

## FRESA Y CHOCOLATE

No matter what other issues are raised with respect to Juan Gutiérrez Alea's 1993 film *Fresa y chocolate*, it is fundamental to hold in view a dominant question: Why do David and Diego never fuck. This matter is never directly addressed by the film, and consequently, it is never answered. Moreover, so much of the critical commentary (characteristically in reviews of the film and its relationship to the sociohistorical parameters of postrevolutionary filmmaking in Cuba) focuses on their relationship as a paradigm for "tolerance" in Cuban society toward difference, sexual difference, specifically, but individual difference in general, in the context of the struggle in Cuba to affirm institutional and personal values that do not impose as an imperative the need for the individual, the citizen, to conform to a rigid of social behavior. Since sexual hygiene was one of the original concerns of the postrevolutionary restructuring of Cuban society more specifically and at least, prostitution as a sign of capitalist exploitation, homosexuality as a sign of bourgeois decadence, and an inadequate standard of family life as a sign an alienated commitment to the appropriate reproduction of the "new Cuban" it was inevitable that there emerge conflicting ideologies regarding sexuality before the revolution, sexuality as defended by various strands of the revolution, and sexuality as it might be defined against alternative paradigms arising from the interaction of postrevolutionary Cuban society with a very diverse set of allies. Although I will leave for others to chart in detail the influence of postmodernity in Cuba through its interactions with countries like Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, and Spain, the fact that *Fresa* points toward the opening of a debate regarding the naturalization of same-sex relations in the mid-1990s in Cuba cannot other than be an influence coming from these (and other) societies, all of which have seen enormous changes in the past ten-twenty years with regard to same-sex relations and institutional, collective and personal attitudes toward them. It is an open question the degree to which any of these societies (with the possible exception of Spain) can really be called gay-friendly, and much less Cuba, although the imperative no longer to persecute the sex trade in order to defend the economic benefit of international tourism in Cuba today has brought with it the relaxation of postrevolutionary norms regarding other manifestations of sexuality: sexual hygiene simply cannot be a major issue in Cuban society at the beginning of the decade of the 00s. It is difficult to know whether this means that Cuba has entered a period of postmodern sexuality (the lesbigay, the queer), a period that allows for the recuperation of the ambiguous zone of homosociality segueing into homosexuality (the long-standing Mediterranean code in which the maricón is a crucial figure but one in which same-sex relations also occur but without being able to be called homosexual in the use of that word as a sign of modernity), or a period of some significant overall of the two that marks this particular period transition in Cuba. Merely to have raised the issue in *Fresa*, and to have it raised by Cuba's most venerated film director in a film that would attract international attention, represents a significant cultural moment. In this sense, it is perhaps legitimate to speak of a film that promotes tolerance, since precisely the decade and a half between the action of the film the period just prior to the 1980 Marielitos exodus and the mid-1990s is one in which Cuba had to see through a transition from the relative insularity of a fairly rigidly defined postrevolutionary society and the adjustments it has had to make to the disappearance of its principal support and defense, the Soviet system. Cuba is now supported by societies (the societies in which the film has circulated, in addition to the United States) that are characterized by economic and social liberalism that could hardly tolerate the persecution of sexual freedoms (the film acknowledges support from Mexican and Spanish film entities, as well as from Robert Redford, who has taken a special interest in Cuban filmmaking). I will have more to say about the importance of the particular period in which the film is made, as well as the significance of this historical distance.

The issue of why David and Diego never fuck must be treated on two levels, one that of the *annoncé* and the other that of the *énonciation*, that is on the level of the story that is being told by Gutiérrez Alea's film and on the level of the story that he is telling. On both these levels, there are ideological problems that must be addressed. These problems have to do with the horizons of coherence with respect to sexual practices at the level of the circumstances in which the characters of the film are immersed, and they have to do with what the film conceives, through its strategic handling of the story of those lives, of the possibilities of relating same-sex relationships to the postrevolutionary "hombre nuevo," a strategic phrase that appears in the title of the Senel Paz short story on which the film is based.

