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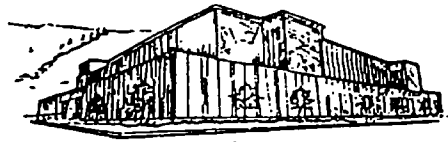
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Revolutionary Language: Films of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea

By

Andrew Snustad

B.A. University of Montana, 2001

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

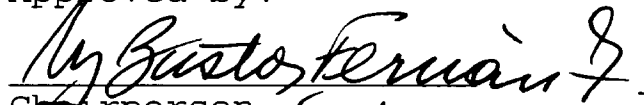
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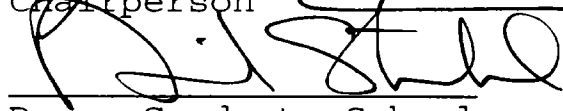
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Revolutionary Language: Films of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea

Director: María José Bustos Fernández MJBR.

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea began his film career shortly before the beginning of the 1959 Cuban Revolution and became a central figure in the emerging revolutionary Cuban film industry. Alea discusses the relationship between the viewer and the director in a number of interviews and theoretical essays. He believes that it is the director's responsibility to dialogue with the viewer in an effort to mold the viewer towards a more pure revolutionary consciousness. Alea manipulates a spectrum of narrative and artistic techniques to achieve this relationship with the viewer. Some critics have interpreted his films as being against the Revolution, however I will argue in the following analysis of *Las doce sillas*, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* y *Fresa y chocolate* that the films accomplish Alea's goals of strengthening the revolutionary consciousness of the Cuban people, rather than dismembering it.

In order to comprehend the film technique that Alea uses, it is important to understand the influences in his works. Therefore, I will begin the study with a brief discussion of film theory that will prove useful in the analysis of his films. I will continue with an overview of the Cuban film industry along with an introduction to the Cuban Revolution to provide a context for the analysis and a definition of the revolutionary consciousness that Alea's films promote. I will attempt to address the questions of who the spectator identifies with, who the intended spectator is, and how the dialogue changes between a socialist Cuban and a capitalist foreign spectator to facilitate a clear and precise study of the films. I will also dialogue with the writings of other critics in an effort to better explain the dialogue between Alea and the spectator.

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Chapter 1: A Theoretical Introduction to Film

Nosotros somos o creemos ser hombres revolucionarios. Quien sea más artista que revolucionario, no puede pensar igual que nosotros. Nosotros luchamos por el pueblo y no padecemos ningún conflicto porque luchamos por el pueblo y sabemos que podemos lograr los propósitos de nuestra lucha (144).¹

Fidel Castro in his speech "Palabra a los intelectuales," which was delivered on June 30, 1961 describes the revolutionary man as someone who places the Revolution in front of art and who does not suffer conflict because he fights for the people. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea is a revolutionary and yet he attempts to create a stronger revolutionary consciousness in the spectator of his films *Las doce sillas*, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* y *Fresa y chocolate*, in direct contradiction to Castro's advice to the intellectuals. Rather than heeding the admonition of Castro by avoiding discord under the umbrella of a static revolutionary existence, Alea's films invoke conflict as a means to manifest growth of the revolutionary consciousness of the spectator.

Castro used the spoken word to disseminate his message to the intellectuals of Cuba that conflict was not a factor for the man who placed the Revolution in front of art, yet all symbolic systems create their own

¹We are or believe ourselves to be revolutionary men. He who may be more artist than revolutionary, can not think like us. We fight for

possibilities of intelligibility through difference, contrast and absence. Discursive studies, rhetoric aspects of structuralism like the poststructuralists reveal that all discourse has its counter discourse. These conflicting discourses are defining mechanisms within a society and the same is true in linguistic systems such as film.

Film theorists use the work of Saussure, Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan to assert that all cinematic meaning is essentially linguistic and the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary because they are culturally determined and culturally relative. The meanings of signifiers are determined by their relation to other signifiers rather than by their reference to extra-linguistic reality (Braudy 5). Film does not merely reveal reality; rather it describes it by producing meaning in the organization of the basic units of the language.

Sergei M. Eisenstein theorizes that this organization of images is the creator of meaning in film. However, power of the image to communicate is insufficient when the image is alone, just as the phoneme alone has no signifying value. According to Eisenstein, the classification of film as a language relies on the

the people and we do not suffer any conflict because we fight for the people and we know that we can achieve the goals of our struggle.

analogy between the linguistic unit and the shot, but stringing words or phonemes together does not necessarily constitute communication within a language. Film theorist Christian Metz rejects the assertion that phonemes and shots are equivalent due to their mutual dependence on further organizational mechanisms.

Metz refutes the claim that film is a language and relies on Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between signs that compose a 'langue' and those that are categorized as a 'langage' to claim that film is a 'langage.' Metz rejects the assertion that film is a language or 'langue', but it does constitute a 'langage' because of the recognizable ordering procedures that characterize film.

Film shots, which for Metz are the basic units of the film 'langage', differ from the basic units of language because they are not arbitrary. The shot is charged with iconic meaning in relation to the world it photographs; whereas the basic units of language are discretionary. For Metz, the shot is equal to the sentence rather than the word and it is the string of shots that suggests that film is a language. The shot is purely iconic because it signifies by resembling objects visible in the world. These iconic shots can only be converted into discourse when they are organized in codes that enable the story to be told (Braudy 4).

Eisenstein agreed that merely stringing photographic images together did not constitute a language and his answer to the dilemma was the mechanism of montage; the term that D. W. Griffith used to describe the art of combining parts of the film into larger units (Braudy 1). Eisenstein in his essay "Beyond the Shot [The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram]" claims that some theorists, such as Pudovkin, believe montage to be a means of unrolling an idea through single shots. He refutes this theory in the following fragment of his article:

But in my view montage is not an idea composed of successive shots stuck together but an idea that DERIVES from the collision between two shots that are independent on one another... As in Japanese hieroglyphics in which two independent ideographic characters ('shots') are juxtaposed and explode into a concept (28).

Eisenstein considered montage as a conflict between a shot and its successor and he attributed the meaning of the film to this process. He imagines that each shot possesses a potential energy in its emotional content. This energy is evident in the direction of movements, the volume of shapes, the use of lighting, rhythms, etc (Eisenstein 31). This potential energy becomes kinetic when the first shot collides with the succeeding one.

Tomas Gutierrez Alea subscribes to Eisenstein's theory that montage, as a conflict between a shot and its successor, ascribes meaning to film. He relies on

montage coupled with Bertolt Brecht's and Eisenstein's theories of conflict between identification and estrangement with the spectator and the central character in the film to strengthen the spectator's revolutionary consciousness.

The following analysis of Alea's films will examine the relationship between the film and the viewer. I will discuss the feasibility of developing a revolutionary consciousness in the spectator using Alea's "Dialéctica del espectador" as a major source of reference. This collection of essays on film theory borrows heavily from the theorists Brecht and Eisensein. They are also the privileged source of theory in my analysis because they allow for the most complete and coherent study of his films. The perspective that Alea's essays offer as the director of the films brings an unparalleled insight to the analysis of his works.

The following analysis is limited to the parameters of a study that focuses on Alea's films from the director's point of view, although I acknowledge that the films are much more than the sum of the director's intentions. My study will enter into dialogue with Alea's essays and other critical analysis, while applying Alea's general film theory to his films *Las doce sillas*, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* y *Fresa y chocolate*. Beyond applying Alea's interpretation of Brechtian and

Eisensteinian theory, I will expand the analysis with the intent to continue the dialogue concerning the films in question.

Chapter 2: A Historical Introduction

In the same way that conflict produces kinetic energy when it collides with the following shot in montage, the energy from the film turns kinetic as a product of internal conflict produced in the film. Film critics have different points of view on the process that enables the film language to produce meaning, but Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's films rely on the theories that describe the process in terms of conflict. Alea considers the function that conflict plays in natural language and applies it in numerous areas of his films.

The energy of conflict is successfully exploited in his films at the technical level as well as at the narrative level. The dialectical interplay is encouraged to achieve his objective of producing a kinetic energy in the spectator that will disseminate into a stronger revolutionary consciousness in the "new Cuban man." This kinetic energy is created by the oscillation of identification and estrangement between the spectator and the subject, unresolved contemplation and self-discovery through viewing the world from another point of view whether it is caused by ecstasy or distancing mechanisms.

Although the critics have different criteria for how the language of film functions, it is agreed that film is capable of constructing meaning and a message. This classifies it as a type of language whether it relies on

codes or biological attributes to decipher meaning from the images on the screen. This universal language, or 'language' according to Metz, achieves a global audience.

The universal audience of film prizes the nation or industry that produces the highest quantity and quality of film with their attention, which translates into the highest levels of influence on the audience. The status quo of such a nation uses film as a medium of export. Hollywood became one of the United States' strongest resources in an effort to influence citizens of the United States and citizens of other nations in their campaign for capitalism and against communism during the Cold War. Ironically many of Hollywood's own were indicted under the McCarthy witch-hunts of the 60's for their supposed communist affiliations. Ellen Schrecker, in her book *The Age of McCarthyism: a Brief History with Documents* describes the 1950's American attitude towards Communism at home and abroad in the following quote:

The sense of urgency that surrounded the issue of communism came from the government's attempt to mobilize public opinion for the cold war. But the content, the way in which the Communist threat was defined, owed much to formulations that the anti-Communist network had pushed for years. J. Edgar Hoover's 1947 testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, is an example of this type of thinking, of the vision of communism that came to shape most people's perceptions of the Red Menace. It conformed to the similarly demonized view of the Soviet Union held by the Truman administration and its supporters. Though distorted in many ways, the perception of an

internal Communist threat had just enough plausibility to be convincing--especially to the vast majority of Americans who had no direct contact with the party or its members. Above all, it legitimated the McCarthy era repression by dehumanizing American Communists and transforming them into ideological outlaws who deserved whatever they got (92).

Interesting enough, film is able to "mobilize public opinion" and "shape most people's perceptions" as government testimonies and committees were able to do during the McCarthy era. This demonic view of Communism was an ideology of the status quo that emanated in film plausibly out of fear of McCarthyistic repression; yet another explanation is that cinema is inherently oriented to reinforce the status quo at a subconscious level.

The nature of cinema is to reflect reality, which strengthens the status quo. When identification occurs in a film between the spectator and the subject on the screen the subject passes itself off as the actual subject of enunciation. In this process the spectator imagines himself as one with the subject and when the film is over, the potential energy remains in the theater without ever converting into kinetic energy in the spectator. The viewer has achieved a form of catharsis in the film by living vicariously through the subject. The end result of the interaction between the film and the spectator is that the potential energy in the spectator is alleviated and transferred to the spectacle

thereby reinforcing the status quo by diminishing the potential energy of change in the members of society. This exchange discourages critical thinking and supports a tendency to allow the film and its subject to feel and think for the spectator.

Shortly after the world's first film *Sortie d'usine* or *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* was created by Lois Lumier on March 19, 1895 the spectacle and its cathartic qualities arrived to Cuba. At an exhibition on January 24, 1897, a representative of the Lumiere brothers by the name of Gabriel Veyre introduced silent film to Cuba. *The Battle of Santiago Bay* and *Tearing down the Spanish flag* were the first films to be produced in Cuba in 1898 and they began a tradition of propaganda and documentary that would mark the beginning of the island's appreciation of both national and international cinema.

Stephen Prince argues that the ability to understand iconic signs is shared internationally and across cultures, which lends itself to its global popularity of film (Braudy 5). Prince raises interesting questions in regards to the universality of film, but his analysis of iconic signs disregards the necessity of organization of the images in order to achieve meaning. Yet his assertion that cinema has universal appeal proved to be true in Cuba. In a nation where the majority of film was

imported from other countries, cinema had achieved immense popularity.

Havana housed over 40 theaters, while the rest of the country had over 300 by the beginning of World War I. During this time European cinema lost its position as the world leader in film and North America claimed a monopoly status in international film distribution. In 1918 Cuba formed the *Asociación de Defensa de la Cinematografía Cubana* in an effort to defend against this monopolistic influence, but they were unsuccessful and in 1919 the most important national producers closed their Santos y Artigas-Quesada, S. A. studios (Campa Marcè 19).

The silent film era in Cuba was dominated by foreign distribution and the arrival of the sound film perpetuated the problem. Movies with sound were introduced in Cuba in 1929 with the Hollywood production *The Patriot*. This film of North American patriotism did little to address Cuban issues, but the entertainment value of *The Patriot* and other North American films was enough to earn popularity among Cubans. Before sound, the Cuban film industry was struggling, but popularity of sound films added an additional obstacle to the industry.

Film with sound was more costly to produce and Cuba was suffering political and economic instability under the rule of dictator Machado and the newly appointed Fulgencio Batista as Chief of State. The economic

difficulties that faced Cuban film producers and the absolute foreign domination of the distribution of film on the island encouraged Cuban culture to develop in other arts, such as popular Cuban Theater, as a form of national expression and influence (Campa Marcé 20).

