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Fresa y chocolate: A Subtle Critique of the Revolution in Crisis

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Abstract

This article uses Paulo Freire's theories to illustrate Gutiérrez Alea's attempts to continue a dynamic, Cuban revolution in light of what he depicts as a static revolution that has ceased to evolve. In fact, the film under study seems to present the achievements of Castro's revolution as counter-revolutionary since the movement has suffered from bureaucratization, sloganism, and the banking model of education, which are all characteristics of an oppressive regime.

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's film Strawberry and Chocolate is set in 1979 Havana, just prior to the Mariel exodus. The film is polemical and critics disagree on its value as a tool to convey Marxist ideology within the confines of "dentro de la revolución, todo; fuera de la revolución, nada." For instance, Anitra Nelson claims, "Widely acknowledged as the foremost Cuban film maker of his times, Alea's work and career prove him to have been a director critically with the revolution" (99). However, she appears to waver from this point of view and allows that "Fresa y Chocolate seems like the product of a turncoat . . . the product of a mellow and mature film maker, freed from the dogmatic constraints of straight jackets of any kind" (103-104). Contrary to this point of view of a mellow film maker, Emilio Bejel believes:

Beyond a nominal treatment of the theme of homosexuality in Cuban socialist society, the script invites interpretations that take into account the complex tension between heterosexuality and homosexuality, between nationalism and antinationalism (the latter signifying treason within the ideology of the film), between socialism and antisocialism (i.e., capitalism), and between power and desire. (66)

Juan Antonio Serna Servín thinks, "El tema central de la película es la lucha entre la oposición ideológica binaria representada por los dos personajes principales: Diego y David y la lucha por el acceso a la libertad" (159). Julian Paul Smith, nevertheless, opines that, "Strawberry and Chocolate, then, is wholly reliant on that old bogeyman of critical theory (and most particularly of Marxist critical theory): universalism. Its moral, as banal as it is unconvincing, is that people are all the same and that sex is like ice-cream, simply a matter of taste" (32). I believe that the film is a subtle critique of unfulfilled revolutionary promises and the Castro regime, which brought transformation, but not development to the beleaguered island; consequently, Gutiérrez Alea incorporates Paulo Freire's theories to present a praxis of a dynamic revolution rather than celebrate the alleged triumph of a static revolution.

The film opens with a shot of a cheap motel that has holes in the walls, a metaphor for the state of rampant vigilance of the CDR in Cuba where evidently no act is private since governmental surveillance ubiquitously lurks in the shadows as a means to control

thought. Moreover, the holes are a means to practice voyeurism, which suggests that monolithic social mores have been chipped away when being a spectator takes precedence over being a participant. Two students, David and Vivian, are about to have sex in this seedy environment. Vivian complains, “You invite me to the movies but it was really for this!” “All you want is sex, like all men.” She is playing the role of the virtuous woman who must reject amorous advances, just like Elena in Memories of Underdevelopment, an earlier Gutiérrez Alea film. David appeases her by offering to wait until they are married with the consummation of the marriage to take place in a five-star hotel. Of course, this is an empty promise given the dire economic straits of Cuba and its people during the “Special Period” of privation when the film was actually made, especially since only foreign tourists would be able to afford such luxurious lodging. Perhaps, by analogy, this serves as a subtle critique of the Castro regime and his revolutionary promises to improve the lives of ordinary Cuban citizens, who lack the funds to lodge in such exorbitantly priced hotels. Vivian seems disappointed and somewhat indignant that David is willing to wait since she wants to indulge in pleasure rather than abstinence, despite her protests to the contrary. The next scene depicts Vivian marrying an older bureaucrat who can provide her with more possibilities. Still, David attends the nuptials as a spectator, rather than as a participant; hence, his promise is never kept and he loses his love because of his idealism.

Because he decides to wait, he is left in the lurch—just as Cubans who have waited and continue waiting to see the revolutionary promises fulfilled. Implicitly, Gutiérrez Alea maligns the figure of the bureaucrat, a repeated theme in earlier and posterior works such as Death of a Bureaucrat and Guantanamera. The director’s critical stance toward bureaucracy has never wavered from presenting this state apparatus in a pejorative light. In the other two films, the bureaucrat dies at the end of the film, whereas in this one he lives and reaps the rewards of his position through an implicit sense of entitlement.