On the level of the story being told, the film subscribes to a series of ideological assumptions that it, it reduplicates them that characterize fundamental assumptions regarding sexuality and the parameters of same sex relations, even while at the same time it is satirizing many of them toward presumably forging a critique that might induce their revision, while enveloping everything to a delightful degree in a broadly picaresque Cuban sense of humor. The film turns on the desire of Diego, a minor cultural bureaucrat, to seduce David, a serious university student, apparently firmly committed to the principles of the Juventud Comunista (Communist Youth). Diego has taken photographs of David in a production of *The Doll's House*, and he hopes that offering David these photographs will draw him into a relationship (one suspects subsequently that these

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photographs never existed, since, after all, David never obtains them from Diego). Moreover, Diego has made a bet with his friend Germán, a sculptor that he will be successful in convincing David to go home with him and to have sex with him; Diego will display from the balcony of his apartment David's shirt as a confirmation that the mission has been accomplished. Diego comes onto David at an outdoor table at the Coppelia ice-cream parlor in downtown Havana; Germán watches from a nearby table. Since places at the table are limited, Diego joins David, who is sitting alone at a table, and attempts to put his plan of seduction into action. An additional detail is to display in full view on the table books that are impossible to obtain in Cuba (i.e., in every sense banned), but that are extremely coveted reading, specifically Mario Vargas Llosa's *Conversación en La Catedral* (1969), one of the key texts of the so-called boom of the Latin American novel of the 1960s and 1970s, of interest because of its treatment of a period of military dictatorship in Peru. David shows interest in the books, but he appears anxious to recover the photographs, not because they are compromising, but presumably because they are in the hands of a very openly homosexual man, a *maricón*.

In this way, the film recycles a set of Latin American stereotypes that eventually become problematical for the film. The most significant one is the disjunction between the straight man and the flamboyant homosexual. David, as played by Vladimir Cruz, is almost grimly straight. Although he has a boyish body, he is fully conscious of the heterosexist responsibility of being a man, with an intense and forthright gaze that brooks no doubt from the other as to his fulfillment of a prescribed inventory of features in appearance, bearing, and speech that conform to patriarchal norms. When first confronted by Diego, David is brusque to the point of rudeness, taking care to transmit to the other man the information that there should be no making the former's commitment to heterosexuality and his concomitant abhorrence of the sexual deviancy presumed to attach to *maricón* and his apparent discourse of seduction: David stares boldly at Diego while his hand reaches into one pocket of his shirt, pointedly withdrawing his ID card whose cover identifies him as belonging to the Juventud Comunista, and then putting it into the pocket on the other side of the shirt. Under the circumstances, given the sexual hygiene that was integral to the Juventud, this is equivalent of flashing a marriage band under the nose of one's seducer: in a homosexual context, it means that one is not available; in a same-sex context, it is the suggestion of the brass knuckles awaiting the queer<sup>1</sup> tempter in the homophobic violence that is the only appropriate response to the insistent come-on. David, however, is still interested in the photographs Diego has, and thus he remains engaged in conversation with the latter, while also at the same time barely refraining from converting his request for the photos into a threatening demand. At the height of the persecution of undesirables and their confinement to the rehabilitation/forced labor IMAP camps barely a decade earlier, it would have been sufficient for David to denounce Diego as having attempted to touch him inappropriately for the police to have hauled Diego off, as Reinaldo Arenas explains in his autobiography *Antes que anochezca* and as is captured in Julian Schnabel's film version, *Before Night Falls* (2000). Perhaps this is still a possibility in 1979, when the action of the film takes place, but it is clearly not in the spirit of *Fresa* to engage in the representation of homophobic violence, precisely because Gutiérrez Alea wishes to lead his audience toward a public ethos in which being homosexual is naturalized, as much as it is to assert, if only by implication, that revolutionary Cuba has outgrown concerns over public sexual morality that made possible the IMAP camps, aggressive policing practices, and the unquestioned/unquestionable right of the straight to denounce with impunity the queer.

