

## A Lesson in Synthesis: Nation Building and Images of a "New Cuba" in *Fresa y chocolate*

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### Introduction

*Fresa y chocolate*, written by Senel Paz, filmed under the direction of veteran Cuban film-maker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and released by the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográfico in 1993, is an innovative Cuban film that makes use of old conventions. The mildly melodramatic plot of "boy meets girl" is polemicized by the addition of a homosexual protagonist, so that in *Fresa y chocolate* "boy meets boy (meets girl)." As the equation indicates, this simple and potentially volatile plot is made palatable to mainstream audiences and official censors through a good dose of humor and a heterosexual frame of reference. Yet *Fresa y chocolate* is far from reactionary. The film is better understood when it is seen as part of an allegorical convention that forms a fundamental part of the post-revolutionary Cuban film industry. Such allegories are used to dramatize the various forces at work in contemporary Cuba and theorize on what it means to be Cuban. I will argue that the simple plot of Alea's film is actually an allegory of the nation—not only as it is now, but as it was and as it could be, with some effort, in the future. I will study the nation as a theoretical construct and proceed by highlighting the role of Cuban film in the nation-building process. The article will conclude with a detailed analysis of the film so as to render the above process explicit.

### I. What is a nation?

*The nation ... is an abstraction, an allegory, a myth that does not correspond to a reality that can be scientifically defined.*

(José Carlos Mariátegui)<sup>1</sup>

A nation is much more than a geographical location occupying a place of greater or lesser prominence on a map. It is moreover a consensual idea, a cultural and political construct, an abstraction that is given form, unity, and meaning in the realm of discourse.<sup>2</sup> As Mariátegui indicates in the opening quotation, the idea of the nation is often formulated and sustained by means of allegory or fictions that incarnate and dramatize the conflicting forces at play in the construction of nationhood.

To begin with, these fictions are political. Whoever leads a nation is under constant pressure to define it from within and differentiate it from what lies outside its established borders. These borders are both physical and ideological in nature, and provide the initial form in which the idea of the nation is contained. The next stage in the nation-building process unites all those who lie within these borders, no matter how heterogeneous, with some common bonds. Timothy Brennan asserts that "the idea of nationhood is...a formal

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binding together of disparate elements" (62). This is achieved by insisting on and finding ways to demonstrate the commonality amongst nationals, as well as supplying them with a sense of belonging. The process is then completed by establishing a series of myths and symbols that in some way ratify and preserve the national essence, such as a flag, an anthem, or a hero.<sup>3</sup>

National culture, in turn, plays a central role in the construction and preservation of the idea of the nation. It provides the various discourses that speak on behalf of the people. It is also responsible for the allegories in which the people (that homogenous and equally fictive receptor of the national discourses) see themselves reflected or represented, and from which they can derive a sense of belonging and develop a degree of pride.<sup>4</sup> As Homi Bhabha points out, "The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference" (297).

### II. Allegories of a New Nation—The Role of Cuban Film

The idea that the nation is a construct bound together by consensual fictions, has been explicit in post-revolutionary Cuba where, for more than three decades, the government has endeavored to assure that both political and cultural discourses attempt to define and give form to the new nation and the new nationals spawned by the Revolution of 1959. After the Revolution, Cuba's physical borders did not really change, but its ideological ones did. The idea of the nation underwent a radical overhaul and new fictions, myths, and allegories were required to help consolidate

the fragments that fell when the old nation was forced apart.

The Cuban film industry was to play a principal role in this process by generating films that could provide positive images of both the new nation and all those who formed a part of the revolutionary process. Less than three months after the Rebel Army—led by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos—entered Havana on January 1, 1959, the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográfico was established. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, one of ICAIC's best known film-makers, succinctly captured the philosophy behind the creation of the Institute when he asserted that "el sentido de la Revolución se encarna en la cultura, que es donde se evidencia el proceso de transformación del hombre."<sup>5</sup>

In his book *The Cuban Image: Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba*, Michael Chanan studies in detail the integral and integrating role of ICAIC in post-revolutionary Cuba. He concludes that:

The Cuban film-makers 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)

The result is that most of the early films produced by ICAIC were documentaries, docu-dramas or histories that dealt specifically with the Revolution or the historical forces that had deemed it necessary. This

was only interesting for a while; before long audiences were demanding a broader range of fiction and film-makers were recognizing the need for variety (Chanan 276).