The next shot is of a wall with “Somos felices aquí” painted on it, as one figure is hiding behind an ice cream cone. Then, two gays, Diego and Germán, stop to admire David. The graffiti is ironic in that not all Cubans are happy and perhaps is a pun at the same time since the gays in the film, “los felices,” use the ice cream parlor as a rendezvous point. On a deeper signified level, the hiding figure represents the oppressed minority (homosexuals) as a metonymic device that represents the masses who practice blackmarketeering and dollar trade clandestinely. Diego sits next to David as Germán sits at the next vacant table to block David’s attempt to move. Diego then pulls out Vargas Llosa’s Conversation in the Cathedral as a flirtatious enticement to lure David to his home since the novel is by a more right wing Latin American at odds with the revolution rather than by a Marxist/Socialist whom the government would approve as appropriate to party ends. In fact, Diego chastises him, “You only read books authorized by the Youth League!” David quickly retorts, “I’ll read what I please.” This scene emphasizes that dissidents still exist on the island and that they strive to evade thought control in a society that must endure official censorship. As the young and naive twentyish student reluctantly agrees to go to Diego’s home to get photos that Diego has allegedly taken of him as an actor in a play, we see the harsh, economic

reality of strangers sharing the ride in communal taxis due to gas shortages. Then, we see a wall in a state of deterioration that bears an image of Fidel, the flag, and Fidel's speech that ends in "Patria o muerte." Is this random homage to the revolution and a celebration of the Cuban ability to endure hardship or a critique that illustrates the crumbling [infra]structure of a failed post-revolutionary Cuba? This slogan recurs in all three films mentioned that deal with bureaucracy, "But to substitute monologue, slogans, and communiqués for dialogue is to attempt to liberate the oppressed with the instruments of domestication" (Freire 65). Given that the bureaucrats in Death of a Bureaucrat and Guantanamo die, it would seem that Gutiérrez Alea is suggesting that the bureaucracy is to blame for the deplorable state of affairs in Cuba; consequently, these functionaries are antithetical to the notion of homeland since "the moment the new regime hardens into a dominating 'bureaucracy' the humanist dimension of the struggle is lost and it is no longer possible to speak of liberation" (Freire 57). Moreover, one may surmise that this level of government should be eliminated since it impedes the development of Cuban society.

Inside Diego's apartment, we see Changó's (Santa Barbara) double-edged ax as well as an altar to Caridad de Cobre, Cuba's patron saint. Like Sergio in Memories of Underdevelopment, Diego is a Europeanized Cuban. He offers David tea, but David prefers coffee. Diego laments, "Civilized people prefer tea, but not us. We prefer coffee." Then he sarcastically sings, "Ay mamá Iné, todos los negros preferimos café." Two things stand out in this scene. First, the contrast between civilization and barbarism that has long characterized Latin American thought as the major problem hampering development. In this case, it seems that Diego is tacitly undermining Roberto Fernández Retamar's celebration of Calibán and the call not to follow the "civilized" world's idea of Ariel the elitist, but rather a Caribbean model that extols the oppressed who have become conscious of their condition. Second, the racial aspect that white people (the refined and civilized) prefer tea and that black people (the unrefined and savage) prefer coffee sets up the question of superiority/inferiority complexes. Since the verb form in the popular song has "nosotros" as the subject, evidently Diego suggests that Cuba is predominantly black and savage, bereft of refined qualities.

Later, Diego offers David his John Donne chair, but David has never heard of Donne. Bejel misinterprets this important scene when he writes:

One of Diego's characteristics that illustrates his ideology is his attitude toward art . . . his attitude toward literature often suffers from a certain superficiality. For example, he is more interested in imagining that one of the chairs in his apartment is "the chair of John Donne" than in trying to understand the work of that great English writer who dared . . . to relate sex and sanctity. (75)

Donne is most famous for his 1633 poem "Death Be Not Proud," which includes the verses:

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
[. . .]
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die. (1101)