Toward this end, *Fresa* implicitly mocks David's attitudes, and the rhetoric of the film's language tends to convince the audience of the ridiculousness of his behavior: his phobic horror of Diego's come-on and the transparency of his attempts to engage him seductively, the franticness with which he is on guard against the possibilities of further seduction when he does agree to go to Diego's apartment (including the way in which he is made the butt of Diego's joking reference, in the collective taxi upon arriving at his house, to David as "Papito" ("Daddy"); the joke is picked up by one of the other passengers in the cab); his alarm when he finds homoerotic icons in Diego's apartment; the comic

earnestness of his report on the experience to one of his fellow university students back in the dorm, Manuel, a young man (apparently something of a monitor of other student's behavior) whose own earnestness is also ridiculed in the film. Of particular interest is the way in which the film implies a critique of David's duplicitous

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<sup>1</sup> I am using queer throughout here as a synonym of the authori-tarian term homosexual and the homophobic term fag(got)/maricón, ignoring, for purposes of the sociohistori-cal moment of the film, any need to distinguish between queer and gay. Although outside commentators have used gay with reference to same-sex rela-tions and identity in Cuba (DOC?????), it is only recently that this inter-na-tional term has entered the speech of the island. It would cer-tain-ly not have been an available vocabulary item for any of the char-ac-ters in the 1979 setting for the film. Thus, queer is under-stood to be here the proper English translation of the Cuban uses of words like maricón and puto.

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when he decides to pretend to be Diego's friend at Manuel's suggestion in order to get the goods on the subversive faggot. This is a particularly noteworthy detail of the film, because it underscores the possibility of consciousness of two crucial facts. The first concerns how the repugnant nature of the disingenuousness of the practices whereby the straight set out to entrap the queer, out of the belief that the queer is so repugnant, so vile, so injurious to public well-being that no attempt to identify them and liquidate them can lie beyond the pale of what is morally or ethically acceptable: given the horror same-sex desire and its practices, no act of betrayal can be so grossly unjust as to be reproachable. Thus, when David subsequently warms to Diego's person, when a true bond of friendship (but never homoerotic love?) develops between them, and when David defends his relationship with Diego to Manuel, the latter's repudiation of David's attitude and behavior reduplicates, if in an even more hysterical nature, David's original reaction to Diego.

The second matter at issue here is countermending the way in which queers are allegedly duplicitous in their conquest of straight men. The assumption appears to be that because straight men possess a sane and healthy sexuality, they can only be gotten to through subterfuge and deceit they must be tricked into yielding up their healthy manhood to the corruption of the queer. This would seem to be borne out in *Fresa* by the fact that Diego does attempt to trick David into going to his room (promising him the photographs and access to banned literature), he does spill coffee on David's shirt in order to force him to remove it so it can be cleaned (thereby tricking him into revealing more of his manhood than sober heterosexuality would allow David firmly insists that he be provided with something to cover himself with) and so that he can display it from the balcony to Germán as a sign that he has successfully seduced David (which is, in turn, a bit of deceit on Diego's part, since no seduction, as it is customarily understood, has taken place, although this remains to be seen as the film develops). However, these are fun and games by comparison to the betrayal of friendship that David agrees with Manuel to participate in so as to trap Diego and more effectively to denounce him to the authorities. Thus, David returns to Diego's apartment, ostensibly in search of the promised banned books and ostensibly to progressively thaw out in his icy distance from Diego. The interpersonal dynamics of David's stringing Diego along requires David to accept Diego's offer of (black market, U.S.-imported scotch<sup>2</sup>); the film jumps to David being treated for his hangover by the patriarchal Manuel and being warned as to the subterfuges of the enemy. What makes this jump cut a source for the ridiculousness of David's behavior is that, in passing, the only real action of homoerotic behavior of the entire film takes place at this juncture: the two men are in their underwear and, after holding David's head under the cold water faucet, Miguel playfully slaps him on the buttocks, exclaiming at how nice and chubby his *culito* (ass) has become.

Given the fact that Diego never touches David of his own accord, this bit of homosocial bonding, built around the ritual of the good buddy helping one through the rough spots of a bad hangover, cannot help but be read as the film's further attempt to underscore the ridiculousness of the soberly straight line David attempts to sustain in conformance with Manuel's recommendations. Thus, on the level of the story being told, there is a direct appeal to the codes of heteronormativity and its conventional stance vis-à-vis recognized homosexuality, while at the same time the rhetorical strategies of the film question heteronormative assumptions and, in fact, openly ridicule some of them as they refer to the presumed conduct of gays and the legitimization of the reaction to them of those who identify themselves as straight.