Once again Tomás Gutiérrez Alea was one of those filmmakers. In a 1986 interview he claimed that "our role is to be united with the revolutionary process" but immediately added that "if it doesn't reach the people, it is of no use" (Burton 125). The people at ICAIC were therefore faced with the challenge of creating audience-pleasing films that were still ideologically sound and beneficial to the nation-building process. The result produced by ICAIC during the 1980's was a series of human interest stories or fictions that not only delighted, but could be read as allegories of the nation as well.

In the article "Transparent Women," Marvin D'Lugo analyzes a set of films made in the late 1970's and early 1980's that have at the heart of the narration, strong female protagonists.<sup>6</sup> He concludes that their struggles for recognition and acceptance within a chauvinistic society are really allegories that address the question of national integrity. "The female figure, rather than functioning simply as a mimetic representation of gender class struggle, thus became the 'site' in which the audience participated metaphorically in the process of national self-realization" (D'Lugo 280). This allegorizing process was used so consistently through the 1980's that it has today become a convention easily recognized by contemporary Cuban audiences, who have grown accustomed to reading narratives of the nation in their national cinema (287).

### III. Who is Cuba?—*Fresa y chocolate's* "Hymn to Tolerance"

While resorting to a convention in cinematic form, *Fresa y chocolate* is nonetheless still revolutionary in content. This can be seen by the way in which the film was received by Cuban audiences. Diego Rottman describes a common scene at Havana cinemas:

La película termina y para salir se abre un portón lateral que facilita la desconcentración. Pero la gente se queda en la calle debatiendo. Nadie queda indiferente a los tópicos fuertes de *Fresa y chocolate*: las críticas a la Revolución y la homosexualidad, dos temas nunca tratados antes en un film de Cuba. (12)

The theme of gender struggle is still maintained as the pretense under which the allegory functions, but the protagonist is now replaced by the figure of the homosexual and his skirmishes with the Revolution. Like all allegories the surface story is straightforward, the characters are representative, and the space they occupy is limited and symbolically defined.

David, a young militant member of the Communist Youth League, meets Diego, a homosexual art-lover and, although it seems unlikely at first, a friendship develops between them. David is an unquestioning supporter of the Revolution and at the university where he studies he receives a solid grounding in the ideology it espouses. Diego, on the other hand, has not fared so well. Although he supported the Revolution in its early years, he has since been forced to withdraw his allegiances as

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a result of an unmitigated homophobia that has prevented him from fully integrating into Cuban life as he would like. Unable to pursue his dream of becoming a teacher and feeling ostracized at every turn, he has sought solace in art and literature. On the day that their paths cross at Coppelia's ice cream parlor, two worlds, both Cuban, come into contact. Through an eventual series of conversations, debates, arguments, and lessons, these two embodied "spaces" begin to mutually influence each other.

Under the pretense that he has some photographs of David from a school play (and a stack of banned books for the borrowing), Diego entices David back to his apartment. There he introduces David into a world of which the latter has only heard, half-imagined, and been taught to reject as anti-revolutionary. Banned books, foreign magazines, religious iconography, homosexual imagery, black-market goods, and china tea sets that hint at the bourgeois decadence of pre-Revolutionary days, cram into Diego's small apartment. For David it is as foreign as a distant land filled with exotic otherness, a land that instantly repels him, yet leaves him spellbound. "¿De dónde es?" David keeps asking. It is this obsession with origin and nationality that hints at how threatened he feels by the idea of difference and change.<sup>7</sup>

Up to this point in the film, the narrative structure appears to conform to that of a classical fairy tale. The original story on which the film was based certainly evoked this idea—*El lobo, el bosque y el hombre nuevo*.<sup>8</sup> Like every hero of every fairy story, David is all innocence. His virginity is highlighted in the opening scene

of the film. Diego, like the big, bad wolf of *Little Red Riding Hood*, entices David to his apartment with the aim of seducing him. The forest, that dark and forbidding place, is transposed to Diego's apartment.