Since so much stress is placed on “Patria o muerte,” we are left with an ambiguous message. First, given the either/or choice, “patria” seems to be the logical selection for Cuba and it should awaken from the dormant state of Marxism that had meaning at the beginning of the revolution, but that has become an empty slogan. New ideas need to arise in order to preserve the nation. This line of thought follows Paulo Freire’s idea that a revolution continues to evolve, “However, in seeing change as a sign of death and in making people the passive objects of investigation in order to arrive at rigid models, one betrays their own character as a killer of life” (108). Or should Fidel’s idea of “patria” and the stymied Socialist project be the choice since any deviation from that path would be a route to death for failing to follow the model of the oppressors who have held power for decades? On the other hand, if we have an equation where both terms, “Patria o muerte,” are synonymous, then the notion of Fidel’s “patria” is moribund; hence, maintaining the status quo is a form of death. Later in the film, we meet Nancy, the neighborhood black marketeer who symbolizes this dilemma between “patria o muerte” when she attempts suicide. Bejel believes that “Perhaps what all this means is that *Nancy is that part of the Cuban nation which desperately needs to be saved from suicide*” (71). Given the focus on “patria o muerte,” Bejel’s point suggests that death is not a viable option; hence, the notion of “patria” must be rethought and reconfigured. What Bejel does not elaborate on is what part of Cuba needs to be saved from suicide—perhaps those who choose to create a new revolutionary model on behalf of the “patria” rather than those who would choose death as an alternative. I believe that Gutiérrez Alea, via the reference to Donne, suggests that death shall die.

Donne’s 1623 “Meditation XVII” is also important to consider, for the poet states, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. . . . Any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee” (1108-1109). On one level, this comment demands solidarity and community rather than independence and isolation. On another level, it suggests that Fidel is not the whole island and that Cuba needs to reconsider its policies and that he, as well as Cuba, needs to abandon a politics of isolation. In other words, as Bejel states, “That is, if within the Cuban context of *Strawberry and Chocolate* the Socialist discourse seems dominant and oppressive, from a world perspective this discourse may be considered profoundly marginalized and isolated” (68). Freire espouses the notion that “Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people” (81). These points and the importance of Donne in the film must be considered when Diego asks, “How can a country move forward if its youth don’t know John Donne or Cavalis!” In this regard, Bejel commits the same mistake of which he accuses Diego, a certain superficiality toward the arts, when the former

focuses on the sexual and not the metaphysical aspects of Donne's works. Diego promotes reading the works and understanding them, not merely recognizing the names of the authors and having familiarity with them. Gutiérrez Alea has to veil this meaning to avoid censorship however.

Diego then spills coffee on David's shirt, coaxes him out of it and ostentatiously shakes it over his balcony as a sign of conquest, which he later confesses was the signal to Germán, whom he had bet, that he could get David into bed. David storms off without the book or his pictures when he realizes that Diego was trying to seduce him. Diego goes to his altar of Caridad de Cobre and threatens to feed her on bread and water if she does not bring David back. In Santería, the orishas must be fed and appeased. The practice of this popular religion displays Diego's further ostracism from Marxist ideology since, for Marx, religion is the opiate of the masses. Since this religion stems from the Yoruba people of Africa, Diego also demonstrates that despite his penchant for portraying himself as white, he is still at heart one of the "negros que preferimos café," hence, he is not a typical bourgeoisie.

Days later, David does return after speaking with his friend Miguel about the possible subversive nature of Diego as a homosexual intellectual with ties to foreign embassies, and as a possessor of contraband. Nelson, regarding the contrast between scarcity and contraband evident in the film, writes, "But the general social conditions which are highlighted in this film (the material scarcity, political suspicion, black market and religious sentiments) also reflect the situation in the early 1990s when the film was made necessarily on a shoe string budget" (101). However, she points out that it is not Diego who is to blame but rather, "Indeed it is the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution representative Nancy who engineers black market transactions, and it is Nancy who epitomises the hysteria and neurosis in the film" (105). Evidently, this hysteria and neurosis stems from the choice between the idealized notion of patriotism the follows the slogan "patria o muerte" or the harsh reality of surviving by whatever means possible. That the CDR representative engages in corrupt practices also indicts party members who proclaim one thing, but practice another.

