out! I can't stand it anymore; I'm so nervous that I almost go downstairs and turn off the 'catao' *(electrical switch) because I can't stand this uncertainty!*

Rubén and I laughed at the absurdity of the situation. However, the rest of the day remained quiet until the power went out around 5:00 a.m.

Various explanations are possible to analyze this behavior. At least one is related to waiting processes from an institutional/operational perspective. Waiting, since they are perpetually positive material institutions and identifiable as such, sometimes articulate an institutional structure of norms, regulations, logics, values, etcetera, which, even when it does not materialize morphologically, i.e. an observable material institution as such, it imposes itself and sometimes even ends up creating the very situation of waiting for which the operational structure that this institution[14] has been conceived.

14 This scenario may be familiar: navigating airport security belts or following markings on the ground at banks and post offices due to COVID-19 restrictions. These procedures are required even without delays, as they are integral to established operations.

This is precisely what happened that Saturday. The fact that the phenomenon that generates the waiting process as such (the blackout) did not manifest itself did not mean that the operations structured institutionally to deal with it did not manifest themselves. Likewise, these could not develop organically because their manifestations lacked meaning functionally. Hence, although there was no children's fuss around the light bulb, there was also no music, drinks and normal dynamics in these cases. Similar to walking through a web of empty tapes, or having to register on a computer, or take a ticket from one of these shift-organizing rolls, with no one else in line, or even no line at all, we do it quickly, performatively, boringly, and almost ridiculously.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has examined the waiting processes associated with blackouts in Cuba through an operational perspective grounded in a Discontinuous Materialist (DM) theoretical framework. The aim has been to highlight the institutional character of these waiting processes, drawing on extensive sociocultural and historical evidence to understand them as sociohistorical institutions transmitted across generations in recent Cuban history.

By introducing the concept of proleptic operations, I have aimed to describe the culturally established sequences of actions and strategies that structure these waiting processes. This approach also seeks to clarify the interconnections between spatial, temporal, and operational dimensions within institutionalized waiting.

The findings of this focused study offer both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they challenge conventional views on waiting as passive temporal experiences by positioning the actions and strategies of individuals and communities at the center of the analysis. Practically, these insights provide valuable guidance for developing policies and strategies that enhance crisis management and community resilience in scenarios similar to the described.

Through case studies and narrative analysis, this research shows that waiting during blackouts in Cuba reflects a historical cycle of recurring events, deeply embedded in social and cultural institutions. Responses to blackouts are shaped by personal experiences and cultural learning, highlighting the dialectical nature of institutionalized waiting. These cases underscore the resilience, adaptability, and social interdependence of individuals, families, and communities facing infrastructure instability. Coping mechanisms, social networks, and community solidarity are essential in navigating these waiting periods, transforming them into opportunities for social gathering, knowledge sharing, and mutual support.

Briefly, this study aims to deepen academic understanding of waiting processes by shedding light on their operational dimensions and the institutionalization of specific forms of waiting. By recognizing the complex interplay of actors, agencies, and operations in the waiting processes related to blackouts in Cuba, we have contributed to

understanding a historical and social phenomenon that has shaped the island's contemporary history over the past three decades. Additionally, this work seeks to provide a testimonial record of the strategies Cubans use to mitigate the adverse effects of blackouts, highlighting the resilience displayed by individual's waiters and communities throughout these crises.

Despite its contributions, this research has limitations, primarily due to the small sample size and specific geographic and cultural focus, which may affect its generalizability. However, the intention was to use a focused sample to gain in-depth insights that could lay the groundwork for broader studies. Future research could explore how cultural and socioeconomic differences influence waiting processes and related social behaviors.

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