There is, however, another framing of David's mentality that is even more slyly critical than the representation of his reaction to Diego's attempts to seduce him, and that is the way in which, even before Diego appears on the scene, the first ten (?) minutes of the film are devoted to undermining the security of David's machismo (if not his masculinity). The film opens with David and his girlfriend Vivian having just arrived at a seedy hotel where lovers go to resolve the perennial problem of a lack of any other private space in which to make love. Although Daniel is determined to have sex with Vivian and is further encouraged in his desire by the scene in the next room he spies on through a peep hole he accidentally discovers while Vivian goes to the bathroom, he is quickly confused by her "All you want is to have sex with me speech." In a gesture of nobility, he jumps out of bed, reaches for his clothes, and promises to "respect" her until they are married and he can take her to a five-star hotel; the scene ends abruptly with the startled look on her face and the accompanying exclamation "Qué!" (Huh). This scene is designed to provoke the first outburst of laughter from the audience, because it is obvious that poor David completely loses himself in the sexual script he is expected to follow, with the result is that he blows his opportunity to assert his machismo and, thereby, to have sex with the very willing Vivian, who, after all, is only following the social script assigned to her not to be sexually aggressive, but rather to be virginally reticent. The camera cuts to Vivian's splendid wedding day, teasing with the audience as to the

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<sup>2</sup> Actually, the brand is Johnny Walker red label, which is, of course, from Scotland. But it is identified as a "product of the enemy," confirming that it is contraband brought in from the United States, since Scotland has never been a political adversary of the Cuban revolution or the Castro government.

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identity of her bridegroom. Of course, we see that it is not David, and with a haughty toss of the head in his direction (he is lingering in the background of the wedding party), she resolutely signs the registry. To add injury to insult, in this characterization of David's inadequacies as a paradigmatic Cuban macho, is the fact that when they subsequently meet (David appears not to be able to get her out of his mid and hangs around her home) and she offers to have sex with him, he is offended that, in a reversal of the macho scheme of things, she sees him only as a sexual toy, and he stalks off angrily. It is with even greater reason that David is offended by Diego's advances after Vivian's wedding, because she has implicitly questioned his manhood, first with her pique at his inability to deliver not for reasons of sexual inadequacy, but out of a misplaced sense of bourgeois nobility that the hotel and then by her decision to marry another man and throwing the image of that decision in his face. Nevertheless, it is after spurning Vivian's offer of a sexual dalliance that David begins significantly to loosen up in his relationship with Diego, which slowly moves onto a plane of authentic friendship and affection. If David hangs around Vivian's house, it is perhaps because he needs her to confirm to himself that he is not gay: after all, one of the primary sociosexual functions of women in a (hetero)sexist society is to provide men with opportunities to affirm their manhood, not to women but to themselves and to their cohorts, through the use of women as a mirror for the male, in the endless and yet never conclusive demonstration that they are not queer.

Diego is equally a stereotype that constitutes a shorthand bundling together of diverse dimensions of the heteronormative definitions of the queer and what are assumed to be unproblematic understandings about the relationship of the queer to straight men. Diego is the paradigm of the flaming queen, whether it is in his mannerisms, his clothes (especially in private precisely the aggressive police practices against queers focused on hair length and dress as primary signs of sexual deviancy), his voice/speech/language, his cultural choices and priorities (the defining passion for the operas of Maria Callas), and especially, in this case, his preference in food the title of Gutiérrez Alea's film captures metaphorically the heterosexist binary as displayed by the choice of ice-cream flavors at the Coppelia: men have chocolate and women strawberry: David is, of course, eating a bowl of chocolate ice-cream, but when Diego sits down at David's table, he not only begins to savor his strawberry ice-cream, but to engage in an exuberant rap in its defense, going on about a succulent strawberry he has found in his bowl as though it were a ripe sexual fetish. Throughout this sequence, Diego manifests, in the very public space of the outdoor patio of the busy Coppelia, a stock array of characteristics associated with the homosexual male.

