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PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM INGLÊS: ESTUDOS  
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**ACTUALIZING CHE'S HISTORY:  
CHE GUEVARA'S ENDURING RELEVANCE THROUGH FILM**

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**ABSTRACT****ACTUALIZING CHE'S HISTORY:  
CHE GUEVARA'S ENDURING RELEVANCE THROUGH FILM****OLEGARIO DA COSTA MAYA NETO****UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA  
2017**

Che Guevara is one of the most popular icons in post-modern culture. The bereted image of Che gazing at the horizon is the epitome of his mythological fame and is one of those images people around the world instantly recognize. Dead at thirty-nine, he has become the face of youthful rebellion, his image associated with the 1968 uprising and with political posters. However, as Guevara's image came to be used commercially, illustrating anything from T-shirts to mugs, one wonders if there is still any political and historical meaning associated with it. In fact, several scholars – discussed in the introductory chapter – have raised the issue of Che's reification, usually with negative conclusions. I beg to differ. In this Master Thesis, I challenge the idea of Che Guevara as a frozen and empty image, actualizing it in the sense of Walter Benjamin, by considering the process of mythologizing Guevara and by investigating his representation in two biographical movies, *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles 2004) and *El Che: Investigating a Legend* (Maurice Dugowson 1998).

Keywords: Che Guevara; Latin American Cinema; Documentary;  
Biopic

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**RESUMO****ACTUALIZING CHE'S HISTORY:  
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2017**

Che Guevara é um dos ícones mais populares na pós modernidade. A figura de Che vestindo uma boina, olhando para o horizonte, representa o mito que cerca a figura de Guevara e é uma daquelas imagens facilmente reconhecidas ao redor do mundo. Morto aos trinta e nove anos de idade, ele se tornou o símbolo da rebeldia juvenil, tendo em vista que a imagem de Guevara foi associada ao Maio Francês e a pôsteres políticos. Entretanto, já que a imagem de Guevara também tem sido utilizada comercialmente, ilustrando produtos os mais diversos, é de se perguntar se Che Guevara possui ainda alguma relevância política e histórica. De fato, diversos acadêmicos – discutidos no capítulo introdutório – têm analisado a reificação de Che, geralmente com conclusões negativas. Eu gostaria de discordar. Nessa dissertação de mestrado, eu questiono a ideia de Che Guevara como uma imagem congelada e vazia, atualizando-a no sentido proposto por Walter Benjamin, ao considerar o processo de mitologização de Guevara e investigar a representação de Guevara em dois filmes biográficos, *Os Diários de Motocicleta* (Walter Salles 2004) e *El Che: Investigando uma Lenda* (Maurice Dugowson 1998).

Palavras-chave: Che Guevara; Cinema Latino-Americano; Documentário; Cinebiografia

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	<b>05</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>07</b>
<b>RESUMO</b> .....	<b>09</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>11</b>
1.1 Myth.....	26
1.2 The Romantic Hero.....	37
1.3 Tragic Fall.....	40
1.4 Martyrdom.....	44
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3</b> .....	<b>101</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>134</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>145</b>



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Lo han cubierto de afiches /de pancartas  
 de voces en los muros  
 de agravios retroactivos  
 de honores a destiempo  
 lo han transformado en pieza de consumo  
 en memoria trivial  
 en ayer sin retorno  
 en rabia embalsamada  
 (Mario Benedetti – *Che* 1997)

"[...]not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious"  
 (Walter Benjamin – *On the Concept of History*)

Che Guevara, or just "Che", is one of the most popular icons in post-modern culture. The bereted image of Che gazing at the horizon is the epitome of his mythological fame and is one of those images people around the world instantly recognize. Dead at thirty-nine, he has become the face of youthful rebellion, his image associated with the 1968 uprising and with political posters. However, as Guevara's image came to be used commercially, illustrating anything from T-shirts to mugs, one wonders if there is still any political and historical meaning associated with it. In fact, several scholars – discussed later on in this introductory chapter – have raised the issue of Che's reification, usually with negative conclusions. I beg to differ. In this Master Thesis, I challenge the idea of Che Guevara as a frozen and empty image, actualizing it in the sense of Walter Benjamin, by considering the process of mythologizing Guevara and by investigating his representation in two biographical movies.