There were a number of attempts to produce quality film before the Revolution, but most ended in failure. Emilio Fernandez produced *el Indio*, which dealt with the life of José Martí and was intended to celebrate Martí's centennial birthday. But Batista had acquired power through force in 1952 and a celebration of liberty in such a political context seemed unwarranted and hence the film never reflected Fernandez's initial aspirations.

In 1955 Julio Garcia Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, who were both members of the recently created Cuban cultural cinema organization *Nuestro Tiempo* and had both studied at the Centro Sperimentale de Cinematografía in Rome, directed *El Mégano* (*The charcoal Worker*). This documentary-style film denounced the brutal conditions that the charcoal burners suffered in southern Havana. Batista's police confiscated the film after its first showing at the University of Havana and hence was never commercially exhibited (Campa Marcé 21). *El Mégano* was an example of what the revolutionary cinema would become in its theme, choice, and style. The individuals who worked in the production, especially Gutiérrez Alea and

García Espinosa, would create the core of the new Cuban film institute that Castro would establish after his victory over Batista's forces.

Pierre Sauvage asserts that the Cuban Revolution is not responsible for the rise of film in Cuba in the Sixties. He writes that:

... Many technicians had been formed, people who were used to dealing with images. Many of these people had already proven their worth before 1959. There was bound to be a movie explosion in the Sixties-with this revolution, with another revolution, with no revolution (27).

His analysis fails to address that groups such as cine-club *Nuestro Tiempo*, with membership of future film directors of the Sixties Alfredo Guervara, García Espinosa and Gutiérrez Alea, were affiliated with Marxism and heavily censored by Batista's regime. Although talent and interest existed before the Revolution, Batista's dictatorship for political reasons stifled film production by cine-clubs. In contrary to Sauvage's position, the Revolution was the catalyst of the boom of Cuban film in the Sixties and has directed the socialist course of Cuban cinema through current times.

The theme and style of *El Mégano* and the first films of the ICAIC were greatly influenced by neorealism, which Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa had studied during their time in Italy. Minna Jaskari in her article "Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and the Post-Revolutionary Cuba" writes:

Italian neorealism came from the desire to expose the true face of the nation from behind the façade of development, to create the 'cinema of the humble' and discover on film the Italy of underdevelopment. Needless to say, these were themes and ideals easily taken up by film-makers in underdeveloped countries elsewhere, and in the case of Cuba, it was the ICAIC which was to concentrate its efforts to produce cinema with a social (and socialist) content (4).

In an effort to combat North American domination in the nation's theaters and to create a national identity of revolutionary consciousness, Castro established a revolutionary cinema that embraced a humanistic and progressive approach to national social issues. This approach in film became collectively known as Committed Cinema or Third Cinema and was disseminated across Latin America. The film culture that spawns from the Revolution is equally innovative in appearance as its more renowned cousin, the French New Wave, but it relates closely to another national film movement, Italian neo-realism.

Third Cinema shared with the neo-realists a political edge that centered on characters and situations rather than problems of film form. Third Cinema filmmakers pushed film structure, but they did so in order to comment on the political and social realities of the audiences watching the films. Ultimately, the goal was to uncover a truly national means of expression that had been obscured by centuries of colonial power.

After assuming power, Castro separated Cuba from a colonialist past with the United States. Castro broke ties with the United States, which had assumed influence after the defeat of Spain in the Spanish American War. In 1961 Castro formally embraced Marxism, the political philosophy that forms the basis for Communism, and allied the country with the USSR, which was the world's leading Communist nation in an effort to distance the country from the domination of their neighbor to the North. He adopted this Soviet-style Socialist Regime not only to defy the United States, but also because the system coincided with his agrarian and economic reform program that the "new Cuba" had adopted. Francine A'ness establishes in her article "A Lesson in Synthesis: Nation Building and Images of a 'New Cuba' in *Fresa y chocolate*," states that Cuba has attempted to assure that political and cultural discourses define and form the new nation after the Revolution of 1959 (87).

The nation had adopted a new identity and they needed new institutions to develop and strengthen the new ideology. On March 24, 1959, less than three months after January 1, 1959 when Fidel Castro's Rebel Army entered Havana, The *Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográfico* (ICAIC) became the first cultural institution to be created by the revolutionary government. The ICAIC marked the commencing moment of

Cuba's independent film industry since there was relatively little national cinematic production in Cuba before the revolution (Torres and Estremera 131 133). The cinematic production before the Revolution was controlled by American and Mexican companies and the main cinematic role of Cuba was "to furnish exotic sets, sultry sex queens, and a tropical beat for Hollywood and Mexican productions" (Burton, *Revolutionary* 18). Now that Cuba had a national cinema, the pedagogical and artistic preeminence of cinema was evident to Castro and his revolutionary government. They sought to use this medium to reach the Cuban masses while at the same time replace the North American stronghold on ideology that Hollywood and Mexico had in Cuba.

Michael Chanan, in *The Cuban Image: Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba*, writes of the role of ICAIC in post-revolutionary Cuba:

The Cuban filmmakers who created ICAIC set out to provide the Revolution with a new way of seeing, of looking and watching. They were not interested in using cinema simply to reflect a given world, but wanted to be able to intervene with their projected images and help reshape it (297).

Fidel and his rebels learned the value of creating an image that reflected their goals rather than reality. While the rebels were contained in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, Fidel invited Herbert L. Matthews of the *New York Times* to write about their insurgence. The content

of Matthews' article supports that either Fidel created the illusion of having more soldiers and more victories than reality supported, or Matthews was simply sympathetic to Castro's cause and invented the illusion of military strength. Whichever the case, Matthews' story made international headlines and helped win Fidel the national and international support that he needed to win.

Chuck Morse, a syndicated talk show host on the *American Freedom Network* and a writer for the conservative online journal *Enter Stage Right* writes in his article "Fidel - Our man in Havana" that Matthews' liberal reporting won Fidel the support that he needed for victory.

January 1957 found Castro and his 18-man group hiding out in the Sierra Maestra Mountains of Cuba's eastern Oriente province. At a time when Castro had no support and was near starvation, he was able to make contact with *New York Times* Latin American specialist Herbert L. Matthews. Matthews had a proven track record of support for Communist causes and was the type of leftist who thought it a virtue to bend the truth to help the cause. He had been reprimanded by the Times for this in his reportage of the Spanish Civil War of 1938-1939. Matthews's mendacious series, appearing on the *Times* front page, falsely described Castro's force as powerful and well armed and also not Communist.

Although Morse's argument fails to credit the extreme oppression of Batista's Regime of the Cuban people that created the social conditions to support an insurgency by Castro and the Rebels, his point that

Matthews' reporting strengthened the rebel's cause is well founded. Through Matthews' reporting and the success of rebel controlled *Radio Rebelde*, which played a central role in the insurrection, Fidel Castro learned the value of mass communication and was determined to use it after assuming power.

Castro charged the ICAIC with the duty of developing a revolutionary culture as a cardinal influence of socialist change. Political awareness in the new film industry was a requirement in the struggle for cultural change, therefore strong revolutionary dedication was evident in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's films. He becomes one of the most influential forces in the industry due to his talent in directing film, his intellect, and passion for the Revolution and Committed Cinema.

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea directed *Historias de la Revolución*, the first film to be exhibited by the ICAIC although it was not the first to be completed. Gutiérrez Alea, drew heavily from the tradition of Italian neorealism to create this three-part documentary that was more of an essay than a mere reflection of reality. *Historias* was a combination of epic and journalistic style that focused on the triumph of the insurrection and the injustice of the former regime. Alea was inexperienced, but he was learning and evolving as a director and soon broke away from the documentary and

pure neorealist esthetic with his direction of the feature-length comedy *Las doce sillas*. This change in genre was not a break from realism in film, rather it was the next step in his evolution towards producing film that was able to both reflect and reshape reality.

D. Christensen in his 1997 review of Alea's film *Guantanamera* titled "Sentimentality over originality: Revolutionary Cuban filmmaker's last effort his least effective" writes of the extreme pedagogical role that the ICAIC played in the beginning years of the Revolution.

Cuban cinema was initially as jingoistic and as agitational as a Bolshevik-inspired revolutionary cinema could be (complete, as David Cook has pointed out, with "cine-moviles" that took the film to the provinces like the Soviet agit-trains of the '20s). But agitprop soon gave way to a more refined sense of filmmaking (1).

The Cuban government would drive portable theaters for their films to the countryside to spread the filmic message to all people of Cuba. The ICAIC's early concentration on a purely propaganda driven cinema soon evolved into a more complex approach to film that constructed a social consciousness and also developed the art of cinema.

The films that I have selected trace the evolution of a filmmaker and a Revolution. *Las doce sillas* reflects the beginning stages of experimentation; *Memorias del*

subdesarrollo reflects a pinnacle of both the director's craft and the Revolution's success, while *Fresa y chocolate* reflects Alea's most blatant critique of Cuba after years of deteriorating revolutionary ideals. The multiple socio-historic situations in Cuba and Gutiérrez Alea's professional development result in a variety of cinematic expressions throughout his nearly forty-year career as a director, however his dedication to the development of a stronger revolutionary Cuba remain consistent.

Chapter 3: *Las doce silllas*

The political environment of the Revolution and the dedication to Committed Cinema, resulted in an absence of musicals and light comedies because directors feared falling into *clichés*, rather they chose serious and complex topics that were seen as a rejection of escapism or bourgeois art. In its place as an escape valve, arose a mode of irony, satire and black humor. One of the first of these films was Gutierrez Alea's *Las doce silllas* in 1962.

The first novel to be adapted into film in the ICAIC was Ilya Ilf and Eugene Petrov's Soviet novel, produced by Gutiérrez Alea as *Las doce silllas* by the same title. During the October Revolution, the bourgeois left Russia in hordes. They were unable to bring their treasures and they mistakenly thought that the Bolshevics would not remain in power for long, so they hid their jewels before leaving. *Las doce silllas* is the story of these hidden jewels. A similar mass exodus of bourgeoisie occurred in Cuba after the Revolution in 1959, making it a smooth transition from the Russian book into the Cuban film for Gutiérrez Alea.

Las doce silllas is a reflexive example of Alea's and Cuban society's transition between the historical time period of high public participation in social change and the return to their passive existence during better

times. In the direction of the film, Alea continues to ride the emotion of the Revolution, but also understands the times that allow for this type of film are vanishing and the complacency of the viewer must be addressed.

Alea's adaptation of *Las doce sillas* transposes the story of Gassat Vorobianinof's search for hidden jewels from the 1927 Russian Revolution setting of the novel to a Cuba immediately following the Revolution with the same plot. In Alea's rendition, Gassat's character is Hipolito and his servant and friend Ostap is converted into the character of Oscar. In the film Hipolito's wealthy aunt hides diamonds in one of her dining room chairs fearing expropriation. Hipolito is the heir to the family fortune, but when she dies, the chairs are confiscated before he is able to extract the diamonds. He contracts the service of his former servant Oscar and the two of them embark on a picaresque adventure to obtain the chairs and their booty as they race against a priest who was informed of the treasures by the aunt on her deathbed.

The two men and the priest chase the chairs, but never possess their treasure and finally discover that the diamonds have been used to finance a new community center. The film deviates from the novel's narrative by replacing Oscar's death with an ending that positions him as a constructive member of the new socialist reality.

Although the film offers a "happy ending" characteristic of films that condition "contemplative" spectators, *Las doce sillas* marks Alea's initiation into experimentalism at the technical and narrative levels that he will eventually employ in an effort to develop the "active" spectator.

Las doce sillas is Alea's and the ICAIC's first attempt at filming a comedy after the Revolution. An example of Alea's experimentation with form is the scene that includes an ICAIC newsreel that provides Oscar a new lead in finding the treasure. The inclusion of the historical preexisting newsreel is metacinematic in the sense that it reflects Alea's search for a mature cinema. Oscar and Alea are both searching for clues that will enable them to reach their goal, and borrowing ideas from other filmmakers within the ICAIC is a means of evolving towards the end goal of Oscar's treasure and Alea's artistic development. It is important to note in this instance that the source of inspiration is Cuban and not foreign. Although Alea is a student of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton's films, he is developing a national cinema and searches for internal inspiration as well.

Alea's inventive use of metacinema is offset by the off-voice comments explaining what Oscar is thinking. The omnipresent voice entirely explains his thoughts and actions while limiting the reason for the spectator to

engage in critical thinking. This didactic technique is common to social-realism art and intends to control the thoughts of spectators instead of guiding them to individual discovery.

Another trait of socialist realism that the film exemplifies is the schematization of the four main characters as representations of various sectors of society. Oscar is a likeable individual who is transitioning into the new society who eventually joins the workers of the Revolution. Hipolito is a stereotypical aristocratic and bourgeois character who refuses to work, while the priest is a manipulated pawn of the Church. The workers are an idealized mass that expresses light heartedness and strong work ethics. The characters are such strong metaphors for their societal counterparts that the characters are difficult to accept as realistic. This characteristic in part lends itself to the comedy of the film, however it overridingly classifies it as propagandist art of social realism.

The conclusion of *Las doce sillas* is also characteristic of social realism. An artist is commissioned to paint a mural in the new community center that was built with the proceeds from the diamonds. He describes how he will depict the forces of the Revolution against the forces of imperialism and although he doesn't specify the color scheme of the mural, only black and

white are required to depict this view of Cuba's social reality. Oscar remains true to his schematized persona when he joins a community game of their national sport baseball, while Hipolito becomes a forgotten character as he leaves the frame discouraged and lost.