Once more, Diego offers David the Donne chair and some scotch as he asks, "Will you toast with the enemy's drink? First the orishas." Yet again, Gutiérrez Alea subtly underscores the importance of Donne's ideological writings to undermine the static revolutionary message. The offerings of tea in the prior example and scotch in this case further serve to show disenchantment with the revolution—a touch so masterfully subtle through the yoking of Donne and the beverages of the enemy. Nevertheless, Diego appeases the orishas first to show that he has what is best for Cuba foremost in his heart and mind. Diego then discusses Cuban artists, writers, and musicians about whom David is utterly ignorant, such as José Lezama Lima and Ernie Lecuona. Whereas Diego bemoaned the lack of progress on the island for not knowing Donne or Cavalis, now he demonstrates that the youth of Cuba are unaware of their own artistic luminaries. For Freire, "A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust" (60). In a system that does not allow open dissent, Diego typifies the

discontented intellectual and patron of the arts whose purpose is to disseminate esthetic projects rather than political agendas devoid of art. He is a real humanist rather than a paternalistic, unenlightened despot.

For Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé:

Ubicando su acción en 1979, un año antes del éxodo masivo de El Mariel, Fresa y chocolate se propone, al igual que el relato de Paz, interrogar no sólo la constitución de la identidad nacional durante el período revolucionario, del “hombre nuevo.” Se trata . . . en particular, de cuestionar la lógica del repudio al interior del sujeto masculino heterosexual . . . en crisis . . . sujeto extrañamente susceptible a la desfondada nostalgia de un pasado que no conoció nunca, que nunca vivió. (131)

Diego inculcates the nostalgia for a more abundant past during a time when the Special Period clamored for enduring hardship and surviving at a subsistence level. In addition, Diego implies that an individual and a country must be familiar with their history instead of the biased, official version that censors dissidence while rejecting alterity. “The educational, dialogical quality of revolution . . . is one of the most effective instruments for keeping the revolution from becoming institutionalized and stratified in a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy; for counter-revolution is carried out by revolutionaries who become reactionary” (Freire 137). In essence, Diego engages in dialogue in order to transform his country, while propaganda from the state machine only recognizes monologue and statistics that bureaucrats compile as measures of the revolution in stasis. He is the more revolutionary figure of the film.

Probably to avoid censorship and reprisals, the dissident character of Diego is a homosexual rather than a heterosexual. Nelson writes, “The homosexuality and artistic sensibilities of Diego (Jorge Perugorría) in Fresa y Chocolate marginalise him too from a revolution that defines such behaviour as deviant and traitorous, so he is finally forced to leave the island” (100). Dennis West, suggests:

And Strawberry and Chocolate is not a gay film. It does not significantly explore the history of homosexual oppression in Cuba; gay sexual pleasure is not shown and gay relationships are given short shrift; and the camera generally prefers David’s heterosexual point of view. Furthermore, the film’s gay protagonist perhaps too conveniently combines physical attraction, artistic sensibility, and socialist and nationalistic viewpoints in order to assure mainstream audience appeal. (16)

Diego nebulously admits that “I’ve had problems with the system.” We are left unsure as to whether his problems arise from his homosexuality, from his dissident views, or from his patronage of the arts since he promotes the esthetic rather than the

propagandistic. He becomes the revolutionary in exile, rather than the counter-revolutionary as defined by Freire.

David counters with, "I'll show you Communists are not savages." Once again, this comment seems to relate to the idea that "todos los negros preferimos café" and that Marxist Cuba lacks civilization; hence, the implication is that an implied barbarism must be dispelled. Diego laughs and says, "We're giving humanity a lesson with the whiskey of the enemy. Bravo! Long live democratic communism!" This oxymoron problematizes both political stances while at the same time it implies that Communists lack humanity when they become part of the political machine. David yields to Diego's artistic sensibilities and brings him a copy of one of his early literary efforts: Plaza Sitiada, which translates as "Square under Siege." Diego points out that it is sheer propaganda, full of grammatical and spelling errors, as well as little esthetic appeal. His criticism suggests that educational reform has failed to make people think and that basic skills are still deficient.