Before setting out to discuss the different ways Guevara has been represented, the process of myth making, and the reification of Che's image, I consider important to have a brief historical outline of the individual Ernesto Guevara. After all, when dealing with mythical figures such as Che, pictorial ubiquity tends to create the impression we know the subject we are talking about. That could be misleading since part of the myth making process, discussed later on in detail, involves

reducing the contextual, political and historical meanings. The man before the myth, Ernesto Guevara de la Serna, was born in Argentina in 1928, the eldest son of Ernesto Guevara Lynch and Célia de la Serna de la Llosa. According to Pierre Kalfon (2004), his father had a two hundred hectare property in the remote province of *Misiones* and his mother was from a rich family. Although they were from traditional families, both Kalfon<sup>1</sup> and John Lee Anderson (2010)<sup>2</sup> point out Ernesto Lynch and Célia de la Serna were not in fact rich. The family was considered a bit eccentric, since Ernesto Lynch had a generous and obsessed naiveté and Célia was rebellious against the gender conventions of the time (Kalfon 14, 16). As a newborn, he developed pneumonia. And when he was two years old, he had his first asthma crisis. After struggling against asthma for most of his childhood, Ernesto decided to study medicine in the University of Buenos Aires.

In 1951, Ernesto and his friend Alberto Granado began a trip by motorcycle to North America. The journey proved to be a life changing experience for the young Ernesto. After returning to Argentina in 1953 to finish his studies, he set out in another trip through Latin America with his childhood friend Carlos Ferrer<sup>3</sup>, "El Calica". This time he witnessed the aftermath of the Bolivian Revolution<sup>4</sup> and also the coup d'état in Guatemala<sup>5</sup> in 1954. It was in Guatemala that Ernesto met Hilda

<sup>1</sup> Kalfon (2004) writes "[b]oth came from the same social background of 'traditional' families from Argentina, an aristocracy legitimated more by history than by fortune" (18).

<sup>2</sup> Anderson writes "[t]hey may not have had money, but they belonged to the right social class and had the right bearing and surnames" (40).

<sup>3</sup> Carlos Ferrer met Ernesto when he and his family moved to Alta Gracia. A mountainous town, its dry air was recommended for Ernesto's asthma. Ferrer was the son of the local lung physician (Anderson 40).

<sup>4</sup> In 1952, just a year before Guevara and Calica arrived in Bolivia, a revolutionary upsurge ousted the military government, which was replaced by Victor Paz Estenssoro of the Revolutionary National Movement (MNR). The Bolivian workers were fighting for the nationalization of the tin mines, land reform, and universal suffrage (Rodolfo Saldaña 2001, 27, 46).

<sup>5</sup> Jacobo Arbenz, president of Guatemala, had initiated a limited land reform. Mercenary forces, backed by the CIA, invaded the country (Saldaña, 28).

Gadea Acosta,<sup>6</sup> who exerted considerable intellectual influence over him and would become his first wife.

After fleeing from Guatemala to Mexico, Ernesto met Fidel Castro. In 1956, he joined the expedition in the boat *Granma*. From 1956 to 1958, Che proved himself as doctor, combatant and leader, eventually being promoted to *Comandante*. After divorcing Hilda, he married Aleida March.<sup>7</sup>

Following the victory of the revolution, Guevara is appointed president of Cuba's National Bank in 1959, and in 1961 he is appointed to the Ministry of Industry. From 1963 on, Guevara goes on a series of international trips representing Cuba. In 1965, during an economic seminar in Algiers, he delivered a speech criticizing the USSR international economic policy. This was one of the last public appearances of Guevara since, after that, he would lead guerrilla expeditions to Congo and, later, to Bolivia.

After a brief stay in Prague, recovering from the failed attempt in Congo, Guevara enters Cuba in secret in 1966. After some months training, he and other *guerrilleros* enter in Bolivia secretly. Despite its early successes, the guerrilla struggles with the lack of support from the Bolivian Communist Party and risk isolation as the Bolivian army crushes the guerrilla's urban network. The Bolivian Army, aided by the US Rangers and CIA, is able to learn precious intelligence about the insurgency and gradually restricts its movement. As a