The end tightly concludes the plot and leaves little to no room for open-ended debate on the narrative of the film and its characters. "Stay and join the game of the Revolution or else leave Cuba" is the clear message of this one-dimensional description of Cuban society. The film's blatant didactic nature and its schematization of Cuban society present a unified argument in favor of social participation in the new Revolutionary culture. This approach to social change is a mechanism of socialist realism and it functions more as propaganda than a call to critical thinking and individual discovery as Alea advocates.

Las doce silllas is representative of a developing stage in Alea's art. He creates a social-realism film while at the same time hypocritically denouncing socialist realist art. Paul A. Schroeder in his book *Tomàs Gutièrrez Alea: The Dialects of a Filmmaker* writes that Alea, in a 1961 cultural debate had openly criticized state control over art's form and content. Yet in apparent contradiction to his criticism, he had labeled *Las doce silllas* as a socialist realist film (15). When

questioned by Edmundo Desnoes in his article "Habla un director" on this contradiction he replies:

The Twelve Chairs is an example of socialist realism because it presents in a very direct way a critical moment for our society, a moment of transition when one can observe very clearly the fight between the old and the new. And in that fight the film reflects a tendency in favor of the new, in favor of the disappearance of the last interest of the bourgeoisie and in favor of the integration into society of healthy and productive elements.

Alea is accurate in his claim that the film endorses integration of productive elements into society and is "in favor of the disappearance of the last interest of the bourgeoisie," however it is not the message that defines this film as an example of social-realism. A less authoritative manner of presenting the message would permit discovery by the spectators.

Instead of forcing the message on the spectator, by leaving arguments open-ended and unresolved, the spectator would be forced to engage in critical thought with the film resulting in the discovery of a message. Although comedy is one of the models of Brecht's 'Epic Theatre' from which Alea borrows heavily, the style of comedy found in *Las doce silllas* fails to conform to Brecht's theory of identification that allows for individual discovery. Later Alea films use oscillating identification as a combination of Brecht and Eisenstein to achieve the dialectic with the spectator and to

encourage that the spectator discovers new realities in the film, rather than trying to impose a construction of meaning for them. The importance of *Las doce sillas* is its demarcation of the beginning of Alea's experimentalism in genres and technique. The comedy was an evolutionary step away from the documentary style films, which offered closed interpretations, towards the highly provocative and complex films that would be products of Gutiérrez Alea's theoretical manifesto influenced by Eisenstein and Brecht.

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea created films as a form of art expression, but for him the concept of the spectator was important and became the theme of various essays that he wrote discussing his philosophy on film. Though he favors praxis over theoretical contemplation in his films, his contribution to cinema is not limited solely to his world-renowned film production. He contributes to film theory with his collection of essays titled *Dialectica del espectador*. In the chapter "El espectador contemplativo y el espectador activo" from the collection of essays titled *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea poesía y revolución*, Alea outlines his theory on the role of the spectator in the cinematic experience. He defines the spectator in the following passage:

...espectador; éste es, por definición, un ser que contempla y su condición está determinada no sólo por las características propias del fenómeno sino por la posición que ocupa el individuo (sujeto) en relación con el mismo. Se puede ser actor o espectador frente al mismo fenómeno (63).²

Alea's definition asserts that the spectator is contemplative and capable of the roles of actor or passive spectator towards the spectacle. The act of contemplation is a human attempt at bettering the human condition and is stronger in some spectators because of

²Spectator, that is, by definition, a person that contemplates, and his/her condition is determined not only by the characteristics of the phenomena, rather by the position that the individual (subject) occupies in relation with his/herself. One can be an actor or a spectator in front of the phenomena.

their social and historical positions. However, the spectacle or object of contemplation plays as much of a part in the level of contemplation as does the spectator's personal history.

Alea categorizes the spectator as either "contemplative" or "active." The contemplative spectator views the spectacle as a fictitious object that was created in an act of contemplation by the artist. According to Alea, this "contemplative" spectator is entertained, but the activity, which is expressed in acceptance or rejection of the film, does not have cultural importance (65). This spectator consumes the film without contemplating the social reality and therefore all reference to social reality is an affirmation of existing values.

Many films in capitalist society perform a conformist role on large sectors of the viewing public with their genres of light comedies or melodramas that employ the "happy ending." Roswitha Mueller states that for Brecht bourgeois art was fundamentally related to its principles of formal organization, which emphasize closure and empathy. Brecht thought that these forms facilitated identification with the central character and functioned to transform a heterogeneous audience with different social interests into a homogeneous group (62). Empathy is the conformist tool used to create society

into a homogeneous audience that accepts sacred bourgeois values such as the notion of country, private property and religion of the society. These values are threatened in the hero character, but the film concludes with their salvation, and the spectators leave the theater without a reason to work for change (Alea 65).

Threatening values and then providing an ending that resolves all conflict that surrounded them, not only diffuses the perceived conflict in the film, but also relieves social inquietudes that the spectator may have felt even before viewing the film. When a person is faced with an unpleasant reality, the movie-theater acts as a place of refuge and escape. These dimensions of film act as a form of catharsis in the viewer and they condition a "contemplative" spectator and subvert Alea's social agenda for film.

Alea values the spectator that engages both with the spectacle and with reality. His intention is to develop Cubans into "active" spectators, which will be stimulated by his films to socially participate in reality. His goal is to develop a social consciousness in the spectator that will act as a guide to action in the spectator in times when individuals tend to be disassociated from social action.

Alea approaches the role that individuals play in society during politically and economically stable times

from a Marxist interpretation. He describes that during times of general stability, individuals only participate socially through their production of goods and materials to satisfy the demands of the exploiting class. During these times, individuals often are "contemplative" spectators that pay little regard to social development. Inversely, when tensions peak between the working individuals and the exploiting class individuals tend to actively participate in developing a social consciousness (Alea 68). Social conditions of the times dictate individual's roles in society. The Cuban Revolution resulted in the overthrow of Batista and the instatement of Castro's revolutionary government and was an expression of high tensions between the classes of Cubans. Cubans took action and transformed their society because the social conditions necessitated it.

The tensions expressed in the Revolution were relieved through military and political action that resulted in a socialist society. According to Alea, the continued development of a Cuban socialist state requires active participation by the individuals of society in creating a social consciousness (68). Yet, the initial tensions that spurred the Revolution dissipate with time and active individuals revert back to passive citizens and "contemplative" spectators. Therefore, Alea

dedicates his films to the active spectator and an improved revolutionary consciousness.

Film is both capable of reinforcing the passive attitude of individuals, but it can also be used to stimulate action in the spectator. Alea's films avoid promoting passive consumption and summon the active spirit of the spectator by employing conflict-producing techniques at the esthetic, conceptual and ideological levels. Alea lists problematizing reality, expressing inquietudes and raising questions as techniques to create conflict, and subsequently an open-ended film that affords the necessary space for the spectator to think critically (Alea 69). One of the points of intrigue for the spectator is Alea's ability to integrate diverse components into the cinematic medium. The film captures politics, ethics and internal opposition in a sophisticated way that confronts conflicting elements at all levels.

One source of conflict in Alea's films is the reluctance to overtly allot meaning. Alea writes that the film must not only be open-ended, but it should also act as a guide to action for the spectator and refers to the artist as a "guía para la acción" (Alea 69). The artist should create a spectacle that not only proposes problems, but one that also shows the path that the spectator should follow in order to discover on his/her

own a stronger social consciousness. The methodology of the artist in guiding the spectator should rely on social sciences such as psychology, sociology and linguistics. For Alea, the artist should have a historically and socially concrete notion of the spectator as to create a better guide to social action (Alea 70). Alea's mission to guide the spectator is limited to the artist's ability to control the distribution of the art to spectators who are members of the target spectator group, which I will address later in my analysis of the diverse critical receptions of the films.

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea encourages critical thinking as a method of strengthening the revolutionary consciousness of the Cuban people. His methodology for obtaining this goal entails creating conflict at various levels in his films with aspirations of awakening a revolutionary spirit that will result in social action. At first glance, Fidel Castro's revolutionary government would be a strong proponent of such an approach to film production since its intent was to support their government. Although Fidel's rebels and government were the action behind the Revolution, their government has been institutionalized into the status quo of the nation and many initial supporters of the ideals of the Revolution have become disenchanted with its trajectory in the past decades.

Many critics of the Revolutionary government have chosen exile in the United States or other nations and continue to critique from Cuba's exterior. Others such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea have chosen to work towards change from within the system. Alea was a proponent of the Revolution from the beginning, but the ideals that he envisioned as the building blocks of the Revolution have lost their voice in the current day revolutionary Cuba of twenty years after the Revolution from which Alea writes his *Dialéctica del espectador*.

Alea believed that the key to reshape reality was by producing in the spectator the drive to leave the theater charged with the kinetic energy that in turn transforms reality. He decided to abandon the neorealist - social realist approach and opted for a cinema of plurality and subtle conflicts in an effort to nurture a revolutionary consciousness in the viewer instead of imposing one. The following films that I will discuss in the study of Alea's art, employ multiplicity at numerous levels to create conflict. This conflict shatters the viewer's expectations and nurtures critical thinking. Alea's concept of revolutionary consciousness requires it to adapt to historical needs.

Alea attempts to create a stronger revolutionary spectator through his production of *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and *Fresa y chocolate*. In search of a

national identity, which is fluid and responsive to the times, Alea directs dialectic films that create a stronger revolutionary consciousness in the spectator. He produces an organic cinema that resists the hero subject of social-realism and avoids Hollywood's tendency to produce entertainment that consumes potential energy rather than converting it into kinetic energy. Alea's films create the conflict that results in potential energy in diverse ways. The combination of images creates meaning for the spectator because it causes the spectator to associate and think outside the comfort of passive consumerism of images.

Similarly, the combination of Brecht's and Eisenstein's theories also creates meaning in his films. Alea discusses Eisenstein and Brecht as they function in a conflicting manner to motivate the spectator to bring the emotion and action to the street, rather than allowing the film to serve as a form of catharsis to dissolve the inquietudes of the people and vindicate the bourgeois status quo.

Eisenstein's theory reasons that complete identification with the subject provides the stimulus that produces action in the spectator. If the spectator can see everyday reality through the eyes of the subject on the screen, then the spectator has a new perspective on reality and can approach reality with new and

enlightened vision that will produce the action that Alea strives to achieve through his film.

Alea attempts to reestablish a social consciousness in the Cuban public using Brechtian theory. His ideas on the didactic nature of art are also heavily influenced by Brechtian theory and their personal histories are paralleled as well. Brecht was forced to leave Germany when the Nazis took power in 1933, but in his exile he continued to write didactic plays and was accused of un-American Activities by the McCarthy Committee. He later settled in East Germany and had problems with Stanlinist authorities who regarded his open-ended theater as both an asset and a liability (Selden, Widdowson, Brooker 97). Similarly, Alea had to defend himself against accusations of dissident art in his film production due to the open-ended nature of his films.

Brecht's theory is the opposite of Eisentsein's, yet it produces kinetic energy in the spectator. His theory reasons that by preventing the identification and complete submission to the subject, the spectator is spared the process of catharsis and is stimulated by the film rather than relieved. The spectator leaves the theater with a desire for action. Brechtian distancing of the spectator from the characters is a film technique that Alea uses to attain a critical approach *in Memorias*

del subdesarrollo. Roswitha Mueller in the book *Bertlot*

Brecht and the Theory of Media writes:

Verfremdungseffekt or 'distancing effect' is brought about in the form of a distanciation, the restitution of an event or character out of the customary circumstances, in order to let it be considered less self-evident (61).

Brecht wanted characters to be "less self-evident" to prevent the risk of total identification with the character.

In conclusion, Alea adopts the ideas of Brecht and Eisenstein in an attempt to create a stronger revolutionary consciousness in the spectator. He theorizes that by converting the passive spectator into the active spectator the discoveries of the theater will translate into a refined revolutionary consciousness in the street. The following chapters will explore the feasibility of such a goal and the challenges that arise when the spectators bring diverse life experiences to the theater and hence employ incongruent filters in their attempt to extract meaning from the films.

Chapter 5: The Virtual Author of *Memorias del*

subdesarrollo

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's objective in creating film is outlined in his collection of essays, *Dialéctica del espectador*. He views the mission of his films as the creation of a stronger revolutionary consciousness in the spectator. But is it possible for the director of the film to form the spectators? Can the director make spectators see what they have never seen before by moving them into a new order of perceptions and experience and by doing so altogether reshape the spectator? Postmodern theorists such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault would argue that the flesh-and-blood author does not construct his or her readers because the author is divorced from the text. There is no authoritative voice in the production, since the reader creates the final text. The reader, not the author, makes the reading (Foucault 141-60). Post-modernist philosopher Jean -Francois Lyotard raises a similar argument as he explains his theory of language as performative, rather than representative of some truth.

