Critical Montage in Tomas Gutiérrez Alea’s Cinema of Insilio

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Abstract: In the long history of political banishment in Latin America there is a counterpart to the category of "exile" that needs more attention: the individual that is excluded, or marked as an "undesirable" by an authoritarian regime for ideological reasons, yet remains inside the country in a condition of reduced citizenship that mirrors that of the political exile. In this paper I would like to expand the discussion of insilio from literature to cinema through an analysis of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s most influential films, Memorias del subdesarrollo (1968) and Fresa y Chocolate (1994). This paper will look first at how Gutiérrez Alea uses critical montage to illustrate the phenomenon of Cuban insilio in two different periods in Cuban revolutionary history. I will demonstrate how the cinematic language of montage is able to illustrate the subjective disjointedness and fragmentation caused by internal exile. My analyses of these films' cinematography are informed by Sergei Eisenstein’s ideas on the dialectical dimensions of montage (summarized in the term "critical montage") and Michael Betancourt’s approach about spatial montage. This paper will also look at how montage in Gutiérrez Alea's films achieves a unique form of communication built on dialectical contrast through a calculated disposition of camera shots, spatial arrangements, and mise-en-scène that makes critical montage more than just the outcome of concept vs. narrative-based editing.

Key words: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, cuban cinema, critical montage, insilio.
exilio interno. Mi análisis de la cinematografía de estas películas toma como referente las ideas de Sergei Eisenstein de las dimensiones dialécticas del montaje (resumidas bajo el término "montaje crítico") y el acercamiento de Michael Betancourt al montaje espacial. Este artículo observará también la manera en que el montaje de las películas de Gutiérrez Alea consigue una forma única de comunicación construida sobre el contraste dialéctico a través de una calculada disposición de los planos, los arreglos espaciales y la mise-en-scène que convierte el montaje crítico en más que el simple resultado de la tensión entre el montaje conceptual y el narrativo.

**Palabras clave:** Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, cine cubano, montaje crítico, *insilio*

In the long history of political banishment in Latin America there is a counterpart to the category of "exile" that needs more attention: the individual that is excluded, silenced, or marked as an "undesirable" by an authoritarian regime for ideological reasons, yet remains inside the country in a condition of reduced citizenship that mirrors that of the political exile. Writing about the oppressiveness of Uruguay’s dictatorship in the seventies and its impact on intellectual life, Argentinian scholar Saul Sosnowski makes the following observations about what he calls the situation of the Uruguayan "insile," i.e., the ideological outsider or committed oppositor that remains in the country but identifies himself or herself with the causes and the travails of an exile community:

The very coining of the term *insile*, analogous to *exile*, as a means of pointing to similarities between Uruguayans opposed to the regime- and thus marginalized- within the country and their counterparts abroad [...] diminish[es] the importance of the national borders as a means of distinguishing among attitudes toward the dictatorship. Insile took a variety of forms—active resistance, sonorous silence, or mere survival pending a new awakening. (Sosnowski 5-6)

This “variety of forms” of *insilio* (or interior exile) described by Sosnowski—active or passive disaffection, tactical withdrawal or underground activism while waiting for the "new awakening" of regime change or reform—can be recognized in many celebrated Cuban cultural productions undertaken under the Revolution. Furthermore, it is necessary to highlight the peculiarities of the interior exile in the Cuban case that differentiates it from similar experiences in the rest of Latin America. One of this particularities is the idea of viewing the island from a distance and *exilio*, as well as from the inside, and both views can often coexist together. In this order, Rafael Rojas states in his book *Isla Sin Fin: Contribución a La Crítica Del Nacionalismo Cubano* (1998) that “De modo que divisar la ínsula desde lejos es uno de los ejes históricos de la cultura en Cuba, mientras el otro es la fuga hacia adentro o lo que Guillermo Cabrera Infante ha llamado el ‘exilio interior’” (169).

On the one hand, it is important to mention that Guillermo Cabrera Infante became one of the most recognized exiled Cuban writers outside the island, while he was ‘erased’ and condemned to oblivion inside Cuba. On the other hand, many non-leftist writers that remained on the island after 1959 suffered interior exile at the hands of the Revolution’s cultural apparatus. In a 1960 letter to his friend Julián Orbon, the Cuban writer José Lezama Lima also referred to the impression of being treated like an exile while living inside Cuba as “*insilio*”. In Lezama Lima’s correspondence with his sister and friends, we can recognize Sosnowski’s “variety of *insilic* forms” in spite of the self-censorship typical in written and print forms of communication
that are known to be scrutinized by government functionaries. In a May 1961 letter to his sister Eloisa, Lezama writes about his exclusion from the Consejo Nacional de Cultura (National Council of Culture), a circumstance that he seems to interpret as an institutional "banishment" or "exile" given the prestige and relevance of his work. In *El libro perdido de los origenistas* (The lost book of the Origenists), Antonio José Ponte documents how the work of the two most prominent writers of the group—Lezama and Virgilio Piñera—was monitored and censored by the regime—, as if they were as threatening to the regime as exile writers—when the aestheticist concerns of the *origenistas* became unpalatable to regime ideologists during the first twenty years of the Revolution. In this order, Rafael Rojas adds that

Virgilio Piñera pasó del destierro republicano al entierro (his emphasis) revolucionario (...). Pero, a pesar de lo que dictan las apariencias, en las últimas décadas, el exilio interior ha sido un mecanismo de reproducción de la cultura cubana más socorrido y eficaz que el éxodo (187).