According to Freire, this form of education follows the banking model with students as depositories for knowledge to be stored. As such, it is a tool of the oppressors since, "Oppression—overwhelming control—is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life. The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic. . . . It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power" (Freire 77). Nevertheless, the work does have several nuggets worthy of Diego's attentive tutelage. Diego preaches, "Art makes you feel and think. Art does not transmit. The government radio does that." Then the camera flashes to the mural, "Patria o muerte," so that the spectator will ponder this slogan rather than mindlessly repeat it. Freire writes, "I repeat: the investigation of thematics involves the investigation of the people's thinking—thinking which occurs only in and among people together seeking out reality. I cannot think for others or without others, nor can others think for me" (108). With that in mind, we must consider what Katherine Kovács states:

Are all Cuban movies to be classified as works of propaganda? If we mean by propaganda films those that are made to propagate the goals of the Revolution and to disseminate ideas, doctrines, and facts that will further the progress of Castro's government and hinder the efforts of its enemies (that is, the United States), then we might classify Cuban movies as propaganda. But if we accept their idea that all movies are vehicles for the expression of certain ideological positions, then the term propaganda would be misleading. Indeed, in their commitment to charting the progress of the Revolution, Cuban filmmakers not only extol its achievements but also point to areas that remain problematic. (111-112)

The juxtaposition of the two scenes suggests that blind faith in the slogan "Fatherland or Death" leads to a land of unthinking automatons devoid of cultural productivity since the whole focus of the Socialist project is economic productivity even though it has utterly failed in Cuba's case. "Dialogue does not impose, does not manipulate, does not

domesticate, does not ‘sloganize’” (Freire 168). Paul Smith posits, “In a state which attempted to render every inch of land productive by planting coffee bushes even in soil which could not support them, the scandal of homosexuality is its supposed sterility, its stubborn unwillingness to (re)produce” (33). Smith pejoratively criticizes the film for its lack of attention to the theme of homosexuality when he writes:

As an exhausted economy prostitutes itself for dollar tourism and lays on a thriving sex trade for visiting Europeans, as rafters invert the old slogan and choose death rather than socialism, Alea and Tabío offer us a film as meretricious and mendacious as Castro’s current policies: heavy-handed, disingenuous, and irredeemably bourgeois. (33)

I believe that he focuses too much on the superficial idea of homosexuality and not enough on the more profound idea of social and economic change that is so necessary to avoid death. Gutiérrez Alea hints that as long as artists, musicians, and authors create art, it is valuable only when they follow their own hearts. Remember, that the relatives of the exemplary sculptor in Death of a Bureaucrat and the world famous singer Yoyita in Guantanamo are repeatedly thwarted in their attempts to bury their deceased proponents of culture because of bureaucratic snarls. Francisco, the sculptor in the former film, had abandoned his art to mass produce busts so that every Cuban could have a bust in his home. Yoyita, in the latter film, returned to Cuba to find her only love after fifty years apart, but died in his embrace. The connection between the two deaths seems to be that when art is used as propaganda, it loses meaning and value; however, artistic success without love of one’s roots seems to be just as devoid of meaning and value. Herein lies the dilemma: to produce art with meaning that celebrates the national without devolving into mindless slogans.

Fortuitously, two songs by Ignacio Cervantes play in the background of the next scene: “Adiós a Cuba” and “Las ilusiones perdidas.” How fitting that these two pieces illustrate the notion of exile and the failure of the revolution. Diego bemoans, “This is a thinking head, but if you don’t always say yes or you think differently, you’re ostracized.” Then he asks David, “What do you believe in?” David replies, “Cuba.” Diego, retorts, “So do I. So that people know what’s good about it. I don’t want Americans or anybody coming here telling us what to do!” He continues, “When will they understand that art is one thing and propaganda another? If they don’t want to think there’s TV, newspapers, radio, and the rest.” Evidently, a thinking person is a bourgeoisie member of society, not a proletariat. Because of that:

In Memories it is the bourgeois idleness of Sergio that scandalises party snoopers; in Strawberry and Chocolate it is the unproductivity of the tea-sipping Diego which arouses the ire of the authorities. Homophobia in Cuba is thus associated not, as in other countries, with religious dogma or pseudo-scientific degeneration theory. Rather it is structurally linked to the centrality of the value of labour to Marxist doctrine and practice. (Smith 33)

Diego is antithetical to dogmatic Marxist theory since he thinks instead of works in the labor intensive sense, but he is not anti-dialogical, which is more in tune with more contemporary revolutionary thought along the lines of Paulo Freire who believed that “the validity of any revolution resulting from antialogical action is thoroughly doubtful” (Freire 127).