A common element in the bewilderingly diverse range of theoretical Postmodernisms is a recognition and account of the way in which the 'grand narratives' of Western history have broken down. Without such metanarratives (God, History as purposefully unfolding immanent dialectic, Reason), history itself becomes a plurality of 'islands of discourse', a series of metaphors which we bring to bear upon it, or

a network of agonistic 'language games' where the criteria are those of performance not truth (64).

The postmodern allegation of the absence of an authoritative voice could also be applied to film since every film results, as the long lists of final credits remind the viewer, of the innumerable voices present. Applying this postmodern reasoning to film appears to discredit my assertion that Alea is able to transform the spectator. Instead I should examine the process of how the spectator transforms the director's film.

However, my position that Alea transforms the viewer is not specific to the flesh and blood Alea, rather it also includes the virtual "author," or conglomeration of choices that come together in the final production of the film. Since much of Alea's theoretical writing is consistent with the virtual "author" that results in his films I choose to refer to them as one in the same without disregarding their integral difference. I recognize the multiple voices that construct the film, while at the same time I recognize the presence of the virtual "author" which dictates the general tone and direction of the film. Although there is no single creator, there is a central intent of the film.

Alea openly attempts to mold the spectator, but he does not deny multiplicity in his film to present an authoritative voice. Rather, he exploits such

multiplicity to achieve his formation of the viewer. Alea, or the virtual "author," dissuades the spectator from identifying uncritically with the one plausible voice of the narrator or the protagonist, in the case of *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, both being Sergio. By identifying with Sergio as an unreliable narrator, the spectator overlooks ways in which the implied author has provided clues about how to place the narrator's faults in relation to other characters and the overall structure of the film.

Alea directed *Memorias del subdesarrollo* in 1968, which was based on the novel *Inconsolable memories* by Cuban writer Edmundo Desnoes, and was critically acclaimed both in Cuba and abroad as a film masterpiece. However, due to the conflicting nature of the film, *Memorias* provoked a multitude of responses, some of which challenged Alea's commitment as a Revolutionary. Dan Georgakas, in his article, "Breaking the Blockade: A Conversation with Cuban Filmmaker Tomas Alea" states that:

American critics often speculated that Alea, one of the founders of ICAIC and generally considered its most intellectual director, was being censored or was in trouble with the authorities. This wholly erroneous notion stemmed from the assumption that the vacillating intellectual in *Memories* was a surrogate for the director (36).

Such critics make the assumptions that Sergio, the "vacillating intellectual" is an identifiable character and that Alea identifies with him.

Alea explains, in his collection of essays *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea poesía y revolución*, the circumstances that surrounded the controversy. The year after *Memorias* debuted; British critic Don Allen published an article in the Fall edition of *Sight and Sound* that presumed the motive of the film was to highlight the struggles of the intellectual in Revolutionary Cuba. Allen wrote, "The implicit criticism of Alea is directed against the new society, which with its inflexibility and failure to assimilate the deviant thinker, there is no remedy for the intellectual and his existential problems" (Alea - trans. mine- 108). As described by Georgakas, critics such as Allen draw conclusions that stem from their identification with the central character Sergio and his struggles in the film. Another critic who identified with Sergio was Andrew Sarris.

Sarris, the president of the National Society of Film Critics said, "what struck most of us favorably about *Memories of Underdevelopment* is its very personal and very courageous confrontation of the artist's doubt and ambivalence regarding the Cuban Revolution" (Allen 233). Alea responds to Sarris' statement in an interview

by Julianne Burton titled "Individual Fulfillment and Collective Achievement" by explaining that Sarris'

...lack of information was such that one suspects a kind of tendentious ignorance, if such a thing is possible. It's hard to know in such cases where ignorance leaves off and stupidity or malice begins (198).

Alea's insult of Sarris' interpretation might be unmerited considering Sarris' point of speculation.

Sarris is a bourgeois citizen in the United States' capitalist society and hence would have a stronger tendency to identify with Sergio's character and would thus conclude that indeed the film and Alea expressed "doubt and ambivalence" towards the Revolution. Alea recognizes the difference between a Cuban and foreign capitalist viewer and expresses his opinion on the matter in his book *Tomás Gutiérrez Alea poesía y revolución*:

Desde esa posición es muy fácil identificarse con un personaje como Sergio y ver en Memorias... una "valiente confrontación de las dudas del artista", etcétera, y levantarla como bandera de "ambivalencias". Se es consecuente así con toda una manera de pensar que en los EE.UU. halla un terreno fértil, y con una manera de defender los propios intereses que no son, por supuesto, los de la Revolución. Se produce entonces el conocido fenómeno de la "manipulación" (Alea 110).³

³From this position it is very easy to identify with a character like Sergio and see in Memorias a "valiente confrontation" of the doubts of the artist, etcetera, and raise it like a flag of "ambivalences." It is this way with a way of thinking that in the U.S. is found fertile terrain, and with a way of defending their own interests that are not, of course, those of the Revolution. This produces then the known phenomenon of the "manipulation."

Alea refers to the interpretations of Allen and Sarris as "manipulations" because they act on their own interests rather than those of the Revolution. The fact that Alea produced the film in a socialist society with an intended audience of Cubans proposes an alternative assessment of the film.

According to Alea, the critique of the film is less directed at the Cuban government and more at the capitalist bourgeois mentality, which is remnant of pre-Revolutionary Cuba and is embodied in the character of Sergio. The Cuban audience tends to notice Sergio's ineffectiveness in the new Cuban society rather than identifying with his bourgeois struggles in a socialistic nation.

Alea is able to break the spectator's identification with the central character and produce critical thinking in the Cuban spectator, yet the North American viewer tends to identify absolutely with Sergio and both spectators praise the film and the director for its deep critique of the opposite point of view. Although Alea reacts viciously to Allen's and Sarris' statements while labeling them as acts of "manipulation," these "manipulated" interpretations are results of his goal to promote critical thinking in the spectator.

Although the North American interpretation conflicts with the desired interpretation by Cubans, it is yet

another layer of conflict that catapults the spectator into action. Allen and Sarris' assertions that the film is indeed critical of the Communist society raise the question for the Cuban public and he/she is forced to use their critical thinking capabilities to decipher the message for themselves. In an interview with Georgakas, Alea replies to a question about the tendency of spectators in the United States to identify with Sergio:

I can understand why it was very easy to identify with Sergio in the United States. He fits perfectly into the liberal conception. Here, it was different. Here we noticed that people went to see the film more than once, perhaps as many as five times. We haven't seen much of that phenomenon. We have had other films that were more popular, that were more explosive with the popular audience, but people only went to see those films once. They didn't feel the need to go back. With *Memories* people came out of the cinema very upset. They still had many questions. They had to return to see if they might find an answer. I think that was the best result of that film... We stimulated reflection about our reality, and I think that is very good (Georgakas 37).

Helminski agrees with Alea and contends "that such popularity depended not only upon pleasure, but also upon the challenges posed to the viewer by such a film"(3). The ambiguity is an enigma that captures the curiosity of the spectator and motivates a return to the film to find the answers that may have been overlooked the first or second viewing.

The equilibrium between entertainment and conflict captivates the spectator's attention and at the same time

catalyzes a critical response. Gutiérrez Alea wrote in 1968, the year of the release of the film:

El filme creo yo, contribuye a afirmar esa conciencia -es decir, la conciencia del subdesarrollo-, premisa indispensable para construir la sociedad que queremos construir, sobre bases firmes, sin mentiras, sin engaños, sin mistificaciones. Es un film doloroso, un filme crítico. Y si el enemigo cree que puede aprovecharse de la crítica, estamos convencidos de que más nos aprovecharemos nosotros, por que en el dolor y en la crítica se afilan nuestras armas, porque nos hacemos más sólidos, más auténticos, y nos acercamos aun más a la realidad (Alea 91).⁴

Although Alea initially takes offense to interpretations that stray from the outcome that he intended in the film, he remains confident that the film plays a constructive role in perfecting the revolution. The criticisms are results of conflicts that motivate spectators to take a critical, yet constructive approach towards the film, towards Cuba and towards them. This critical process is often painful and controversial, however it is necessary to keep the Revolution alive and faithful to its original ideals.

⁴I believe the film contributes to affirm this consciousness -that is to say, the consciousness of underdevelopment-, indispensable in constructing the society that we want to construct, on the firm foundations, without lies, without deceptions and without mystification's. It is a painful film, a critical film. An if the enemy believes that he can take advantage of the critique, we are convinced we benefit more, because in pain and in criticism we sharpen our weapons, because we make ourselves more solid, more authentic and we become even closer to reality (trans. mine)

Chapter 6: Collage of Cuban Reality in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*

Memorias del subdesarrollo uses complex narrative styles to break expectations with the viewer in order to provide the necessary space for critical thinking to emerge. Expectations of coherency and the integration of sequences into the plot are broken and reestablished throughout the film with montage. The two opening scenes are exemplary of the film's employment of montage and ultimately due to the film's circular time, these scenes function as collage within the narration. The broken expectations and the use of montage and collage spur new meaning between scenes and produce the critical thinking necessary to discover new viewpoints of reality, thereby strengthening the revolutionary consciousness of the spectator.

Memorias del subdesarrollo opens with the face of an Afro-Cuban man playing the drums and supporting the frantic rhythm of a dance. The scene broadens its perspective to women and couples as they dance, sweat and sing to the rhythm of the energetic music. Suddenly, the spectator hears gunshots, but the music continues. The film cuts to a group of women looking down upon a man shot on the ground, while the camera follows a man with glasses, as it appears that he may be the killer fleeing the scene. The body is picked up and carried out of the

crowd above the people's heads and into a bright light. The light is continually present at the back of the shots and prevents the spectator from fully deciphering meaning from the obscured images in the scene. The rocky motion of the camera also supports the frenetic mood of the scene. The dancing and music accelerate and suddenly the camera frame is frozen on an Afro-Cuban woman's face, she has perspiration on her forehead and stares at the spectator. The puzzling scene offers no explanation to the significance of the murdered man or the woman's expression.

The omission of explanation in the scene produces a gap that nurtures the curiosity of what will follow in subsequent events. David Bordwell in his explanation of parametric narration describes one characteristic as the following:

...by such gaps and equivocations, the narration maintains an overt communicativeness that provokes our curiosity about how the predicted events will occur" (291).

The spectator is unsure what the scene implies and how it foreshadows the plot. The spectator is unsure whether the action centers on a murder mystery in an Afro-Cuban community or if it will focus on racial conflicts in Cuba. Both such presumptions could be extracted from such a scene, but both would be mistaken. The spectator lacks insight into the scene and is only able to guess

while waiting for more information to fill in the gaps. From the onset of the film the spectator is charged with the duty of thinking independently of the film to try to predict the content of future scenes, however such scenes are only fully understood through the context of the entire film.

Classical narrative often offers the opening scene as a guide to the rest of the film. However, *Memorias'* opening scene does little to orient the spectator to the action of the narrative since the following scene is a jump cut to the Havana airport. In this scene, the central character Sergio is seen bidding farewell to his family as they leave to live a life of exile in Miami. The connection between the opening scene and its ensuing airport scene initially is miniscule, however, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* returns to the opening dance scene approximately eighty minutes into the film to provide some coherence between the two.

As the camera follows Sergio down the street while his voiceover explains that he cannot understand the Cuban people, he enters into a cut back to the opening scene. This return to the original scene is shown through a camera orientation that follows Sergio and his point of view. The scene has been reborn and what invited mere speculation upon meaning at the beginning is not given context by the scene in relation to other scenes. The

spectator is better equipped to extract meaning from the second scene by relying on previous scenes to help construct the plot.

The interaction of these two scenes inserts the meaning into the other through the use of montage. Eisenstein in his essay "The Dramaturgy of Film Form [The Dialectical Approach to Film Form]," defines montage not as:

...an idea composed of successive shots stuck together but an idea that DERIVES from the collision between two shots that are independent of one another(28).

According to this definition, the interaction between these two scenes is an example of montage. The spectator discovers the meaning of the two scenes only upon returning to the opening scene through a new point of view.

Montage is prevalent in the combination of the film's documentary footage with Sergio's fiction. The documentary aspects of the film include hidden camera footage, photo-essays, newsreels, TV reports, radio broadcasts, newspaper clippings, and a sociological treatise. One such example of this combination of objectivity mixed with Sergio's subjectivity is the scene where Sergio is reading the newspaper. Sergio is in his apartment reading the newspaper and the camera zooms in on the headlines adopting Sergio's point of view. The

camera views all headlines without detaining long enough to read any of the articles. Headlines such as "More planes and battleships to Florida," "Kennedy Returns Suddenly to Washington" and "Atmosphere of War and Hysteria Grips U.S. Capital" are all read with the same indifference as the local headlines of "Young Mother Gives Birth to Triplets" and "Dog with Two Hearts." The individual headline shots interacting with each other and seen through Sergio's subjective viewpoint creates a mood of indifference and disinterest that the spectator is beginning to associate with Sergio's character. Hence, montage is another technique in Alea's arsenal of approaches at discouraging complete identification in the film.