It is precisely this emphasis on the interior exile, its peculiarities and contradictions, rather than the exile, what seems to permeate Gutiérrez Alea’s directorial vision in some of his films. In *La visión jubilosa de José Lezama Lima* (2005), Gustavo Pellón points out Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s observation in an interview for *Cineaste* magazine, in which the celebrated Cuban director acknowledges that “Paradiso fue censurada en un momento” and Lezama “era un escritor de talla universal quien en un momento dado fue objeto de la discriminación” (Pellón 159). Gutiérrez Alea thus recognizes that Lezama was systematically marginalized and disempowered by the government to the point of making him an internal exile or *insiliado*. The vision of Lezama Lima as an "*insiliado" informs Gutiérrez Alea representation of the author (as well as Diego, the Lezama-like character equivalent or sort of "avatar" in the film) throughout his 1994 film *Fresa y Chocolate*. In this film, Gutiérrez Alea accounts for how Lezama and other important writers from the *Orígenes* circle were deliberately ostracized and "institutionally exiled" by the cultural apparatus of the Revolution due to discrepant aesthetic doctrines, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and political perceptions.

In this paper I would like to expand the discussion of *insilio* from the Cuban literary arena to cinema through an analysis of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s most influential films, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968) and *Fresa y Chocolate* (1994). It is important to note first Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s paradoxical status in Cuban filmmaking history. While he is recognized and celebrated as one of the most innovative, representative, and emblematic filmmakers that had the full financial and production support of the Cuban state film establishment (the ICAIC or Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematográfico), many critics also argue that his work happens to be the least propagandistic and most anti-conformist and critical of bureaucratic normalization under Cuban socialism in ICAIC history. As Adam Sharman states:

Gutiérrez Alea manifestly supported the Revolution that support did not prevent him from insisting whenever the climate was right and in a manner characteristic of the Cuban film institute ICAIC as a whole, on the need to criticize the Revolution and, indeed, make criticism— at least criticism from within the Revolution — into an essential principle of cultural production (646-647).

I will argue that, throughout his filmography (and especially in his two most successful films), Gutiérrez Alea meant to represent and explore the experience, and the scope of *insilio* in Castro’s Cuba; making the paradoxes and burdens of internal exile particularly clear through sly cinematographic techniques such as critical montage. Through the strategic use of montage,
these films create a compelling argument about the “insilic” condition as an intrinsic phenomenon in revolutionary Cuba. Montage in these films is thus part of a politico-social critique in favor of those excluded inside the island. Through the examination of montage in Gutiérrez Alea’s films as a form of exposing censorship, intolerance, and institutional marginalization in Cuba, we can better illustrate and understand the condition of Cuban insilio from a cinematic perspective.

This paper will look at how Gutiérrez Alea uses critical montage to illustrate the phenomenon of Cuban insilio in two different, contrasting periods in Cuban revolutionary history, and across different identity markers such as class and sexuality. I believe that the cinematographic choices displayed in these films unravel the complex twists and turns of the experience of insilio, and open it to new interpretations. I will demonstrate how, more than literary or poetic discourse, the cinematic language of montage is able to illustrate the subjective disjointedness and fragmentation cause by internal exile—the displacement and isolation that individuals suffer inside their own country of origin caused by institutional exclusions under certain political circumstances. My analyses of these films’ cinematography are informed by Sergei Eisenstein’s ideas on the dialectical dimensions of montage (summarized in the term "critical montage") and Michael Betancourt’s approach on spatial montage. Eisenstein’s montage theories are relevant to the examination of these films because of the similarities of historical context between two socialist revolutions—the Russian and the Cuban—but also because of the great influence that soviet montage exercised in the works of several Cuban directors such as Santiago Álvarez, Tomas Gutiérrez Alea, Nicolas Guillén Landrian, and more recently Fernando Pérez. Additionally, Gutiérrez Alea takes on Eisenstein’s concepts and its cinematic applications, are lengthily discussed by the Cuban director in his essay La dialéctica del espectador (1983) (The Viewer’s dialectics).

The next section of this paper will look at how montage in Gutiérrez Alea's films achieves a unique form of communication built on dialectical contrast through a calculated disposition of camera shots, spatial arrangements, and mise-en-scène that makes critical montage more than just the outcome of concept vs. narrative-based editing. Additionally, it is relevant to highlight the significance of the editing process, particularly in Memorias, in order to comprehend the strategic use of montage techniques throughout these films. After outlining a theoretical framework, this paper will first look at the relevance of montage’s theory in Gutiérrez Alea’s work. The next section will consider how Gutiérrez Alea lays out critical montage, in order to explore the phenomenon of insilio through the characters of Sergio and Diego.

Montage’s theory in TGA’s works

Eisenstein work on montage offers us with valuable insights for the analysis of these films. The use of montage provides us with a pertinent tool for exploring the contradictions of internal exile. According to Eisenstein, in his essay “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form” (1949)

Montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots-shots even opposite to one another: the ‘dramatic’ principle” (Eisenstein, A Dialectic 4), and subsequently, “the logic of organic form vs. the logic of rational form yields, in collision, the dialectic of the art-form. The interaction of the two produces and determines Dynamism” (Eisenstein 2).

The notion of the two ideas clashing in order to create a third new one, becomes a key element for the understanding of cinematographic choices. In this way, we can comprehend the
“dramatic” principle as the construction of a scene or a sequence, a product from two previous “antagonistic” shots or scenes. Eisenstein’s theory takes montage beyond cinematography and the process of editing. He extended the notion of montage to the mise-en-scène and acting. Accordingly, he argues in “Word and Image” that

the actor’s acting may have the character of a flat representation or of a genuine image according to the method he uses to construct his performance. Even though his performance being shot entirely from a single set-up (or even from single seat in a theater auditorium) none the less, -in a felicitous case- the performance will itself be “montage” in character. (Eisenstein, Word and Image 24)

This quote is particularly relevant to these films, since we can understand the acting of these protagonists as a form of montage carried out during their performances. First, in Memorias we have Sergio, with his hyper-private reflections on his own writings (exposed through the voice-over), contrasted with the telescopic view with which he surveys the world outside his apartment. Secondly, we have Diego, from Fresa y Chocolate, a character that expresses his opinions aloud (without the use of the voice-over) but keeps the nature of his relationship with David private.

