

Unfinished Business

(The Village Voice, October 17-23, 1984)

Dear Editor:

Perhaps the most lamentable falsehoods in Tomas Gutiérrez Alea's article ["Cuba Si, Almendros, No," October 2] are to be found in his comments about the publication in Cuba of the "scientific" book *Man and Woman in Their Intimacy* (*Editorial Cientificatecnica*, Havana, 1979). This was a translation from the German from a text written by Siegfried Schnabl, director of the Center for Sexual and Marriage Counseling in communist [sic] Germany. Alea's quotations are incomplete and totally out of context.

Following is an all-too-typical example of Schnabl's condescending contempt for the male homosexual, omitted by Alea: "He often walks gracefully, with short steps, swaggering. Many have smooth long hair, soft skin, and relatively wide hips.... Homosexuals are very sensitive, are easily offended. They are exasperated, unbalanced, subject to influence, nervously unstable, and even neurotic." (page 329)

Schnabl describes lesbians with equally unbridled prejudice: "Active lesbians are on the make, aggressively defending their lovers against competitors. Violent scenes of jealousy can take place among homosexual women." (page 331)

But the German "scientist" does not stop here. He envisions futuristic Nazi-like solutions: "The premises for the development of homosexual instincts are constitutional or inborn, in other words, they are present in embryo, or fetal form." (page 332)

Dr. Schnabl goes on to talk about prevention: "Experiments allow us to suppose that in the near future, high risk homosexuality can be ascertained (by embryologic testing) during the critical phase of cerebral differentiation of the fetus." (page 334)

The most incongruous part of Alea's boasting about this very "educational" book which "the Cuban state places in the hands of those whose cause is that of the discriminated-against" is the fact that this book is not for sale to the general public. This censorship spares only doctors, psychiatrists, and sociologists, who must, however, produce their professional credentials to purchase it. Incidentally, by an October, 1978 decree, all homosexual health care practitioners in Cuba (including doctors) were excluded from their profession.

Holding tight to the official line, Alea, in a halfhearted attempt at fairness, acknowledges the past "error" which was the UMAP camps of the '60s, but conveniently fails to mention the rehabilitation camps which followed in the '70s and continue today with homophobic legislation still in force. Nor does Alea comment on the deportation of about 20,000 homosexuals in 1980 with the Mariel boat lift. Moreover, he skips altogether the other main subject treated in our film which is the persecution of Cuban dissident writers and artists.

Knowing that his arguments are weak concerning artistic and personal freedom in Cuba, Alea tries to convince us—with impressive statistics—of the great social and economical advances under the Castro regime. These statistics are, however, furnished by the Cuban government alone and checked by nobody, since real inspection is not allowed. One day, as it happened after Stalin's and Mao's deaths, the failure of the Marxist experiment in the tropics will become all too apparent.

We do agree though with Alea that our film is a revealing document of its authors' misery. Remembering Picasso's comment to the German occupiers about his painting Guernica: "It was you who made it," we could say that the real author of Improper Conduct is the Cuban government, whose misery also reaches Mr. Alea.

In the late '40s, when we were very young in Havana, we founded the first film society, Cinemateca de Cuba, which showed classics. All of the members of the board eventually left in exile—all but Mr. Alea. He made his choice to submit and become an employee of the Cuban state, receiving a monthly salary to direct films, as well as to attack films made by his ex-friends.

—**Nestor Almendros**

—**Orlando Jimenez-Leal**

Manhattan

Editor's note: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea was unavailable for comment at press time. His reply will appear in a future issue.