As characters, therefore, David and Diego are set up to be diametrically opposed, and the dramatic tension created by their initial encounter is the conduit of the narrative. Yet, more than this, they are meant to be read as symbols. David, is pure, ideologically sound, and sexually straight. He incarnates post-revolutionary Cuba.<sup>9</sup> Diego, on the other hand, is decadent, politically critical, and flamingly gay. He incarnates all that was anathema to the Revolution and subsequently excluded from it.

Likewise, the space that David occupies, the university, metonymically evokes the official space and is meant to be read as Cuba's post-revolutionary nation-state. It is peopled with a community of like-minded individuals, who have come together from different backgrounds to achieve a common goal. This disciplined community has acquired a sense of belonging by being taught to see itself as representative of the nation and the guardian of its well-being. This space is also exclusive. Diego is not only unwelcome but regarded as a "national" threat. When David's roommate, Miguel, hears of Diego he orders David to find out more about him so that he can be removed. "Ésto es una misión—¿tú crees que se puede confiar de un tipo que no le defiende a su propio sexo?"

David, therefore, is forced to return to Diego's apartment. The "guarida," as Diego calls his home, is also a symbolic space. *Guarida* means "lair" and evokes the idea

of "wolf," but it also suggests the notion of both shelter and refuge. It is thus both home and the space of exile. Excluded, marginalized and misrepresented in his own country, Diego has constructed his own space within the nation proper. Through a process of territorialization as the one outlined above, Diego has firstly defined his space with physical boundaries and established an exclusive community within it. When David first goes there, Diego tells him that it is "un lugar donde no se recibe a todo el mundo." He has then sought a common bond for the disparate elements he wishes to maintain within his space. This bond is art and, whether the elements are Cuban or foreign, if Diego regards them as art they are accepted into the community. For this reason, David's interest in literature becomes his valid passport into Diego's alternative "nation".

As the symbols and myths that speak the official nation say nothing to or of Diegos which he regards as valid, he has had to invent alternative fictions and figureheads to ratify his world. Beyond the *guarida*, in the street and at the university, the images and words of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and José Martí fill the walls. They are the heroes that embody the common history and ideals of the nation. They provide the necessary sense of unity and solidarity among the people. Diego, however, has chosen alternative figures. The Cuban homosexual author, José Lezama Lima, supplants Fidel as the leader of this alternative nation, while the poetry of John Donne and Constantine Kavafis replace the revolutionary axioms of Che and Martí. No tricolored national flag is erected in Diego's space; instead, a giant, multicolored paint-

ing of a penis serves to endorse the "national" ideal.

This "little, personalized Cuba" Diego constructs in his apartment has been designed to be a more accepting place than the "hegemonic or Official Cuba." Lezama Lima, we are told, is "un cubano universal." The rule seems to be that anything goes. His "space" is filled with books, music, and artifacts from all over the world, and his walls boast a giant collage of different images. The past and the present, Cuban and foreign, the straight and the gay, male and female, all seem to have a place in Diego's world. It is for this reason that with humorous allusions, Diego criticizes the Revolution for being so exclusive, dogmatic, and inflexible. Listening to María Callas and making obvious reference to Fidel, he comments on the stagnant state of Cuban music: "¿Porqué nuestra isla no da una voz así? ¿Con la falta que nos hace otra voz!" He bemoans the fact that David can only read the books the Communist Youth League authorizes and is scandalized to hear David ask if John Donne is a pen-pal, wonder whether Lezama Lima is his father, and assert that it was Truman Capote who dropped the atomic bomb. As for David's theories on homosexuality and its "causes," Diego is absolutely dumbfounded.<sup>10</sup> For him, David is living proof that the Revolution, in which he once fervently believed, has failed.