Diego's overdetermined behavior points in two directions. In the first place, it is a performance designed both to make it clear to David that he is cruising him, but it is also directed toward Germán, who is the specific audience of his friends plan of seduction. Yet, Diego's behavior is so overdetermined at this point in which one knows little about either him or David that one wonders why the latter doesn't simply when Diego launches into his routine. This leads to the possibility that Diego's performance is as much directed toward the audience as toward, concomitantly, David and Germán: Gutiérrez Alea has Diego engage in a performance as an outrageous queen before the audience of the film as part of an opening gambit in appealing toward the latter's expectations regarding homosexuals and in challenging their assumptions about the legitimacy of such a sexual persona.

In so doing, however, Gutiérrez Alea both gives up a measure of semiotic capital, while at the same time gaining in another quarter. He loses semiotic capital by very narrowly circumscribing the nature of the sexual persona identified with same-sex desire. By circumscribing the homoerotic to the outrageous queen (which, in its specifically Cuban version is represented in the documentary, Luis Felipe Bernaza's and Margaret Gilpin's *Mariposas en el andamio*; 1996), Gutiérrez Alea collaborates with the heteronormative practice whereby being a homosexual not only means only assuming the so-called passive role in sex, but in manifesting that fact that is, that one is assigned to playing the passive role by performing the part of the screaming queen. Such a fissure-less homology is less problematic in terms of the manifest performance (although it does reduce the targets of homophobia to only those who so perform, and assumes without the need for further evidence that by so performing, the individual necessarily engages in the not necessarily visible acts that are the putative reason for the violence of homophobia: to be taken to be performing the sexual deviant is the unquestioned equivalent of being taken to be, with a full range of horrendous attributes, the sexual deviant) than it is in eliding the full range of the homoerotic as identity, feeling, desire, and practices: individuals who may pursue same-sex relations without performing as queens, unless they carelessly reveal themselves in other ways, remain free of a homophobic violence that focuses on that performance. The erroneous homology at issue here not only assumes such a bidirectional equivalence of queenly performance and sexual deviance (to be a queen means being a deviant; if one is a deviant, one will perform publicly as a

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queen) in what is supposed to really matter (the nonreproductive practice of acts against nature), but it also forecloses any way of describing what heteronormativity might want to denounce as sexual deviance that does not involve performing publicly as a queen. This is the Rock Hudson paradox of the presumptions about ways of being nonheterosexual. To be sure, such a possibility of dramatic irony in *Fresa* whereby Diego would end up really being more heterosexual than David is not a possibility, and indeed the film continues relentlessly to be driven by a conception of the mutual exclusivity of the categories of sexual desire, even while striving for the naturalization of the *maricon* as a legitimate social subject of revolutionary Cuba. In their final encounter (their final scene in the film) prior to Diego's departure to accept an invitation from an unspecified foreign embassy, a decision he is forced to make because, while David may now accept him, the revolutionary system cannot and he is fired from his position as a cultural bureaucrat, David is radiant with the fulfillment of his sexual encounter with a woman, while Diego mimes the nausea that the thought of sex can only have in the totally committed *maricon* he prides himself on being.

Diego's miming on the level of the story being told is, certainly, another gesture by Gutiérrez Alea, on the level of the film as cultural text, toward an audience that also holds such a belief about queer men, which in turn ought to provoke its own form of nausea in the straight male because of its overt rejection of the joys of sex with a woman and its implied preference for sex with another man: the representation of the relationship between Diego and David both opens and closes with appeals to the horizons of knowledge of the audience with regard to sexual preference.