Diego, in fact, overtly criticizes the state of things in his country and lays the blame on the Communists. “We live in one of the world’s most beautiful cities. You can still enjoy it before it collapses in shit . . . They’re [the communists] letting it collapse, you know it!” In an interview with Teresa Toledo, Senel Paz, the author of the script and the short story on which the film is based, comments:

There is a joke in Strawberry and Chocolate which highlights another aspect of the situation. When Nancy says, “The outlook’s bad, it’s going to rain,” she gets the response: “Well, the outlook may be bad, but healthcare and education are free.” Constant praise of the positive, of our secure future in this, the best of all possible worlds, lulls people to sleep, immobilises them. I think that to ignore the negative aspects of society is both Latin American and typical of so-called socialism I think a society has to begin by knowing itself in as lucid and unblinkered a way as possible. The revolution and socialism have felt a desperate need to enhance their positive image, with the result that ranks close, a monolithic bloc forms and everything is fine and dandy. I’ve often met people who think that a revolutionary who loves Cuba should not write this kind of film. (34)

This quote, along with Diego’s comments, goes hand in hand with the references to Donne, sleep, and death. One can love Cuba, but not in a sonambulist fashion without a genuine consciousness. It is a call for the people to awaken so that the dream that has turned into a nightmare, the illusion that has become disillusion, can be reinvented.

Diego is another variation of Sergio in Memories, but more disgruntled and appreciative of aspects of Cuban culture. He winds up leaving the country though in order to live life the way in which he wants. Paz says, “I think one of the big lessons of the present period for the government and the party is to put an end to the unjust, abusive intolerance and discrimination shown certain sectors and to do away with the wrong-headed, blind faith in deceitful political terms” (Toledo 34). While never criticizing Fidel, Paz and Gutiérrez Alea seem to adhere to Freire’s idea about revolutionaries who “. . . if they come to power still embodying that ambiguity imposed on them by the situation of oppression—it is my contention that they will merely *imagine* they have reached power. Their existential duality may even facilitate the rise of a sectarian climate leading to the installation of bureaucracies which undermine the revolution” (127). The film ends with David and Diego embracing. Jorge Perugorría, who played Diego, declares:

I think the super-objective of the film is intolerance. Rather than being a film only about the problems of gays, it is about intolerance We still haven't achieved the political maturity to give equal opportunity to everybody regardless of political, ideological, or other differences. . . . The film argues for a reconciliation of all Cubans. (Birringer 21)

Because the gay aspects of the film are not thoroughly explored, this final embrace does not have homosexual overtones and appears not to relate to Donne's works on sex and sanctity.

Instead, the relationship between art and propaganda comes to the forefront as does the notion of what constitutes education. Jesús Barquet suggests:

A diferencia del cuento, el film no busca edulcorar políticamente su crítica social sino que, respetando la esencia del conflicto humano fundamental planteado por Senel, lo hace extensivo tanto a Diego como a David, tanto al pasado como al presente y—con su final abierto—al futuro del país, y concluye, no con recetas floridas del ancien régime, sino con un abrazo sincero entre estos dos hombres (ninguno “nuevo” ni viejo, ni homosexual ni heterosexual) que, aparados en el diálogo franco, la comprensión y el amor fraternal, han logrado unirse en un único ser igualmente acosado por la sociedad, en un ser solidario y, a la vez, solitario.

[. . .] Ese valiente abrazo resulta ser, pues, un reto a todo poder político, ideología o creencia que pretenda reprimir el derecho del individuo a ser y a vivir según sus propios criterios, siempre y cuando éstos no atenten contra la existencia física de los demás. (86)

In essence, no man is an island, but together, a population seems to form an atoll made up of a chain of islands that are linked together rather than living in isolation.