Gutiérrez Alea provides information on the different protagonists by establishing a counterpoint between the outside views and the protagonist’s habitable space that inexorably points at their identities. Such is the case of Sergio’s penthouse apartment in El Vedado (the neighborhood of the Cuban bourgeoisie before 1959) and Diego’s Guarida, the place of an intellectual inside a solarium. It is relevant to note that Eisenstein work’s on montage, particularly in his essay “Dramaturgy of Film Form”, recognized the visual counterpoint within the shot, explained in terms of graphic conflict, conflict between planes, between volumes, spatial conflict, conflict in lighting and conflict in tempo (Eisenstein, Dramaturgy 166-172). These series of “conflicts” in terms of the space and its arrangements, become applicable to the way in which the mise-en-scène is displayed inside Diego’s house, and how the camera surveys the details of Sergio’s apartment in the beginning of Memorias. As Julianne Burton says about Memorias:

This wealth of accumulated detail, the alternative points of view provided by the subjective and non-subjective camera, as well as the dialectical relationship between Sergio’s personal life and his historical context, combine to create artistic complexity through distance (21).

Connecting this “distancing” effect, “narrated” by the camera, with the different combinations of newsreel, documentary footage, fictional material and voice-over, highlights the role of montage in the exploration of the internal exile. There is a sort of parallel between the way in which montage combines and uses different visual and audio materials, and the way in which the insilio shows us a fragmented individual. This interplay between montage and insilio contributes to illustrate the paradoxical alienation inherent to the internal exile. In relation to this, Brian Henderson argues that Montage fragments reality in order to reconstitute it in highly organized, synthetic emotional and intellectual patterns (5). In a similar vein, the internal exile fragments and dislocates individuals such as Sergio and Diego, when they are excluded and censured from the social, political and national scenario. It is important to take in consideration the historical-political scenario that informs the context of both movies, mainly because politics has played out a significant weight in Cuban cinema and cultural productions. As Michael Chanan warns “Politics in Cuban cinema is not a subtext that either the filmmaker or the critic can include or
leave out; it is the inevitable and ever-present intertext of the aesthetic, and its constant dialogue with the political” (Chanan, Cuban Cinema 12).

This form of “intertext” is epitomized in the historical circumstances that serves as a canvas for both films. On the one hand, Memorias is set in the wake of the Cuban revolution, between 1961 and the Missile Crisis, when many Cubans abandoned the country, particularly former bourgeoisies, with the exception of Sergio. On the other hand, Fresa y Chocolate is set in 1979, twenty years after the triumph of the revolution, right after the era called The Quinquenio Grís, which was a period of severe censorship and repression, not just in cultural politics, but also in other aspects of social life. It is also a clear reference to what was an attempted sovietification of Cuba, as Russian advisors were at the height of their influence inside the Island. Additionally, 1979 was the year that preceded the historical Mariel boatlift, another political crisis between Cuba and U.S, which again, gives a significant weight to the context of this movie. When these two films are examined together it is unavoidable to compare the historical circumstances that seem to replicate over time, and inform their cinematography.

The relevance of montage as a useful cinematic tool in revolutionary Cuban cinema is undeniable. It is a powerful aesthetic and ideological element not just in Gutiérrez Alea’s films, but also in Santiago Álvarez’s documentaries, and other Cuban filmmakers. In the same way that Soviet cinema and Sergei Eisenstein’s theory were instrumental for the dissemination of the ideals, and politics of the Soviet Revolution, Gutiérrez Alea is conscious of the role of cinema as a medium for social transformation in revolutionary Cuba. As he claims in his article La dialéctica del espectador (The Viewer’s dialectics)

We understand what cinema’s social function should be in Cuba in these times: It should contribute in the most effective way possible to elevating viewer’s [sic] revolutionary consciousness and… it should also contribute to their enjoyment of life (110).

Ultimately, this acknowledgement of cinema as a form of uplifting “revolutionary consciousness” impacts the way in which the cultural apparatus of the Revolution established its politics concerning the ICAIC. David Wood addresses Gutiérrez Alea’s influence in the cultural politics of the Revolution as follows

Gutiérrez Alea was able to make a major contribution to the shaping of that policy, of how cinema –and art more widely– should relate to the Revolution (…) his lengthy essay La dialéctica del espectador (The Viewer’s Dialectic) offers the most eloquent and refined discussion of the role and ideology of cinema in revolutionary Cuba. Drawing on the ideas of Eisenstein and Brecht (among others) (Wood 513).

Linking Eisenstein’s theory of montage and its practices with Gutiérrez Alea’s films, seems a logical connection, because through the uses of both (the technique of montage and its theory), the Cuban director is able to register the changes, and historical conditions in Cuban society. Furthermore, he explores Eisenstein’s pathos and Brecht’s distancing effect in these films, as two opposite elements of the same phenomenon, yet complement each other. Such is the case of the scene in which Sergio is in a bus seated next to a miliciano, when he is coming back from the airport after the departure of his parents and wife. In this scene, there are two key visual elements in “collision” that ultimately tributes towards a kind of intellectual montage, while refers back to a historical moments. The first one is the short flashback of Sergio’s wife boarding the plane to Miami, and the other moment is when the miliciano is trying to get off the bus and asks Sergio for permission to pass, in a way that seems to interrupt his stream of
consciousness. When the miliciano stands up, we see his rifle and the camera shows us a big sign that reads Girón with the head of a soldier next to it. A deep statement is created through the use of these symbolic images. On the one hand, we are reminded about the historical context of Girón beach, and how the revolutionary army defeated the CIA’s armed forces of Cuban exiles. On the other hand, the presence of the armed miliciano inside the bus echoes the Girón sign, creates a tension between him, as a representative of the new order, and Sergio as a symbolic figure of the old regime. Moreover, the construction of this scene mimics the conflict of a historical moment, and the tension between two places, Miami-U.S and Girón-Cuba. Additionally, Gutiérrez Alea clarifies in his essay Dialéctica del espectador that:

Montage combinations, not only in the case of the series of images which may be arranged in an unusual relation as an incentive to discover new meaning, but also when the relations are established between sound and image constitute a specifically cinematic modality of the estrangement effect (46).