Yet Diego's broad-minded acceptance is only apparent. Like all those who invent nations, Diego must assure its unique identity by differentiating it, and all that lies within it, from the other space that lies beyond its borders. In this sense it falls prey

to similar reductiveness, "¿No te parece maravilloso? Allá afuera la gente empujándose en las guaguas; los negros gritando y tú y yo aquí, escuchando a María Callas y tomando té de la India en tazas de porcelana de Sevres." For all his humanist ideals and good intentions, Diego is a snob, a racist—and where the Revolution is concerned—an absolute cynic. Alea is eager to show that, although the grass may appear greener, sweeter, and more accommodating on Diego's side, it also has many shortcomings. In fact, the two images of Cuba, one from the point of view of the Revolution and the other from the point of view of "exile," reflect very similar traits. Both are exclusive, intolerant and convinced that they are right. Yet, Senel Paz and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea do not pitch the two points of view against each other in order to show any one view to be better. Instead, they address the merits of both arguments and respond to the "Cubanness" inherent in each. Both voices are right, both figures are Cuban, and the spaces they inhabit *together* give form and meaning to "that-nation-that-is-Cuba."

Through successive encounters, both men begin to learn about and respect the other's world. As a result, they start to see their own world with different eyes. David soon stops referring to Diego at the university as "el maricón," but as "Diego," and going over to his apartment is no longer a political "mission," but a welcome respite from the rigidity of the university and the poverty of the street. Through art, literature, and conversation, Diego opens David's mind to the possibilities of alternatives. Additionally, albeit with reluctance, David gradually accepts and re-

spects Diego's homosexuality. In much the same manner, Diego learns to respect David's open-minded but zealous faith in the ideals of the Revolution.

Art in all its manifestations is seen in the film as the privileged space of dialogue and debate, and it becomes the border territory where ideas are trafficked. Diego and David have different concepts of art at the outset. David has been taught that art should be a monologic and normalizing vehicle, as well as a mouthpiece for state politics. Diego immediately criticizes this idea, affirming that art should be above any one ideology. For him, art is a dialogic and universalizing medium that can assist in the communion of difference. Yet this notion of art does not escape the critical eye of Alea. The cultural artifacts Diego so admires—such as Lezama Lima's neobaroque writing, John Donne's metaphysical poetry, María Callas' arias—are in effect equally monologic, since they are all "high" art, predominantly bourgeois and available to few. Initially, therefore, art is the excuse that brings Diego and David together. Over time, it becomes a multivocal and transformative space for them both.

Co-director, Carlos Tabío, has clarified:

*Fresa y chocolate* represents a hymn to tolerance, to the possibility of mutual comprehension and to the mutual enrichment of two persons who are profoundly different. The difference between Diego and David is not only homosexuality; the difference is also their ways of seeing the world, and their mutual understanding and respect lead to

the enrichment of both of them .  
(West 20)

This learning to accept the other is not shown to be easy and does not come without a fight. On the first three occasions that David visits Diego, their two worlds collide, they rarely agree and when they finally broach the subject of homosexuality their emergent friendship appears doomed. David just cannot equate homosexuality with the Revolution, "pero tú no eres revolucionario." To this accusation Diego loses his temper and shouts, "Formo parte de este país aunque no le guste y tengo derecho de hacer cosas por él. Sin mí, coño, faltaría un pedazo." With this, he asks David to leave his space, an act that suggests that the two worlds, the two visions of Cuba, can only exist apart and occupy separate ideological domains.

However, this outburst is the turning point in the film and the key to understanding the allegory it enacts. The Revolution tried to make Cuba a unified and uniform whole, but this image of the nation was a fiction as it excluded integral parts and people from its totality. Diego argues that the nation is *incomplete* without his participation. It must be understood that the underlying structure of the film operates around the ambiguity of the notion of being "a part" of something (as in belonging), as opposed to being "apart" (as in being separated or removed from). Diego wants to be "a part" of the Revolution but the Revolution has kept him "apart," and removed him from this process.