Paul A. Schroeder argues in his book *Tomas Gutierrez Alea: The Dialects of a Filmmaker* that these collisions of montage throughout the film produce a sensation of collage(25). Alea also describes it as such in his cameo appearance as an ICAIC director in the film. When Sergio asks Alea what he is going to do with the sexually explicit shots that they had just viewed, he responds with, "Pienso meterlos en una película, una película esa que sea como un collage, se puede meter de todo."⁵

⁵ I'm thinking of putting them in a movie, a movie that is like a collage, one can include everything (trans. mine).

Brian Henderson writes in an article in *Film Quarterly* that in traditional montage fragments of reality are reconstituted in:

...highly organized, synthetic emotional and intellectual patterns. Collage, [on the other hand], collects or sticks its fragments together in a way that does not entirely overcome their fragmentation (Ctd. in Schroeder 25).

According to Schroeder, the best example of the film's collage characteristics is the way that Noemi is incorporated into the narrative. Noemi's narrative is dispersed throughout the film and is often introduced through Sergio's fragmented imagination (Schroeder 26).

This fragmentation is a mechanism used by Alea to introduce another layer of conflict that will encourage social action. A collage must be taken in collectively all at once, where as a film is perceived in time. Therefore the viewer's memory is challenged by the task of absorbing the entire film at once. The fragmented nature of the film makes it difficult to remember all of the subtle details of the film that are required to formulate a comprehensive analysis. The spectator is unlikely to grasp all of the nuances during the first viewing, therefore people want to come back to see it again. This characteristic of the collage spurs the curiosity of the spectator and spawns critical thinking at yet another level in the film.

The fragmented nature again appears in the broken expectation that the film is ending when the opening scene is repeated through Sergio's interpretation. This return to the beginning is a classical narrative convention that signals closure to the film and the narrative (Helminski 6). This return to the beginning coupled with Sergio's interior monologue as he crosses the street seems to foreshadow the end. Sergio's voiceover says, "Ahora espera Sergio tu destrucción final." The spectator expects an instantaneous end to the film with the death of Sergio. However, *Memorias* reveals these expectations with the intent to immediately disregard them. The film does not finish with this scene and continues for approximately eighteen minutes.

The continual fracture of expectations between the spectator and the film produces conflict that requires critical thinking to extract meaning from the film. Bertolt Brecht, in *Gesammelte Werke* noted that he saw the increasing tendency of intelligent spectators to forget their critical capabilities while at the theater. Expectations based on previous works affected what they saw and produced a reactionary effect (18:163). Although Brecht referred to theater, the same can be said for film. The conflict between the preconceived notions and the actual spectacle is essential in order to encourage

critical thinking that will strengthen the viewer's revolutionary consciousness.

In his theoretical treatise "Dialéctica del espectador" Gutiérrez Alea explains his vision for fortifying the revolutionary consciousness of the spectator. It will be enhanced if the spectator can generate a process of critical comprehension from the moment of contemplation of the film and consequently transform it into practical action (Alea Dialéctica 64). Critical thinking is most valuable when it translates into action that will affect the reality of the Revolution. Alea works towards the creation of the "active spectator" through continual conflict of expectations through the fragmented narrative of this collage.

Memorias del subdesarrollo, as discussed in the previous chapter, is an exemplary case of Alea's attempt to encourage critical thought. This chapter will continue to analyze the oscillation between identification and distanciation, while also taking into account the intended consequences of such thinking. Alea encourages critical thinking and also attempts to mold the viewer towards a stronger revolutionary consciousness by criticizing passiveness and individualism at various levels within and outside of the limits of the spectacle. The spectator identifies and then breaks identification with the central character Sergio as his character unfolds. Similarly, the self-reflexive nature of the film constantly challenges the viewers to discover fresh positions towards the intellectuals and the masses of Cuba, which translates into a redefinition of themselves as "active" or "passive" participants in the Revolution.

As noted in the previous chapter, the film is best understood as a collage, consequently making a linear analysis of the film difficult to achieve. Although my analysis of *Memorias del subdesarrollo* is not chronologically structured and often follows a more circular rather than linear approach, I will base my analysis on the two opening scenes previously discussed in the last chapter in an attempt to add structure to the argument. These two scenes are paramount as they set the

stage for continual identification and subsequent distancing that occurs between the viewer and the film and thus further justify their privileged treatment as the basis of my analysis.

Identification between the viewer and Sergio is established in the airport scene as Sergio bids farewell to his family. Paul A. Schroeder describes the camera shots of Sergio watching the plane depart for Miami in the second scene of the film in the following quote:

In that shot, the camera began with an almost subjective, over-the-shoulder shot behind Sergio. It then tracked around him and ended with a frontal view of his face. The shot was held as he whistled and watched the plane take off, so that the viewer ended up looking at him as well as with him. Viewer identification with Sergio was thus firmly established (41).

This identification with the viewer is secured with the purpose of dismantling and reestablishing it throughout the film.

Although the deterioration of identification between the viewer and Sergio begins almost immediately after it is secured, one scene in particular marks its termination. Sergio goes to a round table discussion where Jack Gelber, an American playwright, asks to comment on the debate:

Could I ask a question in English? It's all right? Ah...ah... Why is it that if the Cuban Revolution is a total revolution, they have to resort to an archaic form of discussion such as a round table, and treat us to an important

discussion of issues that I'm well informed about?

Sergio agrees with Gelber's critique that the intellectual community hides in their round table discussions while remaining sheltered from the reality of the streets. Consequently, the next scene shows Sergio crossing a street, but he is not engaged with the reality of the streets. Rather, he is still completely alone and the long zoom from afar as he is walking towards the camera across an empty street resembles a dream sequence more than a confrontation with reality. His isolation is emphasized rather than diminished as he enters the streets of Havana. Sergio's internal dialogue continues to depict him as removed and isolated from reality while being locked into the role of a self-reflexive intellectual:

No entiendo nada. El americano tiene razón. Las palabras se devoran las palabras y lo dejan a uno en las nubes, en la luna a miles de millas de todo. ¿Cómo se sale del subdesarrollo? Cada día creo que es más difícil, lo marca todo. Todo. Y tú, ¿Qué haces abajo Sergio? ¿Qué significa todo esto? Tú no tienes nada que ver con esta gente. Estás solo. En el subdesarrollo nada tiene continuidad, todo se olvida, la gente no es consecuente. Pero tú recuerdas muchas cosas, recuerdas demasiado. ¿Dónde está tu gente, tu trabajo, tu mujer? No eres nada, nada estás muerto. Ahora espera Sergio tu destrucción final.⁶

⁶ I don't understand a thing. The American was right. Words devour words and they leave a person in the clouds, on the moon. Thousands of miles away from everything. How does one get rid of underdevelopment? Every day I believe it is more difficult. It marks everything. Everything. What are you doing down there,

Sergio uses the second person point of view to address himself as if he continued to share the same point of view as the spectator that was established in the airport scene. However, this identification is lost with the extreme long shot from above that zooms in on him until his face covers the entire screen and he becomes a meaningless blur. His blurred image represents the new distorted image that the spectator has of Sergio. The once clearly identifiable character is now viewed from a blurred perspective and identification with him is lost.

Another point in the film that dissolves the spectator's identification with Sergio is the return to the dance scene that opened the action of the film. The initial dance scene, although ambiguous, implied a mood that demanded action and movement. The camera was an active participant in the movement of the music and the people, whereas the return scene's camera angle follows Sergio and refrains from entering the action. A sensation of alienation emanates from the scene and it embodied in Sergio as an outsider and a passive participant in the Revolution.

Sergio? What does all this mean? You don't have anything to do with them. You're alone. In underdevelopment nothing has continuity, everything is forgotten. People aren't consistent. But you remember many things, you remember too much. Where's your family, your work, your wife? You're nothing, you're dead. Now it begins, Sergio, your final destruction (trans. mine).

Memorias addresses the issue of "passiveness" and "activity" in Sergio's life and also as it pertains to the spectator. Sergio's character is utilized to execute a critique of both the Cuban intellectual and the classless Cuban spectator. Sergio's contemplative nature, portrayed in his internal monologue voiceovers, coupled with his inability to join the action of the Cuban people in their development of a new society classifies him as a purely "contemplative" intellectual. However, Sergio's character is complex and represents more than one dimension of Cuban society.

Lukacs insisted that the individual character is representative of social causality. However for Brecht, Lukacs' theory that called for a convergence of the particular into a stereotypical character was no longer valid in our time because our world had changed and that there was a changing objectivity. He felt that the perspective of the individual hero was too narrow and limited to incorporate the complexity of modern social relations. The historical transition from the bourgeois age to that of the working class demanded a new model of film and theater. The bourgeois age concentrated on the individual, inviting the spectator to identify with the experiences of the protagonist whose function was to model the complexity of human nature (Speirs 40-1). The

individual is no longer the major factor of social and economic importance; therefore a new model was required.

Brecht replaced the idea of the "typical," which for Lukacs was the unity of the universal and the individual, with the notion of the "gestus," which focuses on the social situation itself (Mueller 62-3). In other words Brecht's "gestus" focuses on the typical relations among people and avoids the universal character. Reasoning that reality is not one-dimensional, the characters in film or theatre should also be multi-dimensional to present a level of verosimilarity to the work of art. This characteristic provides a space for conflict to spawn within the character and encourages the viewer to adopt a critical approach to the film and to reality.

Lukacs creates characters that are prototypical of a specific class or era. His individuals are stereotyped with strict schematic portrayal. Sergio does not fit Lukacs' character schemata because he is not one-dimensional; rather he is divided and complex. He embodies traits of a Cuban intellectual who fails to embrace the reality of the Revolution, but his passive characteristics are paralleled with the "passive spectator" of the theater, which includes him as a member of the masses as well.

The spectator rejects Sergio, but at the same time he identifies with him since Sergio is also a spectator.

This results in a self-critical approach that the audience is forced to adopt due to the shared voyeuristic traits and proves essential in promoting revolutionary action. This association between Sergio and the "passive spectator" transcends the binary opposition between the intellectual and the masses by including them both as the object of scrutiny and is thereby inclusive of a more complex critique of social relations.

The following description of scenes illustrates the parallels that the film constructs between Sergio and the spectator. Sergio returns to his apartment after leaving his family at the airport. As he enters his apartment the camera work is emblematic of *cinema verité* and the only sound is that of Sergio whistling, which upon revision of the scene emphasizes his solitude, but only initially marks his immediate emotion of content. A hand held camera follows Sergio through his apartment to his bedroom where he flings himself back on the bed as if expressing a certain relief that his family is gone and that he finally has a place of refuge all to himself. The refuge of Sergio's apartment is paralleled with the spectator's anonymous escape upon entering the darkness of the theater.

Sergio then sits down at his typewriter and writes the first words of *Inconsolable Memories*, Edmundo Desnoes' novel on which the film is based, "Todos los que

me querían estuvieron jodiendo hasta el último momento, se fueron."⁷ This again reinforces Sergio's relief in his escapism and continues to construct the parallel between the two entities. As previously mentioned, the escapism of the theater often results in the repression of the spectator's critical thinking; however, by exposing the process the film attempts to avoid it.

The next morning he enjoys toast and coffee while the soundtrack records his burps and slurps of coffee, further emphasizing the comfort that he finds in the seclusion of his apartment. He then walks onto his balcony and observes the city from his telescope. The first image that he finds through the lens is a couple groping each other while lying on lawn chairs next to a pool. Sergio is equated with the camera and therefore the spectator sees everything that Sergio sees. Sergio and the spectator continue to observe the city until they detain for a moment on the monument to the U.S. Battleship Maine, which has been torn down with only the pillars remaining. Meanwhile, Sergio's voiceover says, "El Titan de Bronze... y la paloma que iba a mandar Picasso, muy cómodo eso de ser comunista y millonario en Paris."⁸ This initial telescope scene invites the

⁷All those who loved me, bothered me to the last moment, have left (trans. mine).

⁸The Bronze Titan... and the dove that Picasso was going to send. It is very comfortable being communist and a millionaire in Paris (trans. mine).

spectator to identify with Sergio through the shared camera shots and voice-over monologue that is consistent with common revolutionary rhetoric.

As the opening dance scene is revisited through Sergio's flashback, the initial telescope scene is replicated as the film concludes. Sergio again views Havana from the distance of the telescope in the closing scene as the people work and prepare for the Bay of Pigs invasion. Instead of joining the Cuban people and their struggles, Sergio and the spectator view the Revolution from afar through Sergio's telescope. Sergio is a spectator due to his voyeuristic tendencies of watching and contemplating, while abstaining from any sort of participation. In this sense he is the same as every individual who watches a film in a theater and does not integrate what they learned or saw in the theater into reshaping reality.

The conditions of the theater give the illusion of being alone, although the spectator is actually a member of the audience in the theater. The darkness of the theater, the lights and shadows on the screen together with the loud sounds that surround the viewer add to the phenomena of identification. They produce in the viewer something similar to a hypnotic state where the consciousness of the viewer is dormant. The images on the screen act as a shared dream where their power and

persuasion or suggestion can be powerful and dangerous (Alea Dialéctica 77). Therefore viewers are inclined to identify with Sergio because of their position as spectators in a theater.