This “estrangement effect” seems very pertinent in the way in which sound is used in both films, whereas it is through the use of the voice-over in Memorias, or the hemorrhaging city’s sounds in Fresa y Chocolate, as well as the use of strategic melodramatic music with clear references to exile, -like Ignacio Cervantes’ famous Adiós a Cuba-, for the purpose of stressing Diego’s insilio and future forced exile. Additionally, Diego’s friendship with a character like David, -whom is totally opposed to Diego’s philosophy of life and political views-, serve as counterpoints for his double-entendre comments about the government, and gives us the notion of an intellectual montage as a result from two ideas and characters in tension. In the same way, Bruno Bosteels clarifies about Memorias...

Even more symptomatically and as a result of the techniques of montage, between sound and image too the relation tends to be one of violent disjunction. The constant use of voice-over, for instance, purportedly relevant as meta-commentary (…), in fact never manages to produce, or never wants to produce, a correspondence between sound and sight, between the visible and the sayable (…). This is why Sergei M. Eisenstein’s technique of intellectual montage becomes so critical (101).

These conflicts between sound and images, as well as within the same scene or sequence, in Memorias and Fresa y Chocolate, highlights the disjunctions and paradoxes of insilio, in addition to the relevance of montage as a suitable cinematic language for the exploration of this phenomenon. In this sense, Paul A. Schroeder establishes in his book Latin American Cinema: A Comparative History (2016) that

The documentary and fictional elements in Memories of Underdevelopment are edited using what Sergei Eisenstein called intellectual montage, whereby the juxtaposition of shots or sequences that are dialectically opposed to one and other creates a new, abstract idea, for example “alienation” or “solidarity” (192).

It is precisely the coexistence and antagonism of these two feelings,-alienation and solidarity-, in characters like Sergio and Diego what makes their insilio experiences so complex and contradictory. On the one side, Sergio incarnates a former bourgeois, with his sexual and social class prejudices, yet he is able to criticize that bourgeois’ mentality. However, his identification and social place in the new Cuban society is constantly challenged. As in the case of his trial instigated by Elena’s family accusations, or the scene where the Urban Reform’s bureaucrats look into his rights to live alone in a big apartment, and his sources of revenue as former property owner. On the other side, Diego values and identifies with important elements
of Cuban culture, he tried to integrate into the revolutionary process by participating in the Literacy Campaign of 1961, yet his homosexuality and criticism, excludes him from being fully accepted into society. As exemplify in the confrontational scene between him and Miguel, and the expulsion from his workplace towards the end of the film.

**From Critical Montage to *insilio*, Sergio and Diego two faces of the coin**

It is relevant to this analysis how certain elements of montage has changed from one film to the other, as well as the similarities in the uses of montage. In the case of *Memorias* there are abundant combinations of documentary footage, newsreel, and photographic material in conjunction with the film’s narrative. Furthermore, the constant use of the voice-over, -as a form of meta-commentary for Sergio’s opinions and thoughts-, offer us a film with an avant-garde aesthetics and critical observations. On the one hand, it is a film in which “The image of reality provided by *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* is a multifaceted one –like an object contemplated from different viewpoints” (Gutiérrez Alea 74). The uses of montage add to this idea of “multifaceted reality” by way of contrasts. Sergio’s moments of isolation, and auto-reflection, signified through the use of the voice-over, in combination with documentary footage, -as a form of intellectual montage-, serve as a counterpoint with the ideology of the masses promoted by the Revolution. On the other hand, *Fresa y Chocolate* displays a lessening in the uses of montage in a more “purist”-Einsteinian way. There are no combinations/interjections of newsreel or documentary images within the narrative, and the voice-over is only used once throughout the film. Nevertheless, the arrangements of the mise-en-scène, in terms of the spatial disposition, as well as what is shown within the frame, convey Eisenstein’s idea of “visual counterpoint within the shot” and “spatial conflict”. Likewise, Michael Betancourt explains in his book *Beyond Spatial Montage* (2016) Distinguishing Sergei Eisenstein’s montage from the long takes in Orson Welles’s films is not simply a matter of when and how they choose to cut; it is also an issue of the imagery contained within their shots (3). As a result of this, we have to think beyond the editing process, and take into consideration the encapsulated “imagery”, and its possible meanings that make into each shot. In this regard, the abundance of visual components in Diego’s house point at his sense of cubaness, in spite of being excluded from the socio-political scenario. The fact that we are exposed to a detailed and intimate view of *La Guarida*, -a very small space that can holds like a sanctuary many referential images of the Cuban culture-, as opposed to the more public *beca* (dorms) where David lives, present us with the idea of two spaces in “conflict”. Additionally, Diego’s *Guarida* signifies his own refuge, and offers us with a metaphor for an island (*La Guarida*) inside another island (Cuba).

In the initial sequence of *Fresa y Chocolate* we have a set of images in tension, without any verbal interjections (voice-over or commentaries from the protagonists) or flashbacks, it is a mainly visual and linear composition. As opposed to the arrangements of certain scenes in *Memorias*, where we have the insertion of verbal discourse within the visual components. The montage becomes a sort of “hybrid” object composed of the “tensioned” images and the voice-over, a critical montage. As Michael Chanan points out