The relation of the part to the whole is a question that is consistently alluded to throughout the film. The most sustained

example revolves around the exhibition of sculptures that Diego organizes for his artist friend, Germán. Knowing that the religious figures would be rejected if he tried to get them exhibited via official channels, Diego incessantly negotiates with a foreign embassy to give him support. In spite of the support finally given, the cultural organization interested in the sculptures only deems some of them worthy of exhibition, explaining that "no es el momento para algunas piezas." Germán is happy to have only part of his exhibition shown and fails to understand why Diego reacts so strongly against the idea. Germán keeps insisting that "lo importante es el todo, no una parte....Nosotros luchamos mucho, mucho por esta exhibición, la exhibición va completa." Yet Diego's violent reaction to this decision can only be understood in relation to the overall allegory of the narrative. For Diego, the exhibition is not just a collection of artifacts, it symbolizes the Revolution itself. If it is not complete it is not worth exhibiting. The on-going saga of the exhibition and Diego's relationship with it evoke his continued problems with and about the Revolution. For both, Diego fought hard to see them realized, criticizes them for being incomplete and selective, and is consequently censured and driven from the public space as a result of his contentious involvement with each. Germán ends up destroying a piece of the exhibition to prove his point, only to realize that Diego was right: by destroying a part, he undermined the integrity of the whole.

While Germán disappears from the scene leaving behind chalky fragments, David chooses to apologize and make amends. From this moment onwards the

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idea of synthesis and union of parts becomes the central motifs of the film. David adds a photo of Che, another of Fidel, and the national flag to Diego's collage, insisting that "forman parte de Cuba." This act and the words that accompany it are a crucial turning point for David's character, since he is able to recognize that the Revolution, while foundational, is still only a part of Cuba. Later, when Diego tries to reject the Revolution (ironically an integral part of Cuba too) based on its treatment of homosexuals, David reminds him that "los errores no son la Revolución, son una parte" and it cannot be judged on that basis alone. David transforms Diego's space with iconography and ideology of the Revolution, and in doing so initiates a process that will turn the *guarida* momentarily into a utopian space of synthesis. This is the exact site, however, where the audience is able to rethink, by means of an allegory, the future possibilities of the nation. The use of a collage to symbolize the process of fusion is important since it represents a whole made of independent as well as interdependent parts.

The nation-building process therefore continues, but now with input from both sides. Diego begins to teach David about art and architecture, to fill in the gaps left by his "revolutionary" education. In turn, David reminds Diego of all the good that has come from the Revolution. As the two stand and survey the beautiful but crumbling streets of Old Havana they reflect on what is happening to their city. It is falling into ruin, disintegrating before their eyes.

Diego: Todavía estás a tiempo de  
ver algunas cosas antes de que

se derrumbe y se la trague la  
mierda. ¡La están dejando caer!

David: Somos un país pequeño,  
con todo en contra.

Diego: Sí, pero es como si no les  
importara. ¿No sufren cuando  
la ven?

David: A algunos nos importa. A  
ti y a mí nos importa...

This dialogue underscores the need there is to renovate and rebuild the nation, to preserve the past and prepare for the future. What it also highlights is that while both men have differences, their mutual love of Cuba and concern for its future preservation unites them above and beyond all else.

The closest the *guarida* gets to projecting an ideal image of a cohesive Cuba is in the dinner scene. Diego, David, and their friend Nancy come together and ritually enact a scene from Lezama Lima's masterpiece *Paradiso*. The loneliness and disappointments of their respective lives, isolated in scenes that occur beyond the *guarida*, are momentarily forgotten. David and Nancy are in love despite the age difference. A novel that was banned is resurrected along with Cuban music from the past; and as they toast friendship and love, the photos of Che, Fidel, Martí, and Lezama hint at quiet acquiescence in the shadows. As a scene from Lezama Lima's book, the moment is a fiction—but it nonetheless gives form to and contains an image of an alternative Cuba.