Yet, if *Fresa* invests in Diego a compact range of stereotypical queerness, it is important nevertheless to comment on the relative bodily presence between David and Diego. If David at no time betrays any of the overt semiotic signs that would make him suspect from the point of view of the policing of sexual hygiene that is, at no time is he in any danger of causing a blip in the radar screen of scopic homophobia and if Diego strives for a perfect performance of the homosexual queen, the simple fact is that Diego's body is more manly than David's. Jorge Perugorría has a muscular, pilose body that he shows to advantage; this body is particularly well utilized by Perugorría in films subsequent to *Fresa*, in which the hypermasculine display of his characters, synergized by his physique, is particularly evident (as though affirming that he the actor, despite his role in *Fresa*, is unquestionably straight a highly ironic possibility in terms of the aforementioned Rock Hudson paradox, whereby the more insistent the display of heteronormative masculinity is, the greater the latitude is to suppose an ironic stance toward compulsory heterosexuality). Moreover, it should be noted that masculine bodily display is traditionally more legitimate in Cuba (and other Latin American societies, but not all: Argentina and Mexico, for example, would be exceptions) than in the United States. This is a difficult generalization because of the many changes in American society directly relating to queer culture on the one hand and the greater informality of public dress in recent generations. However, the so-called gay clone image in American society coincides in many ways with a form of masculine display that is not necessarily marked in Cuban society, as can be seen from the well displayed masculinity of Perugorría's character in, for example, his next film, Gutiérrez Alea's 1994 *Guantanamera* (in which the female lead is also played by Mirta Ibarra, Diego's neighbor and spiritual sister, the sometimes suicidal black marketeer Nancy in *Fresa*). I have written about the effective use of masculine bodily display with reference to the Brazilian film, Paulo Thiago's 1988 *Jorge um brasileiro*. Jorge is also a straight character, invested iconically with all of the socially redeeming features associated with the heteronormative imperative, whereby being straight means contributing to the reproduction of citizens for the State and reaffirming a series of manly virtues that sustain its proper functioning. The point is that Diego's hunky presence occupies the space also filled by the imposing straight man, such as he presents in *Guantanamera* (where he is, in fact, a social redeemer), making that space suddenly ambiguous. Moreover, Diego is really quite handsome, almost pretty, with dark, penetrating eyes, luxurious eyelashes, and smooth well-kept skin, features that are also traditionally suspect in an American male (historically in the United States, a man ought not be too good-looking<sup>3</sup>), but not in the complex of features prized by the Latin lady's man. Finally, what is most striking about Diego's physical beauty, aside from the ambiguity that it may provoke in a classification between straight and queer men is the fact that, alongside David, Diego is the more imposing

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<sup>3</sup> I must recognize that Spanish also has a belief to this effect, as seen in the saying "El hombre es como el oso: cuanto más feo, más hermoso." However, the point is that to be male and beautiful does not push the limits of heteronormative acceptability as much in Hispanic culture as it traditionally does in American culture. Concomitantly, note must also be taken of the fact that Hollywood, while always enshrining plain looking American male icons Van Johnson, Gary Stewart, Ronald Reagan, Rock Hudson again has also allowed for masculine beauty, without confusing it necessarily with homosexuality . . . even if many of the notorious masculine beauties of Hollywood did have a queer dimension to their lives: Montgomery Clift, Cary Grant, Marlon Brando, César Romero. Romero, of course, worked for Hollywood as a Latin lover icon.

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man. It is not that David is effeminate or slight (often also taken as a sign of effeminacy), but simply that Diego's muscular body overshadows David's often almost scrawny look. Vladimir Cruz's body, as seen in a recent Cuban film like Eduardo Chijona's 1999 *Un paraíso bajo las estrellas*, is much more filled out and muscular, without quite become the mesomorph Perrugoría is, which leads one to wonder if Cruz is deliberately made up in *Fresa* to have a more emaciated look alongside Perrugoría. Even if this is not so, the simple fact remains that Perrugoría is quite hunky, which both underscores and undermines the queenliness of his character Diego. It underscores it because that queenliness is dissonant with his hypermasculine presence, and it undermines it because it breaks the stereotype of this wispy gay man. Consider, for example, what the effect would have been to have Joel Angelino, who plays the part of Diego's sculptor friend Germán, over whose work Diego gets into trouble with his superiors in the cultural office in which he works. The wispy redhead Angelino, with a soft body that is no match either for Perrugoría's muscular frame or Cruz's hard one, would simply have fed so much into audience stereotypes of the gay man as to have invited complete dismissal. Thus, while Gutiérrez Alea reproduces stereotypes in order to question their validity, while he has his characters articulate elements of homophobic violence at the level of the story being told in order to question at the level of the film's rhetoric the legitimacy of that violence (which, I repeat, remains essentially verbal in the film), at the same time his film backs away from fully reproducing the stereotype by deploying an actor who is both a queen and a hunk, a contradiction that is clearly visible when reference is made to the completely stereotypic Germán.