Sergio’s voice-over would speak its testimony, but the film’s open and “seemingly disarticulated” language would give the effect of a plastic montage more than a literary narration. The multiplicity of means would make the idiom of the film not only more open but also richer in its signifier (291).
To illustrate this richness of the “signifier”, we can analyze the scene that follows the morning after Sergio’s parents and Laura left. This is the part where Sergio goes to the balcony of his apartment and starts looking through his telescope. First he sees a couple that is making out, and then the urban landscape of Havana while he states through the voice-over “Aquí todo sigue igual, así de pronto parece una escenografía, una ciudad de cartón” (Here everything is the same, all of the sudden it looks like a set, a city of cardboard). The camera, embodied by the telescopic view, stops first on Antonio Maceo’s statue, and second on the spot where the Imperial Eagle used to be, while we hear Sergio’s voice saying “El Titan de Bronce…, Cuba Libre e Independiente…, quien iba a sospechar todo esto, sin el Aguila Imperial” (The Bronze Titan, Cuba, free and independent. Who would have thought this could happen, without the imperial eagle). The next thing we see is a boat leaving the bay of Havana accompanied by Sergio’s stream of consciousness through the voice-over in which he adds “Esta humanidad ha dicho basta y ha echado a andar, como mis padres, como Laura y no se detendrá hasta llegar a Miami, sin embargo hoy todo parece tan distinto.., he cambiado yo o ha cambiado la ciudad?” (This mankind has said enough and has begun to move, like my parents, like Laura and they won’t stop until they get to Miami. However, today everything looks so different. Have I changed or has the city changed?”). This subversion of the different quotes, as a rebellious response to the political propaganda of the times, accompanied by the image of one boat leaving Havana’s bay, brings up the idea of Cuban exile, but also the importance of this verbal/voice-over interjections within the overall composition. In this scene there are two images creating tension, the boat leaving and Sergio staying in the balcony, and we can see how these two visual components are related but are also kept separated, not just by the geographical distance, but also throughout Sergio’s commentaries. Subsequently, Paul A. Schroeder reminds us in Latin American Cinema: A Comparative History (2016) that Sergio’s inability to articulate and act out productive alternatives to a society he loathes generates alienation, a feeling visually captured in the shot of him looking down on Havana through a telescope (Latin American Cinema 197). Sergio’s alienation and incapacity to confront his reality, reaffirms his position as a fragmented individual; one that is continually confronted on his daily life, and his uncertain position towards the revolution is often defied. In relation to this, the use of the voice-over provides us with a valuable example. It is worth mentioning that it’s used to reveal Sergio’s private thoughts, and stream of consciousness to the audience, which then become not so private-, but they are never said aloud in front of other characters. This is an interesting use of the politics of discourse because it establishes a sense of duplicity, one in which there is a constant dissonance between thoughts and spoken discourse. This form of discursive dissonance will also serve as another counterpoint in relation to Fresa y Chocolate. One more example is a later scene, in which Sergio is walking through the streets of Havana and sees a bust of Jose Marti, with the inscription of “Nuestro vino es agrio, pero es nuestro vino” (Our wine is sour, but it is our wine), a phrase that Sergio doesn’t identify himself with. It is important to be clear with regards to that particular phrase, so many times intentionally misquoted and wrongly used in the post-1959 Cuban political context. The original phrase says “El vino, de plátano; y si sale agrio, ¡es nuestro vino!” (The wine, of banana; and if it goes sour, it is our wine!), which was written by Jose Marti in his essay Nuestra America in 1891 under different circumstances and for other reasons. In a subsequent scene, Sergio criticizes the lack of merchandise in the stores of Havana, and the way that people are poorly dressed, “all women seem to be dressed like “criadas” (maids) and the men “all seem to work in construction”. There is a non-conformism stated there, as well as a criticism towards the new economic conditions under communist ideology. As a counterpoint, the use of the voice-over in Fresa y Chocolate doesn’t have the same presence. Particularly, if we take into
consideration that the original literary source, -Senel Paz’s story, as in Memorias-, is written in first person and could have been adapted into a voice-over in the film’s version. The only time the voice-over is used, is in the scene in which David is walking through the streets of Havana, looking through the stores’ windows (similar to the scene of Sergio walking and criticizing the lack of consumer goods in the stores of Havana). Conversely, Diego’s subversive comments about the system are not presented in the movie through the voice-over, on the contrary, Diego speaks his double-entendre expressions out loud constantly. In this sense, Diego’s thoughts are vocalized, and more extroverted as opposed to the more introspective type of Sergio’s commentaries.

The scene where we meet Diego provides us with plenty information about his political perceptions and sexual orientation. Diego is openly homosexual, an intellectual and photographer (curiously we never see him in the film with a camera) that works in a cultural institution. Diego and German (his sculptor friend) decided to go to Coppelia, after making a bet about Diego’s abilities for seducing David. In this scene, Diego sits at the same table where David is seated, the cinematography is presenting the scene using the shot-reverse-shot, with the exception of the moment when we get a shot of German seated at another table listening to the conversation, in order to give us the two antagonistic views. David is the straight young man from the countryside, a college student fully integrated into the system, and a member of the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (commonly referred as UJC, is the Youth Communist League, founded in 1965), while Diego is a homosexual, a photographer, a metropolitan subject, and an intellectual that doesn’t pledge allegiance to the Revolution’s ideal of the “revolutionary man”. It is also important to mention the official politics of persecution throughout many years in Cuba against homosexuals, religious people, political dissidents, and any other person that didn’t necessarily fit the “revolutionary model”. As a consequence, many of them were sent to the UMAP as a form of punishment, which is briefly mentioned in this movie at a later moment. In this scene, we gain knowledge of Diego’s political views through the books that he has in his bag as he starts taking them out in order to tempt David’s intellectual curiosity. Some of the books and writers that Diego mentions were forbidden in official settings, libraries, as well as university environments. In part due to their allegedly “subversive” content or because their writers made declarations against the regime. Another interesting detail in the mise-en-scène is the bag where Diego is keeping the books, the bag says “Cuba” in the outside, using the idea of nationalism in order to cover “counter-revolutionary” books, which gives us a glance at another hint of subversive camouflage. This detail serves as a meta-commentary about the cultural censorship, and the intellectual silencing of Cuban writers in exile. Finally, Diego convinces David to go to his apartment, with the excuse of getting some pictures that Diego took when David performed as Torvald in the play A Doll’s House. After arriving to Diego’s neighborhood, we have a shot of the two of them, in which the mise-en-scène plays out a significant role as a reminder of the state’s propaganda. We see a group of children or “pioneros” (the term used in Cuba, in reference to elementary school children, since they are considered by the government to be “pioneers for communism”) with their uniforms walking down the street while they are signing aloud. On the left side of the frame, we see a Russian car, as a reminder of the Russian influence and presence in Cuban’s politics at the time. Next to the open door, we have a frame with a triad of pictures of historical and political figures: José Marti, Antonio Maceo, and Ernesto Guevara. The notion of the political propaganda surrounding everything, even the “private” houses and neighborhoods, reinforces the perception of being constantly watched, -in the Orwellian sense-, and serves as another point for the invasion of privacy. Furthermore, while
Diego and David are taking the stairs, we glance to see the walls of an old mansion converted into a solar, all cover by images of the Cuban flag, and Castro’s phrases, to emphasize the ever presence of propaganda. This careful disposition of the mise-en-scène and the spatial arrangements of objects and people, confirms that