However this image, this projection, does not and cannot last. It is an ideal, an experiment in tolerance, and this is also underscored. The magic of the moment is

created by candles and soft music, but several less than perfect conditions intrude into this scene. The meal, for example, is actually quite humble. Vegetables are absent and chicken makes do for lobster, a detail that remits to actual economic scarcity. Diego leaves the space, his little nation, reminding us that "in reality" he is preparing for exile, and the romance between Nancy and David, a heterosexual union, suggests that at present there is still no social space for homosexual expression.

This issue has been studied in great detail by Paul Julian Smith in an article published by the British journal *Sight and Sound*.<sup>11</sup> Smith contends that the subject of homosexuality is carefully framed "within a hetero narrative which safely contains it for nervous straights, it also displaces, in classic misogynistic fashion, the homophobic contempt for the supposed femininity of gay men on to a woman (Nancy)" (31). It must be noted that the sexual union between David and Nancy occurs not only in the *guarida*, but in Diego's bed. Diego, the homosexual subject, is at best a mere intermediary for heterosexual love. He brings David and Nancy together and provides the space for their union by absenting himself. What is more, if there were any doubt about David's masculinity at the beginning of the film, it is eradicated by the end. David's sexuality is ultimately confirmed and, as a result, the male, revolutionary subject remains safely defined in exclusively heterosexual terms. Masculinity, like nationality, is thus constructed by a similar process of exclusion, inclusion, and hierarchization.

From the moment Diego is made to leave the *guarida*, the film accelerates to-

wards its conclusion. Miguel's suspicions that David is being co-opted by a homosexual are aroused when his friend brings his lessons in tolerance back to the university. Beyond the four walls of the *guarida* such ideals not only fall on deaf ears, but sound counter-revolutionary. Miguel decides to find out for himself where David is spending all his time and invades Diego's space. The outside world comes rushing in and destroys the dreams Diego and David had created. Diego has to finally admit he is leaving the country, forced into absolute exile by the rigidity of the system. Disappointed, David takes back his flag and the images of Che and Fidel which had formed such an integral part of the utopian vision within the *guarida*. The collage is dismantled, the walls are left bare, and Diego's belongings are packed up or given away. Yet in spite of the fact that this ideal of fusion and synthesis appears doomed, the film ends with one of its most enduring images—David and Diego finally hug. If their friendship and the site it occupies are an allegory in nation-building, then their hug is a symbol of hope that it will come to pass.

This notion of hope is also woven in to the idea of time; with this, the idea of fusion extends to this element of the film as well. The action of the film takes place in 1979, a date that marks the culmination of over a decade of oppressive measures in Cuba against homosexuals and anyone associated with them. In 1980 the Mariel boat-lift occurred in which thousands of Cubans, many homosexual, fled to the United States. It was a dark moment for Cuba, a period of crisis for the Revolution, and a time to redefine the nation. Since

then, there is a general consensus that things have improved and that the Establishment has become progressively more tolerant to both sexual and cultural alternative forms of expression (West 17). Simply the fact that the film, *Fresa y chocolate*, has been made and allowed to be distributed in Cuba, proves this point.

Parallel to this are the numerous allusions within the film to present-day Cuban dilemmas and debates, such as homosexuality, economic scarcity and the black-market trade which subsequently arises, as well as general frustration with the status quo. Added to these two time periods is a third—glimpsed in the *guarida*—which is the future of the country and the direction it must take to become a cohesive and fully representative nation. Homi Bhabha, in reference to images of the nation (any nation) has pointed out that “[t]here is, however, always the distracting presence of another temporality that disturbs the contemporaneity of the national present” (295). This is no more apparent than in the various images and ideas of the nation captured by *Fresa y chocolate*, where the past and the future give meaning and form to the present.

#### IV. Conclusion

While it is true that the camera mediates the point of view of the straight male (David), and much of the film’s humor is derived from Diego’s “campy” histrionics, I believe that critics are overlooking many of the film’s merits and divorcing it too much from the environment in which it has been made. What is more, to isolate the question of homosexuality and concentrate solely on the contradictions inherent

therein, is to undermine the integrity of the film as a whole. This is precisely the lesson that the film is trying to teach. Diego, it must be remembered, is an allegorical figure, occupying an allegorical space and as such he is an amalgam of many traits associated with a marginal figure in Cuba—homosexual, artist, bourgeois, exile.