There is another way in which there are ideological and rhetorical problems between the level of the *énoncé* and that of the *énonciation*. One of the major features of the film is David's virginity, which intersects his subscription to a severe heteronormativity. It is not that the one is the consequence of the other (heteronormativity may not, in Latin America, exclude premarital sex as categorically as it often does in the United States), but that, precisely, David has even better reason to be alarmed by Diego's advances: at the same time he fails with women, he is being come on to by men. On the level of the story being told, David is done the magnificent favor by Diego of the latter arranging for David to have sex. This he accomplishes by persuading his neighbor Nancy to bed David (Nancy has good reason to be nice to David, as he donates blood once when she attempts suicide by slashing her wrists), and he carefully sets the whole scene up; Diego leaves them alone in his apartment, and Nancy and David make love in his, Diego's bed. David is subsequently euphoric, and he does not hold it against Diego when the latter explains to him that he had actually arranged the whole affair, and the two joke about the fact that it was actually in Diego's bed; David announces his intentions to marry Nancy. He makes this announcement at the same time he and Diego are making their goodbyes, as Diego prepares to leave the country for his job with the foreign embassy.

Now, there are many curious issues raised by this plot that need to be viewed from the level of the film's rhetoric: the fact that David finally has a sexual adventure, but with Nancy; the fact that they make love in Diego's bed; and the fact that David has no problem with it having been the consequence of Diego's machinations rather than as a result of his own macho ways with women. What I would like to propose is that, while at the same time that David does make love with Nancy and while it is (apparently) a totally satisfactory encounter with lasting consequences that can be summarized by the cover term "love," at the same time David has in a very real sense made love to Diego. It is important to note that the only real physical contact between the two men come after David and Nancy have had sex: in Diego's now dismantled apartment, David is able to exchange a very warm, tender, and clinging embrace with Diego. Of course, it is a sign of the degree of friendship that has developed between them, and of course, it is a sincere gesture of farewell that David extends to Diego, who he knows is having after all to abandon a Cuba he identifies with so deeply (he had, at the outset of their relationship, assured David that he had no intention of abandoning Cuba, even playing for him Ignacio Cervantes's haunting piano dance "Adiós a Cuba"). And of course, hugging Diego is a sign of the degree to which David has accepted the naturalness of Diego's being gay. David underscores his acceptance of Diego when he switches their servings of ice-cream in their farewell meeting at the Coppelía, when he not only gives Diego the man's serving of chocolate, but he proceeds to dig into Diego's portion of strawberry ice-cream in a way that mimes Diego's miming of queenly discourse, down to the savoring of the plump fetish strawberry. None of this means that David, like Gary Grant's character in the 1938 *Bringing Up Baby*, ". . . just went gay all of a sudden." But it does mean there is a sympathy between the two men and in public that goes far beyond the mere matter of "accepting" the difference of the other. From this point of view, one could speculate on how David and Diego have sex together through Nancy and in Diego's bed. It is a commonplace that one is never having sex just with the other person involved in the sexual act, but with all of the other persons that make up one's sexual history and one's sexual fantasies (a point clearly made by the opening scene of Paul Rudnick's 1997 play, *Jeffrey*). And, moreover, it is a commonplace that women, in a homophobic, homosocial, and sexist society (each adjective implies the other), are bridges between a relationship that is really going on between men (this point is worked out in terms of repressed homosexuality