The spatial arrangements of elements is always a component of the image’s meaning, whether as a relationship existing across multiple images composited together or between elements contained within an apparently singular image (Betancourt 4).

Thus, the “image’s meaning” weighs heavily in the paradoxical condition of insilio and its representations. The cinematography of the subsequent scene provides us with elements of Diego’s insilio through a strategic use of the “image’s meaning”. When they enter Diego’s apartment or La Guarida (The hideaway), the name that Diego uses to refer to his place, we are exposed to a space that becomes crucial in order to understand Diego’s perceptions. According to him, “La Guarida is a special place”, here the mise-en-scène provides us with plenty of information about his ideas and cultural background. We have a significant amount of books, German’s sculptures for a future exhibition, which seem to David very strange and rebellious.

The walls are covered with paintings, pictures of Marilyn Monroe, Alicia Alonso, Bola de Nieve, Lezama Lima, and other cultural memorabilia objects, the image of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre (Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre) mother and patroness of Cuba, provides us with the fact that Diego is also a religious person. The camera is showing us these elements from the mise-en-scène as a form of David’s perspective view. He remains wary of Diego’s intentions and asks him to leave the door open, a petition that Diego obeys while telling him that this way “we will facilitate the labor for the neighbors,” an expression that is a clear allusion to the hypervigilance actions of the system, through the neighbors and CDR, upon those considered to be “counter-revolutionary”xiii. While David is searching for his photos in a box, Diego is in the kitchen of the house preparing tea, but David tells him that he doesn’t drink tea and Diego goes back to prepare coffee instead. In this part the camera only shows us what David is doing in the living room of Diego’s place. Diego’s figure is constantly leaving the frame, out of the shown space (the living room), and the camera doesn’t show us what Diego is doing in the kitchen, we only hear him talking and humming the famous song Ay mama Ines. The use of the shot-reverse-shot technique when Diego comes to the living room, suggests a mimicry of Diego’s exclusion and isolation in revolutionary Cuba. There is also the fact that just in a few occasions they are shown together in the same frame, such as the case when Diego comes, and shows him some poetry books, but he is crouched down while we only see a part of David’s body as he remains standing up. The other, is the part where Diego intentionally spills the coffee onto David. These elements remark on the fact that Diego and David have antagonistic political perceptions, and sexual preferences, in which David represents the state’s politics and Diego is the outcast social element. It is also a cinematographic presentation of Diego in a position of inferiority in relation to a character like David, due to his sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and political views. The detail that he is intermittently leaving the frame, and the space occupied by David, is a cinematographic observation upon the exclusion of individuals like Diego within a social context in which only heterosexual, communist and atheist subjects are allowed. After this we have a moment in which Diego puts on some opera music, with the pretext of avoid being heard (another element of subversive camouflage). Diego praises Maria Callas’ voice and says to David “why can’t this island produce a voice like that, we need another voice so badly! We’ve had enough of Maria Remolá”. This expression becomes a double meaning phrase in reference to the fact that Castro’s
voice is the only one heard in Cuba. Also, the fact that Diego claims “another voice” is a claim for the need of a space for public discourse and tolerance within the national context. Towards the end of the scene, after Diego intentionally spilled the coffee on David’s shirt, as a way of apology, he serves the tea in his cups of Sèvres porcelain and takes a seat in front of him. The composition of this shot, positions David in a solid chair, Diego’s special chair for reading John Donne and Kavafis, as a way of commenting upon David’s immovable position towards Diego at the moment; while Diego is seated in a more artisanal chair, and framed by one of German’s sculptures in the background. The use of the shot-reverse-shot during their conversation, in addition to the opposite group of images mentioned earlier, creates a visual pressure that replicates the main character’s tension. The sculpture behind Diego, is an image of Christ with the arms extended and sugar mills chimneys in the top of the arms, in clear reference to Cuba’s national product, sugar, Diego’s religiosity, and the fact that Diego doesn’t identify with the political agenda, doesn’t mean that he doesn’t identify with other forms of nationalism, such as music and Cuban writers; which adds to his experience of fragmented subject. In a subsequent shot, we see Diego looking for a book that he says is a Marxist treaty about male sexuality, and reads aloud a piece of the book. By presenting Diego’s image next to a religious figure, the camera is positing the idea of confession, particularly after he starts talking about how he became homosexual. This element suggests an intellectual, and visual conflict with the readings of a Marxist treaty about sexuality. These two conflicting components of the scene, the mise-en-scène arrangements, and the uses of music as a form of subversive camouflage against the constant surveillance, ultimately, contribute toward a critical montage, that concludes the scene with the explosive reaction of David, who ended up rushing out of the place.