Another way that *Memorias* approximates the dilemma between "passiveness" and "action" is the film's criticism of passiveness and individualism through the contrast between the interior refuge of the house and the exterior nature of the street. In the scene where Sergio and Elena visit Ernest Hemingway's home in San Francisco de Paula, Sergio criticizes Hemingway for his isolationist and manipulative tendencies while the film's camera shots criticize Sergio for the same tendencies. These isolationist traits ultimately translate into another criticism of the spectator.

Sergio brings Elena to Hemingway's villa in San Francisco de Paula as part of his continual plan to educate and mold her to his intellectual desires. Sergio criticizes Hemingway in the following quotes:

Aquí tuvo su refugio, su torre, su isla en el trópico. Lo amoldó [René Villareal] a sus necesidades, el criado fiel y el gran señor, el colonizador y el Gunga Din. Hemingway debió de haber sido un tipo insoportable"⁹

These criticisms of Hemingway function as criticisms of himself. Sergio is a voyeur to the action in the streets

⁹This was his refuge, his tower, his island in the tropics. He modeled René Villareal to his needs, the faithful servant and the

through his telescope from the refuge of his apartment in the same way that Hemingway used his tower to hide from his fear of life.

Sergio reads an excerpt from Hemingway's diary of how he conquered the fear of death by chasing a buffalo and responds with the following:

Si fuera suficiente correr detrás de un búfalo para vencer el miedo, de todas maneras no hay búfalo en Cuba. Soy un idiota... El venció el miedo a la muerte, pero no pudo soportar el miedo de la vida, al tiempo, al mundo que empezaba a quedar demasiado grande."¹⁰

Sergio felt that Hemingway was scared of the reality of life and hence spent his time holed-up in his tower writing about adventures of life and molding others to his desires, while at the same time avoiding active participation in the Cuban community. Hemingway ultimately took his own life in a final act of escapism.

Although Sergio is the subject that criticizes Hemingway, he is also the object of these criticisms. Sergio's apartment is elevated over the city and serves as his private space of refuge for molding the women in his life through abuse, wealth and fantasy. In the same way that Hemingway molded René to a life of servitude,

great lord, the colonialist and Gunga Din. Hemingway must have been unbearable (trans. mine).

¹⁰ If it were sufficient to run behind a buffalo to beat fear, anyway there are no buffalo in Cuba. I'm an idiot... He defeated the fear of death, but he couldn't stand the fear of life, of the time, of the world that began to become too big (trans. mine).

Sergio attempts such a conquest with Laura, Elena and Noemi.

Sergio believes the women of Cuba to be inferior to his sophisticated lifestyle and none of the women in his life meet the standards set by his first love Hanna, who was European. He thereafter wishes to Europeanize the women who enter his life. Sergio says, "Siempre trato de vivir como un europeo. Elena me obliga a sentir el subdesarrollo a cada paso."¹¹ His condescending attitude towards Cuban women as reminders of the underdevelopment of the country functions as a distancing factor from the audience.

The preceding scene to Hemingway's home illustrates Sergio's frustration with his girlfriend Elena. As Sergio and Elena walk through a museum, Sergio appears sophisticated in his appreciation for the art, while Elena is flighty and uninterested. Sergio's voiceover says, "También a Elena quise cambiarla como a Laura, pero no entiende nada."¹² Sergio was unable to change his wife Laura and his flashbacks to his attempts portray Sergio as cruel and relentless in his efforts. Sergio fantasizes about his housekeeper Noemi in an attempt to shape her in his dreams in the same way that the film

¹¹ I always try to live like an European. Elena makes me feel the underdevelopment at every step.

¹² I also wanted to change Elena like I did to Laura, but she doesn't understand anything (trans. mine).

shapes the viewer through the dream-like encounter in the theater.

Sergio takes Elena out for dinner on their first date and during dinner he fantasizes of sex. The images that began as his sexual fantasies are continued into the following scene at the ICAIC and they are now movie clips that are being shown by Gutiérrez Alea himself to Sergio and Elena. This cameo appearance by Alea draws attention to the process of film and further develops the correlation between Sergio's controlling tendencies and film's similar characteristics. Pure identification with the protagonist prevents the spectator from actively participating with the film and exposes the spectator's vulnerability to the clandestine mechanisms of the film. This is a plea to the spectator to disassociate him/herself from pure identification with film so as to free his/her mind enough to participate actively in reality and the Revolution.

As earlier mentioned Cuba was saturated with Hollywood films that covered rather than exposed the inherent mechanisms of film and used them as tools to maintain the status quo. Although Alea was a student of North American film and studied the dramatic and comic elements, he imitated certain aspects of Hollywood, while avoiding the status quo enforcing elements of the industry in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. Many Hollywood

films attempted to distract the viewer from the socio-political reality of the nation and presented a world where the viewer could identify with the central character and purge the socio-political unrest. This process worked against the Cuban philosophy of using cinema as a revolutionary tool for developing a stronger revolutionary consciousness.

Alea, in *Dialectica del espectador* uses a Tarzan movie to exemplify the way that the mechanism of identification has become an absolute for many spectators in the Hollywood tradition, which results in the resignation of critical thinking to total identification. Alea writes that even black and female audiences support the jungle animal's response to Tarzan's call as they help him rescue Jane from a group of black men. He writes that in these situations identification has become an absolute, which prevents the spectator from discerning between anything besides the "bad guys" and the "good guys" and naturally the spectator identifies with the latter (Alea Dialéctica 70). This process numbs the spectator's consciousness instead of sensitizing it. Therefore Alea utilizes many distancing methods already mentioned to avoid the absolute identification with Sergio, but he also embraces partial identification in his crusade to develop an improved revolutionary consciousness in the spectator. He finds a balance in

the compromise between Brecht's alienation and Eisensteins's identification.

Many Hollywood films focused on fantastic spectacles, such as Tarzan's communication with jungle animals, which contained socio-political messages aimed at maintaining the status quo. The identification with Tarzan prevents the audience from critically noticing the racist stereotype-enforcing plot of evil black men endangering the safety of the white protagonists. Alea opposed such an approach and dedicated his films to the confrontation of socio-political concerns surrounding Cuba instead of disguising them behind the mechanism of pure identification. Instead of creating a spectacle of catharsis, *Memorias* is a call for the transference of potential energy into kinetic power.

Although Alea's films are not fantastic in the Hollywood sense, they embrace the inherent fantastic nature of film and expose it to the spectator. The written fiction of Hemingway, the sexual fantasies of Sergio and the fantasy of the spectator in the dream-like environment of the theater are deliberately exposed as sterile and impotent when action does not accompany them. Alea uncovers these controlling mechanisms in order to shed light on the otherwise obscured relationship between the spectator and the film. Through such exposure, the

film shows that fantasy is intrinsic in film and functions as a controlling mechanism on the audience.

Hemingway, Sergio and the film itself are portrayed as creators of fiction or fantasy and all three are also depicted as controlling forces. Hemingway creates fiction and is portrayed as an unbearable man who molded René to his liking. Sergio is initially cast as a creator when he writes the opening lines to the novel on which the film is based. The camera shots from his point of view and his fantasies of Noemi continue to portray him in this light and his controlling nature is revealed through his attempts to Europeanize the women in his life. The spectator rejects the controlling nature of these two creators of fantasy in the film. Upon such a judgment, the audience is forced to confront the fantasy of the film itself and its controlling nature on them as an audience.

The rejection of the controlling nature of Sergio and the film translates into the loss of identification between the spectator and Sergio. Once identification is compromised, Alea implements the next step towards developing a stronger revolutionary consciousness. Alea relies on what Brecht referred to as *Verfremdungseffekte* or the 'distancing effect' to help the viewers discover on their own something that had once been camouflaged by its common nature. He draws on Hegel to explain his

argument, "Lo conocido en términos generales, precisamente por ser conocido, no es reconocido"¹³ (ctd. in Alea Dialéctica 74-75). He tries to present an image that the spectator is accustomed to in a way that appears new and fresh, such as the return to the telescope scene. When the spectator sees an ordinary representation of reality, albeit a subjective perspective, on the screen he sees it from a different viewpoint, which sheds new light on reality. This new vision of reality functions as a revelation of new signification (Alea Dialectica 76).

The discovery in the film is exemplified in the telescope sequences, which initially may have been interpreted as a casual representation of reality, but combined with the second telescope scene and distancing mechanisms in between the scenes proposes a new interpretation. The accumulations of previous scenes shed new light on the telescope scenes as evidence of the previously mentioned collage structure of the film. In this revisited interpretation the telescope symbolizes Sergio's isolation from social action. This discovery of Sergio's "passivity" is paralleled with the self-reflective discovery of the spectator's passiveness. It shows a scene that was originally deemed common and

¹³The familiar in general terms, precisely for being familiar is not recognized.

unworthy of critical thought in a different context and hence a discovery is made that allows the spectator to view the film and reality from a fresh perspective. The discovery produces an internal transformation that consequently results in exerting this internal change on the external reality.

The spectator is able to see shared qualities with Sergio as they share in his voyeuristic nature. Sergio is a voyeur of society and the spectator is a voyeur of Sergio and also a voyeur of society if he/she does not receive the film as a call to revolutionary action. Alea uses the subjective camera angle of Sergio's view, a film mechanism that traditionally upholds the status quo, and inverts it to arouse a critical approach of the process of identification in film. He makes us as spectators painfully aware of the filmic medium by self-conscious investigation of its processes.

If the spectator empathizes with Sergio, then this proximity to the character is little bothersome and hardly evokes a negative reaction that would consequently lead to a desire to change. Therefore he breaks the identification with Sergio before an absolute identification is established. Although Alea includes alienation mechanisms in the film, North American viewer's responses to the film often suggest that such mechanisms remain overlooked in final analysis.

For this reason, Alea's condemnation of the North American viewer's interpretation is validated in the sense that it does not follow his original intentions. However, such interpretations are not necessarily wrong or "manipulative" as Alea described them, rather they miss the wealth of layered criticism that transcends the boundaries of the capitalist versus communist struggle. These interpretations miss the scrutiny of the relationship between the spectacle and the spectator and therefore fail to translate ideas from the film into individual and social change that Alea deems paramount in creating a stronger revolutionary consciousness.

The Cuban spectator has the distinct advantage of societal context to better understand the film. As I mentioned earlier, the North American viewer may truly empathize with Sergio, but the Cuban spectator would have to ignore many of his anti-revolutionary ways in order to identify completely with him. Brecht's theory that the traditional perspective of the individual is inadequate in presenting and demonstrating the complex causality of social relations is exemplified in Sergio.

Alea wants to nurture analysis rather than obstruct it so he develops Sergio as a character that is alienated from the Revolution, but at the same time Sergio's character exemplifies certain revolutionary characteristics. Although Sergio's character mainly

embodies characteristics of the elite bourgeois intellectual, he is also emblematic of the average Cuban spectator. As Sergio criticized Picasso for his passive position from Paris in the first telescope scene, the film criticizes Hemingway's, Sergio's and ultimately the spectator's passivity. It is easy to observe and contemplate reality from a safe haven such as Sergio's tower or the darkness of the theatre, but contemplation is useless to the creation of a stronger revolutionary consciousness if it is not converted into action.

Alea openly attempts to create a stronger revolutionary consciousness in the Cuban spectator by laying bare often hidden mechanisms through their criticism at multiple levels in the film. They are embodied in Sergio's criticisms of non-fiction people such as Hemingway and Picasso, but an even more potent critique develops in the hypocrisy of Sergio's criticisms of others. Every time that Sergio criticizes someone, the viewer sees that the criticism is applicable to Sergio and consequently the spectator as well.

The initial identification and subsequent distancing from Sergio sets the stage for the last link in this chain of scrutiny. The spectator soon loses interest in identifying with Sergio and turns to criticizing him instead. However, every time that the audience criticizes Sergio, it realizes its vulnerability to the

same criticism. The passive nature of Sergio is discovered also as a characteristic of the spectator's position to the spectacle from the autonomous darkness of the movie-theater. This discovery is what leads to critical thinking and discovery that translates into action and enhanced revolutionary consciousness.

Chapter 8: A Return to Identification

Fresa y chocolate shares similar objectives with *Memorias del subdesarrollo* in its attempt to create a stronger revolutionary consciousness in the spectator. However the quarter century that passed between the release of the two films demands that new historical and cultural issues be treated. By the release date of *Fresa y chocolate* in 1993, Cuba was suffering a severe cultural and economic crisis. This crisis that still persists today is highlighted by years of economic dependence on the Soviet Union that left Cuba susceptible to the economic repercussions to the collapse of Soviet Communism. With a trade embargo that is still intact from the Cold War-era, Cuba's island economy is in dire straits. The economic collapse was accompanied by what some view as a cultural crisis plagued by oppression, exile and a deviation from the ideological promises of the Revolution.

The current cultural and economic crisis makes Gutiérrez Alea's goal of creating a stronger revolutionary consciousness in the spectator ever more vital for the survival of the Revolution. When asked by Michael Chanan on the solution to the current crisis Alea responded with the following:

Well, sometimes a crisis generates a reaction, an answer. I think the only way of overcoming it would be-and perhaps I'm expressing a very

idealistic Christian sentiment here-by means of understanding and love among people. We have to help one another, because if we don't, we're all going to perish. Of course, there have to be new economic mechanisms, intelligent mechanisms, so that people feel motivated to react in the most coherent way to these goals of human coexistence. You can't act solely on the basis of exhortations and sermons and calls for love, because love flourishes where people can love each other, not in sewers (Chanan "We are losing" 51).