Through the cultural medium of film, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Senel Paz have been able to project a multi-dimensional image of Cuba. In doing so, they have raised questions about the idea of “nation” as an absolute. However, they reveal it to be a highly contingent notion. It can be officially or “unofficially” defined, viewed from within or without and reified from the center or the margins. In *Fresa y chocolate* we learn to see and understand Cuba as a construct, an uncertain idea that is refracted through time and resists definition. It is made up of disparate parts, easily fragmented but not so easily pieced together. When it is deemed “whole,” what parts it contains are deemed valid areas of debate. Therefore, from the vantage point of Diego’s *guarida*, a symbolic space, the audience can take time to exorcise the past, reflect on the present, and consider the future of their nation. By highlighting the fictive quality of the nation, the many forms it may take, and the ways it is built, the film reveals the processes at work in its definition—as well as the possibilities at play for its redefinition. *Fresa y chocolate* may be a fiction, but its allegorical structure effectively serves to capture, contain, and communicate an abstract, evolving idea of Cuba and what it means to be Cuban. What is more, the film’s lesson in synthesis provides a conceivable direction for

the nation-building rhetoric of the future. For this reason, the film is entitled "*Fresa y chocolate*" and not "fresa o chocolate." A combination of flavors seems to be the order of the day.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Cited in Timothy Brennan, 49.

<sup>2</sup>In his book *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an "imagined community." The term concisely underscores the inherent fictive quality of the concept of nation as well as nationhood.

<sup>3</sup>According to Hans Kohn, modern nationalism, which in a sense replaced religion, took three concepts from Old Testament mythology: "the idea of a chosen people, the emphasis on a common stock of memory of the past and hopes for the future, and finally national messianism" (Brennan 59).

<sup>4</sup>It is the mark of the ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy—and an apparatus of power—that it produces a continual slippage into analogous, even metonymic, categories, like the people, minorities, or 'cultural difference' that continually overlap the writing of the nation (Homi Bhabha 292).

<sup>5</sup>See *Cine y Revolución en Cuba* (107).

<sup>6</sup>Films such as *Lucía*, *De cierta manera*, *Retrato de Teresa*, *Hasta cierto punto*, *Lejanía*, *Hello Hemingway* and the collective film *Mujer transparente*. The film *¡Plaff!* is an intentional parody of the allegorizing of the

nation through female figures (D'Lugo 287).

<sup>7</sup>All citations are based on my own transcription of the movie *Fresa y chocolate*.

<sup>8</sup>The screenplay *Fresa y chocolate* was written by Senel Paz with the collaboration of director, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. It is based on the cohesion of ideas from two short stories written by Paz: Diego and David appear in "El lobo, el bosque y el hombre nuevo", and Vivian (David's ex-girlfriend) and "David" appear in "No le digas que la quieras." The character, Nancy was lifted directly from another screenplay by Paz, *Adorable Lies*. The film was codirected by Carlos Tabío due to Alea being taken sick. (See interviews by Denis West in *Cineaste*.)

<sup>9</sup>A popular revolutionary film of the sixties was Pineda Barnet's *David* (1967). It tells the life of a revolutionary hero. The name "David" therefore personifies the figure of a specifically Cuban revolutionary.

<sup>10</sup>Some of these reasons humorously include that he obviously had no father or strong male figure at home, that his family regrettably did not take him to a doctor to have it sorted out when he was young, that it is a problem found in the glands, etc.

<sup>11</sup>In spite of the fact that the film has been a box-office success and a prize-winner on the national and international film circuit, it has nevertheless been the target of heated debate. The two main criticisms against the film are its conventional and somewhat melodramatic form and its stereotypical treatment of homosexuals. For a less than positive review of the film see Paul Julian Smith's article "The Language of Stawberry."

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