Furthermore; it is relevant to this analysis the way in which David and Diego are shown within the social context. On the one hand, David is presented in several moments in his dorm at the university, as well as with his classmates. The fact that he is presented in public spaces, sharing with other people, suggests that he has social mobility and he is not excluded from the social scenario. On the other hand, we know that Diego works in a cultural institution at the beginning of the film, and he is expelled later in the film because of the letters he wrote criticizing the cultural politics of certain galleries that didn’t accept German’s sculptures, due to the subversive content in them. As a result of the letters that Diego wrote, he is expelled from his job, an episode that reinforces the idea about the lack of freedom of speech. In addition, throughout the entire film, we never see Diego’s workplace or any other form of social interaction, with the exception of his close circle of friends composed by David, Nancy and German. Likewise, Nancy and German also suffered public exclusion, they are both considered social outcasts. German is a homosexual like Diego, and an artist that sees his artistic potentialities silenced by the estate cultural apparatus. Additionally, Nancy is a rehabilitated prostitute that makes her life selling things in the black market. The fact that Diego’s social interaction in the film is presented within limited spaces, such as La Guarida, and people like Nancy and German, turns out to be a cinematographic observation upon his social exclusion and isolation. Towards the end of the film, Diego has to leave the country because nobody will employ him since he is a “bad” subject and social outcast. Diego’s imminent departure at the end of the film (even though, the film ends without him leaving the country) is an element that strengthens the exclusion of individuals like Diego from the social and political Cuban scenario. In the same manner, Sergio from Memorias del Subdesarrollo stands in an ambivalent position regarding the recent Cuban revolution. He’s willing to flirt with a revolutionary sensibility based on the fact that he stays in Cuba, and hopes he can use it to his own benefit, as way of using the
historical and political situations to generate material for his writing. But, ultimately he’s no firm believer and remains a critical spectator of the new regime. There is a sort of parallel in terms of ideological inclusion and acceptance, between Sergio and Diego. Under the new political circumstances of Cuba, Sergio has become a subject partially identified with the ideology of the nation. It becomes relevant to point out that some of Sergio’s points of view echo the ideology of the bourgeois and old political regime in Cuba, yet this ideology is often in “collision”, to borrow Eisenstein’s term, with the actions of our protagonist. In this sense, Althusser enunciates in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” that “We cannot recognize ourselves outside of ideology, and in fact, our very actions reach out to this overarching structure (...) we acquire our identities by seeing ourselves mirrored in ideologies” (168).

The apparatus, in the case of the world and society where Sergio grew up, is collapsing, which contributes towards the idea that sometimes is not clear to which interpellations Sergio is responding. Under this new ideological apparatus, Sergio can’t quite fully “recognize” himself. The fact that he decides to stay, in opposition to those from his class milieu that leave the Island, becomes an outcome of this “collision” of ideologies. Henceforth, Sergio’s identification with the new order becomes controversial and ambivalent in some moments, which reinforces the contradictions and conflicts inherent to the experience of internal exile. As Paul A. Schroeder reminds us about Memorias...

Sergio does not die, and his survival leaves open two possible outcomes: either he will continue down the road of ambiguity, which will exacerbate his alienation and precipitate his eventual death, or he will confront the cause of his alienation by using his ability to think critically, his only redeeming quality, in order to transform himself through what was then theorized as a desgarramiento (Latin American Cinema 197).

Furthermore, Sergio’s desgarramiento never materializes, neither his death nor incorporation into the revolutionary process, even when he is willing to flirt with some revolutionary ideals. The only possible outcome for him seems to be “the road of ambiguity”, and subsequently his total isolation. This stage of disaffection and alienation, ultimately, leads him to the path of insilio, a road full of burdens and constant contradictions. In the same way that Sergio is excluded from the revolutionary model in the wake of the Revolution, Diego struggles trying to find his place within a society that doesn’t include in its “revolutionary” discourse homosexual, religious, or dissident subjects. They are fragmented subjects when only part of them and their lives can be part of the ideology of the state. The fact that Memorias del Subdesarrollo ends in a sort of ambiguous way, with Sergio alone in his apartment, immersed in his doubtful thoughts, during the uncertainties of the Missile Crisis, without being incorporated in any form into the revolutionary context, emphasizes his state of internal exile within the boundaries of his own country, which happens to be an island (a signifier with a double metaphor for the character’s isolation). In the same way, Fresa y Chocolate ends with the imminent departure of Diego, another subject excluded for being considered a counter-revolutionary. However; Diego’s departure ends with David’s embrace, which suggests the idea of an opening space for certain tolerance. Whereas Sergio stays alone, after being successful as a womanizer, a fact that holds little or no hope for him.
Conclusions

Through the analysis of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s most influential films, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968) and *Fresa y Chocolate* (1994), I examined the perspectives in which the topic of internal exile is presented. In my analysis of Gutiérrez Alea’s filmography, I meant to explore the experience, and the scope of *insilio* in post 1959 Cuba, making the paradoxes and burdens of internal exile particularly clear through sly cinematographic techniques. Through the strategic use of montage, these films create a compelling argument about the “*insilic*” condition as an intrinsic phenomenon in revolutionary Cuba. As Paul A. Schroeder writes about Diego’s exclusion

For someone who is strongly identified with his nation, the feeling of ostracism on political and sexual grounds is a heavy blow. But add to that the discrimination and rejection that homosexuality brings with it, and the two –ostracism plus discrimination– add up to the internal exile (Schroeder, *The Dialectics of a Filmmaker* 121-122).