Gutiérrez Alea states that the impetus to recovery lies in economic reforms that provide the space for brotherly love and compassion among Cubans. He comes short of offering economic solutions to the crisis, but through his cultural influence he proposes a solution in *Fresa y Chocolate* that promotes tolerance and a strengthened revolutionary consciousness as understood by Alea.

In order to understand Alea's concept of the term "revolutionary consciousness" as used to describe his desired effects on the viewer, the term "revolution" must first be defined in the context of the Cuban lexicon. Sujatha Fernandes in her doctoral dissertation "Reinventing the Revolution: Artistic Public Spheres and the State in Contemporary Cuba" describes the term "revolution" as pertaining to a variety of meanings. The first definition is associated with the Cuban socialist state and in its most generalized form it describes the social achievements and nationalist goals of the Cuban

system that were set in place by the revolutionary movement of 1959 (11). This definition of the term would likely be adopted by Castro in his "Palabras a los intelectuales" speech where he declares "Dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada."¹⁴ Castro and the Cuban State call on the population to "defend the Revolution against American imperialism" as "revolution" is seen as synonymous with the socialist state.

Fernandes also explains that in some cases the Revolution is personified as an acting force in the world. She supports her opinion with the examples of people saying that, "the Revolution has given me these opportunities" or "the Revolution eliminated racial segregation" (11). This active nature of the revolution is also exemplified in her final definition of "revolution". Fernandes writes:

The term is also used to describe a dynamic of ongoing social and political change. Cubans frequently refer to the revolution as a process rather than a fixed outcome. They say that, "we are making a revolution," and "a revolution requires courage to change things," stressing the unfinished and continuous nature of political change (12).

This final definition of "revolution" is of utmost importance in understanding Alea's reference to the Cubans "revolutionary consciousness." Although the first definition is related more with the institutionalized

¹⁴ Within the Revolution everything, outside the Revolution nothing

notion of politics, and the second suggests continuing process. According to Fernandes, people understand the term "revolution" as both state authority and also as an utopia in the process of being realized (12). Alea understands the term in its utopia form while Castro refers to it as a combination of ideals and Cuban State. Although they both accept that ideals are an integral aspect in the definition of the term, the two Cubans construe the set of ideals deemed revolutionary differently.

Castro's association of revolution with the socialist regime has transformed it from a counter-dominant ideology during Batista's dictatorship to the dominant one of current times. Aspects of state ideology that become a part of the belief system of individuals in the society become hegemonic. Jean and John Comaroff in *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* refer to hegemony as what is "taken-for-granted" and explains the process that creates hegemony.

As ideologies spread throughout a political community they become accepted as the status quo and these ideologies are internalized through habitual practice, suffusing everyday life and the conventions that regulate it (28).

(trans. mine).

Such is the case in Cuba; the ideologies of the Revolution became hegemonic and in turn lack the progressive nature inherent in revolution.

The ongoing social and political change has been stagnated by a government that identifies itself with the Revolution of 1959, but has failed to remain revolutionary over the decades. Revolution is a process of continual evolution. Therefore when Che Guevara called for the formation of the "hombre nuevo," he was calling for the formation of a revolutionary consciousness that evolved with time and was rooted in critical thinking that would power the Revolution forward. According to Stephanis, Che Guevara was not looking for a "hombre nuevo" that was empty and unable to interpret the world around him because that would result in another type of alienation. The "hombre nuevo" is the active man that is in constant need to think and look for his own solution for Cuba (36). This definition of the "hombre nuevo" is consistent with the vision that Alea projects in his films to create a stronger revolutionary consciousness in the spectator. By adopting Stephanis' definition of Guevara's term, it is possible to assert that Alea dedicates *Fresa y chocolate* to the development of a critical thinking individual who is continually becoming new and yet deeply grounded in the original ideals of the Revolution.

Alea exemplifies characteristics of the "hombre nuevo" in the sense that his style evolves and has shifted from the extreme technical experimentation of *Memorias del subdesarrollo* to a more mise-en-scène technique. The semantic focus of *Fresa y chocolate* is on brotherly love and critical thinking, while *Memorias del subdesarrollo* proposed a call for action to join the movement of the masses. Despite the differences between the two films, his goal of creating active revolutionaries through the interplay of identification and distanciation between the spectator and protagonist remains intact. The definition of the term "revolutionary" evolves with time and now calls for the union of the ever-changing intellectual with the revolutionary of the hegemonic government.

Chapter 9: A Tale of Revolutionary Tolerance

The 1993 release of the popular Cuban film *Fresa y chocolate*, by directors Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío and with a script by Senel Paz, marks the beginning of a debate about its critical content and significance. Gutiérrez Alea criticized Cuban society in *Memorias del subdesarrollo* through Sergio's perspective, but the impact was weakened by the ultimate break of identification between the spectator and Sergio. *Fresa y chocolate* is different in that the criticism is intensified rather than diminished by the gradual growing identification between the spectator and Diego, who is originally positioned in polar opposition to the spectator's point of view. Contrary to accusations that Gutiérrez Alea is a dissident for such criticisms of his country, I will argue that his criticisms strengthen the revolutionary consciousness of Cubans rather than acting as a destructive force on the Revolution.

Michael Chanan in his interview with Gutiérrez Alea titled "We are Losing all our Values: An Interview with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea," asks him to comment on the critical commentary from outside of Cuba that tried to place him as a dissident because of the critical nature of *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. Alea denies being a dissident, but acknowledges criticizing Cuban society.

Well, some say that I'm a dissident because I criticize Cuban reality; others say I'm a propagandist for the government because with this criticism I try to show that in Cuba there exists freedom when in fact there is none... If a dissident is understood as someone who attacks the government to try to destroy it and erase all that the Revolution has been able to bring of benefit to the people, then I'm not a dissident. But, of course, I criticize within the Revolution everything that I think is a distortion of those objectives and those paths of hope-in other words, everything that has us off the path, to the point of placing us where we are today, in a very dangerous and agonizing crisis. In this sense, I'm a critic, but not a dissident (52-53).

In his response, Gutiérrez Alea openly acknowledges to his criticism of Cuban reality in *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and this critical approach in film is intensified in *Fresa y chocolate* because the process of distancing the spectator from identification with the protagonist, as experienced in *Memorias*, is reversed. The revolutionary Cuban spectator of *Fresa y chocolate* does not initially identify with the protagonist Diego (played by Jorge Perugorría) because of his "counter-revolutionary" sexual orientation, ideas and possessions. The spectator's identification is focused on David (played by Vladimir Cruz) who enjoys the privileged perspective of the camera and embodies the esthetics of the Revolution. The two characters are constructed as binary opposites in the beginning, but the clear division between the two soon dissolves, as does the spectator's distanced position to Diego.

Critics such as Andrew Sarris praised *Memorias del subdesarrollo* for its strong criticism of the Cuban government and society. The equally erroneous, but opposite accusation of not being critical enough of the Cuban government met *Fresa y chocolate*. Both of these critical receptions hold some validity, however my analysis based on the goal of creating a dialectical relationship in order to create a stronger revolutionary consciousness in the spectator disregards these interpretations and presents a different analysis of the films.

The negative reaction to *Fresa y chocolate* was grounded in its bourgeois nature and its failure to successfully condemn the treatment of homosexuals by the Cuban government. Carlos Campa Marcé refers to an article published by Paul Julian Smith in *Sight and Sound* titled "The Language of Strawberry" as an example of such criticism. The critique accused that the film was "la domesticación del cine revolucionario, tan vital en otros tiempos, reducido aquí a un discreto y verboso melodrama burgués"¹⁵ (70). The criticism partially alludes to the break from the experimental technical nature of earlier films such as *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, but the central

¹⁵ ...the domestication of the revolutionary cinema, so vital in other times, reduced here to a discrete and wordy bourgeois melodrama.

complaint is the perceived bourgeois component to the film.

The film is considered bourgeois by Smith because it fails to provide a gay point of view. Evidence of this omission of gay agenda is that the camera and consequently the likelihood that the spectator also refuses to take a homosexual point of view. The film's point of view centers on David, the heterosexual protagonist, rather than on Diego. This camera's identification is initiated from the opening sequence when David brings Vivian to a cheap motel where they plan to make love for the first time. Vivian separates from him on the bed and goes to the bathroom, while David waits for her to return he peeps through a hole in the wall at two energetic heterosexual lovers. As David peeps through the hole, the camera adopts his viewpoint and the spectators view the scene through David's eyes. Next, the camera slowly pans across Vivian's naked back as she returns to bed. This initiates the film's preferred treatment of David and the heterosexual point of view and also develops the spectator's identification with him.

David's point of view prevails throughout the film by other means besides being the subject of the camera shots. He is often seen alone and his internal dialogue, presented as a voice-over, comments on Cuban's

infatuation with sex. This is in opposition to the way that Diego appears in the film. Rarely, is Diego seen alone and when he is in a frame by himself, he appears as the object of David's gaze. He appears most frequently accompanied either by David's look or by the look of other characters, like Nancy, Germán or Miguel. In other words Diego is objectified through the gaze of others.

The symbolic nature of the film is the basis for Campa Marcé's insightful analysis of Smith's criticisms. Campa Marcé writes:

...su crítica adolece de cierta impertinencia al exigir a Gutiérrez Alea algo que nunca estuvo en su propósito: hacer queer cinema, es decir, una película abiertamente homosexual: lo que no era, obviamente, su intención"¹⁶ (70-71).

Evidence that Gutiérrez Alea's objective was not to create "queer cinema" is the objectification of Diego in the film. Campa Marcé in the previous quote reveals Smith's failure to recognize that Alea's goal was not to create an openly gay film, rather he used the theme of homosexuality as a vehicle to promote a union of Cubans based on the ideals of a strengthened revolutionary consciousness.

Fresa y chocolate deconstructs binary oppositions within Cuban society at various levels in an effort to promote national reconciliation. The clear theme of

¹⁶ His critique suffers from impertinence upon demanding something of Gutiérrez Alea other than the film's objective: to make queer cinema,

homosexual/heterosexual opposition warrants work to be done in the field of gay or queer analysis of the film. However, unless such an analysis recognizes the symbolic nature of sexuality in the film and continues the study into broader fields of Cuban society, I believe that much of the dialect between the film and the spectator would be lost.

A gay or queer analysis would privilege the homosexual/heterosexual opposition in its study, as in the case of Smith and would find that such an analysis of the film leaves something to be desired. The abusive treatment of homosexuals within the Castro regime is a bona fide point of departure for the analysis of the film, however the homosexual/heterosexual division only functions as metonymy of Cuban culture. The differences in sexual orientation between Diego and David are symbolic of a divided nation. *Fresa y chocolate* is not entirely committed in plot or dialogue to denouncing the oppressions that homosexuals have suffered under the Castro regime; rather it subtly alludes to such injustices and uses homophobia to paint a national picture of intolerance at multiple levels. Cuban society is fractured by sexual orientation, by diverse revolutionary philosophies and because of intolerance

in other words, a movie that is openly homosexual: which obviously was not his intention (trans. mine).

between these groups the nation is divided further between Cuban nationals and Cuban exiles. At such times of national crisis it is essential to the continued progress of the Revolution that Cubans unite, however due to the present intolerant socio-political environment, the nation remains divided.

The fable of national unity and tolerance that Alea weaves in the film that is a response to the crisis and is grounded in the sexual metaphor, but it is not confined to the boundaries of sexuality. The relationship between David and Diego is symbolic of the nation's division. David is heterosexual, a revolutionary cadet, limited in his education, an atheist and certain that he will remain in Cuba. In opposition to David, Diego is homosexual, an artist and intellectual, broadly educated in the arts, religious and becomes an exile at the conclusion of the film. Through the friendship that develops between these seemingly polar opposites, the film attempts to break the barriers of intolerance in Cuban society.

As Smith insightfully brought to light, the film privileges David's point of view and by doing so establishes the spectator's identification with him. He/she identifies with David who not only enjoys the privileged perspective of the camera, but also embodies the esthetic characteristics of heterosexuality and the

Revolution. He is a card-carrying member of the Communist party, which he quickly flashes to Diego during their first encounter at the Coppelia ice cream parlour where the dichotomy of the title is established. David eats chocolate ice cream while Diego eats strawberry. The complete opposition of two characters is apparent even in their choices of ice cream and the spectator finds him/herself eating chocolate ice cream with David.

This identification initially aligns the spectator on the side of heterosexuality and the Cuban government, whereas the spectator is originally alienated from Diego because of his "counter-revolutionary" sexual orientation, ideas and possessions. David's first visit to Diego's 'guarida' reveals religious sculptures, photographs of naked men, foreign magazines and books that persuade him to report his "counter-revolutionary" discovery to Miguel, who is also a member of the Young Communist Pioneers. However, this polarization becomes problematic when the "counter-revolutionary" characteristics of Diego and the "revolutionary" traits of David begin to invert upon themselves and become to define the opposite of what they originally signified, thereby dismembering the original dichotomy.