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in the Brazilian Bruno Barreto's 1981 *Beijo no asfalto*, which the woman unknowingly stands between an erotic bond between her father and her husband). The proposition that, in the context of a hegemonic heterosexism, men, since they cannot fuck each other, must displace their attraction to each other and express it through another means, often through the women who brings them together and holds them in a hopefully lasting bond (such as the relationship between father-in-law and son-and-law in Barreto's film) is amply explored in X's study on the long-standing relationship between the Bing Crosby and Bob Hope characters in the road shows they made together, where Dorothy Lamore (and other women), constitute a bridge between two men, a quasi-, pseudo-, not-really-for-real erotic duo whose interaction is fluffed up in terms of broad jokes of sexual innuendo where a guffaw serves to replace, in the spectator, the moment of reflection as to what, after all, be going on between the two men. Marilyn Monroe's character serves much the same function in the relationship between Tony Curtis's and Jack Lemmon's character in Billy Wilder's 1959 *Some Like It Hot* (see Foster). Indeed, Sugar Cane is always complaining about how, with men, she always gets the fuzzy end of the lollipop (an image that is basically nonsensical), and the woman Jack Lemmon plays, Daphne, is a bridge between him and Joe E. Brown's Osgood Fielding III, who really doesn't care (because "Nobody's perfect") that a man is really on the other side of the woman. Indeed, what is really quite hilarious, is that Cruz, as he is savoring the strawberry of femininity, looks into Diego's eyes and says "Nadie es perfecto"). What, for David, is on the other side of Diego's queenly impersonation?

All of this playing around with the relationship between Diego and David (who gets into trouble with Miguel for defending Diego, and ends up getting asked by his *compañero* whether he now has "become one, too") [????], goes far beyond the sort of "love the sinner, but not the sin," which is the conventional stance of liberal heterosexual tolerance toward the queer: one must express affection for the latter, but there is a constant need to reinforce the message that anything that can be taken as an opening toward the fulfillment of homoerotic desire is strictly off limits. The need constantly to draw the line in the sand between the two always assumes that there is a clear point in which the inauguration of the homoerotic program has begun to take place, but certainly, this cannot be so easily determined: Does it start with a kiss? Or is it that unexpected moment of tender touching? Or is the sudden lingering gaze of the sort that David blesses Diego with while uttering one of the most famous phrases of contemporary gay culture? The fact that Cruz, who one cannot expect to have much familiarity with the 1950s cultural icons of gay America, knows it in 1979, when American films could hardly have been the order of the day, reinforces how Gutiérrez Alea is playing with the blending of what is coherent on the level of the film's story and what is coherent on the level of its rhetoric: Cruz speaks to the level of the address of the film to a Cuban audience in the early 1990s, one that is more likely to have seen Wilder's film or, with the arrival in the 1980s of international gay culture in Cuba, to have heard the phrase, perhaps without even knowing what its origin is.

So, then, David and Diego do, in a way, fuck. Cruz not only becomes Diego's deeply loyal friend, even suffering a confrontation with the relentless Miguel in an attempt to defend him, but he does enter in a very significant way into Diego's world and, more importantly, into some understanding of what constitutes homoerotic desire, thereby understanding the suffering for the individuals who not only see the fulfillment of their desire insistently denied (alongside of which the postpone of David's first sexual adventure becomes trivial), but who in addition are brutally bloodied for it, both verbally and physically. David never ends up having sex with Diego in what is customarily understood to be having sex, although I would insist that the way in which they are together in the last third of the film does constitute a version of same-sex erotics, if only in a baby-steps way. Yet David performs his own sexuality for Diego. In voyeuristic terms, the macho always boasts to other men of his conquests (often to other women, but more as a way of seducing them: heterosexuality must be constantly performed and re-performed), but it is done in the spirit of (re)conforming one's heteronormative masculinity to/for the benefit and approval of other heterosexuals, not as part of the consolidation of friendship with a gay man. Diego will disappear from David's world, at least from the perspective of the year 1979, but it is clear that he will remain in David's consciousness, and as something very much more than a gay friend whom David has grown to learn to tolerate. Thus, in the end, Gutiérrez Alea, in a very halting way that is not free of some significant ideological problems (for example, where does all of this leave hear-of-gold Nancy?), allows David and Diego to attain a level of intimacy that is much more than that of "good buddies," while at the same time avoiding but just barely bringing them into the realm of the fully homoerotic engagement that is now currently (and has been, since at least the 1980s) considered imperative for fully confirming the naturalization and legitimacy of same-sex love.

## References

GUTIÉRREZ ALEA, Juan. *Fresa y chocolate*. Dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea e Juan Carlos Tabío. Cuba / México / Espanha: ICAIC, IMCINE, TeleMadrid, 1993. 1 DVD (108 min).