As a result, David changes his ideological perspectives. Nelson points out, “But Diego's frankly disarming style, cultural knowledge and persuasive logic shift David away from his dogmatic Party suspicions. After a period of hesitant and secret attraction to the unorthodox Diego, David finds himself acknowledging the legitimacy of, and finally literally embracing “the other”” (104). Paz comments:

I have insisted ever since the story was first published that the central issue is not homosexuality. The problems raised go much further: it is friendship and tolerance that are at stake. . . . So the film also addresses religious and racial intolerance and intolerance on the level of ideas, which is the most important of all. (Toledo 33)

In other words, the film truly is a serious inquiry into freedom, equality, and fraternity rather than a commercial comedy about a homosexual and his travails to be accepted into society. Humor is used to deflect the serious nature of the work though, which attests to the Cuban spirit to overcome obstacles with alacrity rather than bitterness. As

the saying goes, “Cuando la vida te da limones, haz limonada.” This film tries to show the way to make the best of a bad situation and to improve it.

Nevertheless, it is a struggle to achieve these goals. The revolution proclaims struggle in its propagandistic messages, but this struggle is different. According to Serna Servín, “La lucha se percibe en tres dimensiones: la búsqueda de un espacio, la adquisición de una voz y la expresión de una ideología de resistencia” (159). Serna Servín clarifies and expounds on these ideas in his very useful article by stating that first, Diego wants to be accepted as a homosexual and as a contributor to social change. He writes, “La primera dimensión: la búsqueda de un espacio se percibe por el deseo de Diego de ser aceptado como homosexual por la sociedad en la que vive. . . Además se muestra dispuesto a ayudar al gobierno con el objeto de lograr la metamorfosis postmoderna que Cuba necesita.” (160-161). He continues:

La segunda dimensión, la adquisición de una voz en Fresa y chocolate sucede durante el proceso mediante el cual Diego es confinado a espacios privados. Diego cuestiona al sistema político en dos niveles. El primero está relacionado con el arte, mientras que el segundo está ligado a la desmitificación de la revolución cubana. Según la ideología de Castro, el propósito primordial del arte es transmitir propaganda política y reafirmar el discurso oficial. . . . La desmitificación de la revolución cubana funciona como un medio por el cual Diego cuestiona la aplicación de un sistema obsoleto—el partido comunista—que ya no satisface las necesidades de la gente. Diego intenta buscar un nuevo tipo y/o estilo de vida que supuestamente el partido comunista prometió cuando llegó al poder en 1959. De ahí que él insista en su constante crítica a la ideología de la revolución cubana. (162-163)

He concludes, “La tercera dimensión, la ideología de resistencia, se representa a través de un proceso dialéctico que surge en Diego. Tal proceso dialéctico funciona como un mecanismo que otorga a Diego la entereza y el coraje para sobrevivir en la lucha” (164). Ultimately, however, Diego gives up the struggle and decides to abandon the island, which serves as an indictment of the system and suggests that it is Cuba that refuses to change despite attempts to modify a failed system. Consequently, the message seems to be that Cuba is losing some of its most talented and creative people because the system thwarts any efforts that are contrary to official dogma even if those ideas to eliminate problems may be more effective methods.

Nevertheless, since David and Diego embrace, we must infer that David is now a convert—not to homosexuality, but rather to new ideas instead of the monotonous litany of Marxist propaganda. Dennis West asked Gutiérrez Alea in an interview, “Does Diego’s line of dialog—‘How much we need another voice!’—allude to Fidel Castro’s vast political power and the possible necessity of further democratizing the Cuban political system?” Gutiérrez Alea chuckled and replied, “Well, it seems obvious doesn’t it? Of course, that line is said as a joke, but a joke that contains a great measure of truth” (19-20). Considering that comment, I think that Gutiérrez Alea artfully depicts a decadent

regime that is in dire need of change. In that sense, he is still revolutionary in his cinematic approach and a voice that dares to question and think in an artful manner to show his love of humanity, a characteristic championed by Freire. The paternalistic love of the people displayed by Fidel results in a form of necrophilia that the slogan “Patria o muerte” typifies. His policies thus represent a form of sadistic love. “Sadistic love is a perverted love—a love of death, not of life. One of the characteristics of the oppressor consciousness and its necrophilic view of the world is thus sadism” (Freire 59). Gutiérrez Alea engages the spectator to become a participant in life rather than blindly follow the slogan that leads to death.

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