This inversion of characteristics that deconstructs the binary opposition of the two characters is founded in the friendship that develops between David and Diego.

Rebecca M. Stephanis in her article "La construcción del Hombre Nuevo: El intelectual y el revolucionario en Memorias del subdesarrollo, Fresa y Chocolate y Guantanamera" writes:

According to Julianne Burton, there are two revolutionary groups. The first is vanguard and committed to serve the Revolution for others. The second is the intellectual that tries to establish himself in a sociopolitical side of the Revolution. According to Burton, intellectuals and revolutionaries are not opposites or enemies, but rather they should interact in a dialectic relation to advance the Revolution (31).

This is the message that Gutiérrez Alea and Tabío promote in the film through the reconciliation of differences and the resulting friendship of two seemingly opposite characters.

The film proposes a solution to this through the interplay of alienation and identification in the film. The two characters clear division soon dissolves resulting in a reexamined perspective on both David and Diego. The spectator identifies with the "active" protagonist of the Revolution, however it soon becomes evident that David and the spectator are impotent rather than active. Both David and the spectator are portrayed as passive or impotent from the opening sequence of David and Vivian in the motel. David's voyeuristic view through the hole of the "active" couple next door reminds the spectator of his/her own voyeuristic view of the

film. As in the telescope scenes of *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, Alea again develops a voyeuristic scene with a character that is the object of the spectator's identification in order to lay bare the process of the cinematic apparatus and remind the spectator of his/her passive interaction with the film. This technique drew attention to the inactivity and isolation of Sergio and now draws attention to David's shared impotency with the spectator.

Another example of the crumbling image of David and the Revolutionary spirit that he represents is when Diego tells David of the deterioration of the architectural beauty of Havana. Diego says:

Vivimos en una de las ciudades más maravillosas del mundo, todavía está tiempo a ver algunas cosas antes de que se derrumbe, se le trae la mierda.¹⁷

The film follows with a cut to a montage sequence in which David is included in a scene of crumbling buildings. David realizes his insufficiencies and becomes open to Diego's wealth of knowledge.

The spectator's distanced position to Diego also begins to dissolve as traits that had previously been overlooked begin to emerge. Diego's "counter-revolutionary" or "anti-Cuban" image suffers an inversion

¹⁷We live in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, there is still time to see some things before it all falls and turns to shit (trans. mine).

process that exposes his knowledge of Cuba. Diego's version of being Cuban does not coincide with the establishment's vision; nonetheless Diego is portrayed as being more Cuban than David is. When David, referring to the large picture mounted on the wall, asks Diego of the figure's identity and Diego informs him that it is Lezama Lima, one of the fathers of Cuban literature, David's previously unscathed Cuban identity is put into question. Also when David brings in his own writings Diego comments:

Qué es eso de escribir mujic en lugar de guajiro? Denota excesivas lecturas de las editoriales Mir y Progreso. Hay que comenzar por el principio, porque talento tienes."¹⁸

Diego is making reference to a writing that includes the Regimen sanctioned readings both national and Soviet, but that excludes some of Cuba's finest writers.

Diego becomes a source of Cuban knowledge that has been ignored by the Regime and thus also ignored by the revolutionaries. The intellectual hasn't stopped thinking or critiquing, Diego is more educated and more Cuban because he knows the literature, the music, and the architecture of his country where as David only knows that of the Revolution and of the Soviet Union (Stephanis 34). Diego says, "Lo que está en peligro no es sólo la

¹⁸ What is this of writing Russian instead of Cuban? It denotes too many readings from the Mir and Progreso editing houses. You need to start at the beginning because you have talent (trans. mine).

Revolución: lo que está en grave peligro es la patria."¹⁹

The regimen of the Revolution has excluded much of the best Cuban literature just as it has excluded homosexuals and other "counter-Revolutionary" sectors of the population. Diego teaches David that there is more to being Cuban than the governmental approved materials deemed as "revolutionary."

Diego initiates David into a new reality of Cuban art and at the same time plays an active role in his sexual initiation that negates the impotency that characterized him in the opening scene. David meets Nancy in Diego's "guarida" and after the initiation into "la cena lezamiana," David loses his virginity to Nancy in Diego's bed. David's intellectual and sexual initiations develop together due to his relationship with Diego. David's revolutionary identity that had been put into question by his inactivity has been revived and he is able to lay claim to a new identity of "activity" and renewed revolutionary consciousness. The sexual metaphor that constructs the fable of tolerance and inclusive Cuban unity is completed with this scene.

The reconciliation between David and Diego has far reaching implications on the spectator when the effects of identification and estrangement are taken into

¹⁹ What is in danger is not only the Revolution: what is in grave danger is the country (trans. mine).

account. The spectator experiences this inversion through the gaze of David that becomes more accepting of Diego. The spectator experiences the humor and kindness that Diego shares with David and is inclined to identify with such humanistic qualities.

The spectator never loses identification with David, but gains a newfound identification with Diego. Whereas *Memorias del subdesarrollo* relied more on Brecht's theory of estrangement, *Fresa y chocolate* depends on Eisenstein's theory of identification to transform the actions of the theater into the praxis of the spectator. Eisenstein's theory reasons that complete identification with the subject provides the stimulus that produces action in the spectator. If the spectator can see everyday reality through the eyes of the subject on the screen, then the spectator has a new perspective on reality and can approach world of the spectator with new and enlightened vision that will produce the action that Alea strives to achieve through his film. The spectator sees fictional reality through the eyes of David who is eventually able to identify with Diego, who initially was presented as a polar opposite. The film draws on Eisenstein's theory in an attempt to enable the spectator to refigure the fiction into his/her own symbolic world.

As in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, the film attempts to influence across the fictional boundaries of the

theater into the world of the spectator. David again exemplifies passive traits when in Diego's apartment he reports that their friendship is acceptable in the apartment, but not in the streets. Just as Hemmingway and Sergio hid in their towers of isolation and passivity, David proposes a similar refuge for their friendship and Diego acquiesces portraying a similar passivity, yet somewhat less surprising due to stigma attached to his intellectual characterization.

Through Diego's mentoring of David and the ensuing friendship, David is willing to go to the streets with his new friend and his new knowledge. The closing scene returns to Coppelia where the two are again eating ice cream, only this time David orders strawberry and Diego eats chocolate. Although David and Diego were able to achieve the reconciliation, Diego ultimately is forced into exile by the letter that he sent in protest to the censorship of his exposition. The resistance to conclude the film with the "Hollywood happy ending" provides sufficient conflict and fissures to transfer the identification that the spectator found in the friendship with Diego into the reality. However, it is up to spectator to develop an ending to the film that includes Diego in Cuba rather than exiling him.

The challenge to the Cuban spectators is to achieve reconciliation with their countrymen. Instead of hiding

in isolation from difference, one must embrace the difference exemplified by the oppositions between David and Diego because herein lies the conflict that creates the necessary catalyst to action and the advancement of the Revolution. The example of tolerance and empathy experienced in the film must leave the theater and be transformed into action that will create a new Cuban reality.

The transformation of David and the spectator through an acceptance of Diego and his vision of the revolution is an example of how Cubans can come together to rectify the current crisis in Cuban society. As the spectator identifies with David through the gaze of the film, he/she also breaks the barriers of opposition between the two protagonists and establishes identification with Diego. The spectator's revolutionary identity has also been put into question by his/her inactivity in relation to the film and the shared experience with David. The solution to this problem is found in the new revolutionary consciousness that the film promotes.

The inclusion of Diego's alternate vision of the Revolution is what revives and enables David to lay claim to a new mode of being revolutionary. David was able to regain his Cuban identity through his friendship with Diego. However, due to the economic repercussions of the

intolerant political and cultural environment of Cuba, Diego was forced into exile. The current crisis requires conflict that encourages the development of a new revolutionary consciousness that includes diverse perspectives in order to create unity rather than division in Cuban society. In 1891 in Tampa, Florida Jose Marti spoke of the future of Cuba with the following words: "Con todos y para el bien de todos."²⁰ Gutiérrez Alea's vision of the future of Cuba coincides with Marti's, however the Regimen and many "revolutionaries" have strayed from the inclusiveness of Marti's message and *Fresa y chocolate* is an effort to realign the course of the Revolution.

²⁰ With everyone and for everyone's welfare (trans. mine).

Chapter 10: Concluding Reflections on a Continuous Call to Action

Of the three films analyzed in this study, *Fresa y chocolate* realizes the most overt criticism of Cuba's revolutionary trajectory. While exposing the rifts in Cuban society, it offers hope for tolerance and national unity, but charges the spectator with the responsibility of creating a Cuba where Diego and diverse citizens like him are able to take an active role in revolutionary Cuba. Alea realizes that separation and internal struggling will not overcome the crisis that faces Cuba after the loss of their Communist allies and the U.S. backed trade embargo. Therefore, Alea communicates this message to the spectator through the linguistic medium of film.

The films invoke conflict as a means to manifest revolutionary consciousness in the spectator. *Fresa y chocolate* and especially *Memorias del subdesarrollo* are superb examples of the communication of cinematic meaning built on conflict. Alea calls on the spectator to decipher the meaning of his films and in turn use their voice to become active participants in strengthening the Revolution. The cinematic language of montage, collage, ambiguity and the oscillation between identification and estrangement are the basic building blocks of meaning for

the spectator to decode in Alea's linguistic dialect with the spectator.

The oscillation between the spectator's identification and estrangement is the result of Alea's subscription to the theories of both Bertolt Brecht and Sergei Eisenstein. Brecht attempts to create distance between the spectator and the central character as a means to avoid the total submission to the film and the consequent risk of allowing the film to think for him/her. Brecht's theories support the laying bare of filmic mechanisms in order to attract attention to the potential power that the film has on the viewer. This realization is intended to nurture a critical thinking in the theater as well as in the streets that works towards a realization of an improved reality due to the heightened critical thinking in the public.

Sergei Eisenstein also theorizes on the most effective way to achieve new realities in the spectator. However, instead of creating distance between the spectator and the central character of the film, he proposes that complete identification with the character allows him/her to experience life through another's perspective. As a result of this altered perception of reality the spectator will reevaluate his/her relationship with reality and ultimately produce change.

Alea identifies with both theories and includes them in his films. *Memorias del subdesarrollo* oscillates between the two to create a dialogue within the film. Both theorists value critical thinking as the driving force behind an incessant effort to improve and rework oneself and one's social reality.

Alea referred to this fluid drive as the revolutionary consciousness of Cubans and in his group of essays titled *Dialéctica del espectador*, he states his intentions to strengthen it the Cuban spectator through his films. He creates a competing discourse within the films that applies pressure on the spectator to think critically and improve Cuba and the Revolution. His films created a new discourse of revolutionary consciousness during three separate periods of the Revolution. He has answered the socio-historic demands of Cuba to the best of his artistic ability in each of films examined in this study.

Las doce sillas was an experimental film that marked a stage of unpolished technical inventiveness that supplied Cuba with comedy in serious times. Alea's adaptation of Brecht's and Eisenstein's is less apparent in this film than the other two films discussed in this study. However, a more detailed examination of the subconscious identification that results with the spectator as a result of the comic aspects of the film

would be an excellent point of departure for future critics interested in continuing this study. Although the message of *Las doce sillas* appeared more overtly didactic in nature and clearly supported the Revolution while criticizing the bourgeois, it marks Alea's initiation into the technical and narrative experimentation that would be a trademark of his more mature films.

Memorias del subdesarrollo, his most technically developed film, produces a sophisticated criticism of both revolutionary Cuba and the bourgeois who refuse to take an active role in the Revolution. The juxtaposition of Sergio as a passive participant in the Revolution with the active documentary shots that are included in the film highlight the theme of passiveness versus action in the film. Through a prolonged rupture of identification with Sergio the Cuban spectators are able to see his character faults and soon distance themselves from him and begin their criticisms of him. The multi layered criticisms in the film are especially effective because of the spectators' ultimate discovery that the accusing fingers of the criticisms are often pointing back at themselves.

These multi-layered criticisms that eventually point at the spectators' passive positions towards the film are initially disguised in the reality of everyday life. The collage nature of the film ensures that the spectators'

discovery of the criticism only occurs after a similar scene has been accepted earlier without reaction or reason to be self-critical. This method of showing the spectators' passivity first without reaction and then again in a similar scene that does provoke a reaction is an especially effective way to strengthen the revolutionary consciousness of the Cuban people.

This subtle yet effective method of reaching the spectator is exemplary of Alea's astute efforts to consistently improve the Revolution. This revolutionary dedication, evident in *Las doce sillas*, *Fresa y chocolate* and *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, is honored in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's obituary in *The New York Times* on April 17, 1996 and appropriately sums up his life and career as a constant proponent of a strengthened revolutionary consciousness:

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, the celebrated Cuban director of "Memories of Underdevelopment," "Strawberry and Chocolate" and other films, died yesterday in Havana. He was 69. Denying that he was a dissident, Mr. Gutiérrez Alea said, "Many people think if you criticize the government, then you are giving weapons to the enemy." On the other hand, he said, criticism was his obligation. He regarded himself as "a man who makes criticism inside the revolution, who wants to ameliorate the process, to perfect it, but not to destroy it."

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