It becomes relevant to point out that this internal exile problematizes the subjectivities that are trapped within the national boundaries, and subsequently complicates the space-identity relationship in a multidimensional way. It is important to note the possible connections, via the *insilio* topic, between Gutiérrez Alea’s works, and other Cuban filmmaker such as Fernando Pérez, Carlos Lechuga, and Ernesto Daranas. As Rafael Rojas reminded us at the beginning of this article, “la fuga hacia adentro o el exilio interior” “es uno de los ejes históricos de la cultura en Cuba”. Henceforth, it is a subject that claims for more consideration within Cuban cultural productions. Furthermore, there is a dialectical function in the subject of *insilio*, since it can be an advocate for a constructive critique. Through the examination of montage in Gutierrez Ale's films as a form of exposing censorship, intolerance, and institutional marginalization in Cuba, we can better illustrate and understand the condition of Cuban *insilio* from a cinematic perspective. Montage in these films is thus part of a politico-social critique in favor of those excluded inside the island. Through the use of Eisenstein’s theories of montage and dialectics, and Michael Betancourt’s approach about spatial montage, the cinematic components show us the tensions, contradictions, and antagonistic elements that tributes towards the overall composition of the film, as well as the changes of the montage from one film to the other. In the same way, the cinematic foundations that appear to be in “collision” within a particular scene or sequence, prompt our attention towards the fact that the discourse of a nation, and exilic condition can be protean, renegotiated and expanded. Henceforth, it is important to comprehend better the intersection of identities and subjectivities’ discourses, within the context of *insilio*, as the constant act of displacement and renegotiation. In turn, Gutiérrez Alea’s films open up space for future analysis of the uses of montage in Cuban filmography, as well as the internal exile in other cinematographic productions. Though possibly not a direct influence, one can see traces of Gutiérrez Alea’s interpretations of montage and the phenomenon of *insilio*, in Fernando Pérez’s *Suite Habana* (2003) and *Últimos días en La Habana* (2016), also in Ernesto Daranas’s movie *Conducta* (2014), and Carlos Lechuga’s most recent film *Santa y Andres* (2016).
Notes

1 Other cinematographic productions from Latin America dealt with the topic of censorship, self-censorship, exile, repression, and isolation. The Argentinian case is one of the most prolific ones. Tiempo de revancha (1981), directed by Adolfo Aristarain during the dictatorship, is a clear allegory to the Argentinian military dictatorship. Aristarain had to navigate the waters of censorship in order to produce the film. Though, not exactly like the Cuban case, one can establish similar connections among the insilio experiences of Cuba and other Latin American countries such as Argentina.

2 Guillermo Cabrera Infante provides a valuable account of his (and others) intellectual and cultural erasure at the hands of the revolutionary cultural apparatus in his essay Mea Cuba (1968) and his posthumous memoirs Mapa dibujado por un espía (2013).

3 In Lezama Lima’s letter to his sister Eloisa (called Eloy by Lezama) from May of 1961 he wrote that: “No, querida Eloy, no pertenezco al C. N. de Cultura. Mis males son metafísicos, que llegan a ser físicos”(42) (No, dear Eloy, I don’t belong to the C.N of Culture. My evils are metaphysical, which become physical. See Cartas a Eloisa y otra correspondencia (1939-1976). Verbum. Madrid. 1998. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

4 In this sense Antonio José Ponte writes that: “Los dos mayores escritores de ese grupo padecían censura, se encontraban censurados también otros no origenistas, y la administración cultural imponía sus figuras literarias. Reinaba la segundón y lo falseado, la literatura debía obediencia total a la política”. (8)

5 Gutiérrez Alea’s film from a later period, Los sobrevivientes (1979) also deals with the idea of exclusion and seclusion. In this film, he experiments with a comic, yet still analytical approach, about a former Cuban bourgeois family that chose not to integrate into the revolutionary process. This film could also serve as another axis for the analysis of insilio within his filmography.

6 The role of montage is analyzed in depth in Fernando Pérez’s Suite Habana (2003) by Cynthia M. Thompkins in her article Montage in Fernando Pérez Valdez’s “Suite Habana” (2003). This article adds value to the conversation about the importance of montage in Cuban cinema, as a recurrent technique employed by several of its most acclaimed filmmakers.

7 Solar is the term used in Cuba for the old colonial houses and old mansions that were divided in smaller sections, like mini dwelling units within a bigger communal structure, where many family lives, like a sort of communal house. This is a very common phenomenon in Havana, due to the lack of proper dwelling and overpopulation.


9 Giron beach is the place where the crucial battle happened during the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, and is the name used to make reference to this battle in Cuba.

10 Tomas Gutiérrez Alea’s essay Dialéctica del espectador. (Ediciones UNION, La Habana, Cuba. 1982) has been translated into English with the title The Viewer’s Dialectic. Wayne State UP, 1997. 1

11 Antonio Maceo also known as “El Titan de Bronce” is an emblematic figure in the history of Cuba. He was an independence fighter during Cuba’s war of independence against Spain in the nineteenth century. He was also a committed anti-imperialist figure, henceforth the visual counterpoint to the statue of the imperial Eagle. The sculpture of the Imperial Eagle was built during the years of the "Platt" Republic (1902- 1933) in 1925, as part of the monument built for the victims of the Maine’s explosion. This explosion in Havana’s harbor, precipitated the American intervention in the Cuban-Spanish war. It became a symbol associated with American imperialism. For a historical detailed analysis see Julio Le Riverend, La República: Dependencia y Revolución. (Cuba, 1969) and Julio Le Riverend y La Historia Del Pensamiento Antimperialista Cubano (Cuba: 2005).For a detailed analysis about sculptural landmarks and the history of sculpture in the twentieth century in Cuba see Jose Veigas, La escultura en Cuba: siglo XX (Santiago de Cuba. Fundacion Caguayo. Editorial Oriente, 2005).

12 The UMAP stands for ( Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción ) Military Units to Aid Production. The UMAP were forced labor camps created in Cuba between 1965 and 1969 throughout the island, with the idea of confining and supposedly “rehabilitate” deviant and outcast subjects, mainly homosexuals, political disidents, religious people, or anyone else considered “counter-revolutionary”. For more detail see the documentary Conducta Impropria (1983) ed. Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez Leal.

13 Counter-revolutionary (contrarrevolucionario) is one of the terms used by the Castro’s regime in reference to any person considered enemy of the Revolution. Henceforth, the appellative implies a form of stigma, and a way of being declared a persona non grata.
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Films