<sup>6</sup> "Hilda was an exiled leader of the youth wing of Peru's APRA and was now working with the Arbenz government. [...]Hilda was well read, politically oriented, and generous with her time, her contacts, and her money, and she appeared in Ernesto's life when he was in need of all these things." (Anderson, 163, 169). They had a daughter, Hilda Beatriz Guevara Gadea. After the divorce, Ernesto invited Hilda and their daughter to live in Cuba. They accepted. Hilda Gadea died in 1974; Hilda Beatriz, in 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Aleida March is a Cuban woman born in Santa Clara. According to Kalfon, she was a teacher and a July 26 militant. She had to flee to the mountains to escape repression. During the revolution, she worked as Guevara's secretary (214). According to Anderson, she came from a poor white tenant farmer family near Santa Clara. She moved to Santa Clara to continue her studies at school and, later, at the local university. After the assault on the Moncada Barracks, she became interested in politics and eventually joined the July 26 movement (419). Aleida and Ernesto had four children: Aleida Guevara March, Camilo Guevara March, Celia Guevara March, and Ernesto Guevara March. Aleida March is the head of Che Guevara Study Center and has edited many of the previously unpublished manuscripts of Guevara.

result, Guevara and most of the remaining *guerrilleros* were captured on October 8, 1967.

Guevara was shot and his body was displayed for the journalists. After that, both of his hands were cut off and the rest of his body was buried in an unmarked grave with other dead guerrillas. His remains were only found thirty years later, after the Bolivian retired general Mario Vargas Salinas revealed Guevara was buried near the landing strip at Vallegrande. After eighteen months of searching,<sup>8</sup> in an effort involving Bolivian, Argentinian and Cuban scientists, several bodies were found and identified, including Guevara's remains (Henry Butterfield Ryan 1998, 141).

A guerrilla leader and theoretician, Cuba's international emissary for many years, the mind behind the economic planning in Cuba, it is easy to understand why Che Guevara became famous once one learns about his history. But what is more intriguing is that after almost fifty years since his death, his image is omnipresent and people still react passionately to it. For example, he has been celebrated as a hero (Bjorn Kumm 1967; 1997), portrayed as a villain (Anthony Daniels 2004; Paul Berman 2004; Alvaro Vargas Llosa 2005) and called a myth by others (Fernanda Bueno 2007; J.P. Spicer-Escalante 2014).

Bjorn Kumm (1997)<sup>9</sup> offers an example of a romantic portrayal, reminiscent of Guevara's celebration during the sixties as a stalwart of revolution. Kumm describes the fallen Guevara as a unique leader, one that relinquished power and that put his own life at stake (30). His interesting article is a mixture of political obituary, explanation for the failed Bolivian expedition and a salute for the fallen hero. Such romantic portrayal tends to focus on his deeds, his revolutionary ideals and fearlessness.

In contrast, Che's portrayal as a villain tends to label beforehand the Congo and Bolivia expeditions as failures, focusing on negative aspects. In addition, as a villain, emphasis is given to Che's alleged cruelty or violence. For instance, Anthony Daniels (2004) describes Guevara as "distinctly unwashed" (22), compares him to Hitler (23), calls him a "tyrant" (24), an "adolescent" (26), a "ruthlessly priggish and self-centered" individual (27). In addition, Paul Berman (2004, 1) calls Guevara a "totalitarian" and a "cold-blooded killing machine", while at the same time pinning the responsibility for firing squads

<sup>8</sup> More details about the search for the remains of Guevara and other guerrilla members can be found at [https://www.ecured.cu/Hallazgo\\_y\\_traslado\\_de\\_los\\_restos\\_del\\_Che\\_a\\_Cuba](https://www.ecured.cu/Hallazgo_y_traslado_de_los_restos_del_Che_a_Cuba)

<sup>9</sup> The version consulted was published in 1997, but the original one was published in 1968.



and labor camps to Guevara, all in a wrathful single page. Finally, Alvaro Vargas Llosa (2005)<sup>10</sup> says Guevara was "ignorant of the most elementary economic principles" (9), calls him a "callous fool" regarding guerrilla affairs (10) and a "cold-blooded killing machine" (4).

Unsurprisingly, Llosa (mis)quotes the same excerpt Berman does from *Mensaje a Los Pueblos Del Mundo Através de La Tricontinental* (1967): "hatred as an element of struggle; unbending hatred for the enemy, which pushes a human being beyond his natural limitations, making him into an effective, violent, selective, and cold-blooded killing machine" (Berman 2004, 1; Llosa 2005, 3). Berman and Llosa remove the excerpt from its context in order to emphasize the representation of Guevara as a murderer, a cold and violent individual. However, neither Berman, nor Llosa, take into account Guevara wrote such text for the delegates of the 1966 Conference of Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, representing seventy four countries, at the height of the Vietnam War.

Not only he discusses Vietnam in his Message, but Guevara (1999)<sup>11</sup> also offers a panorama of the struggle for liberation in the continents of America, Africa and Asia. Guevara's text is a call to the oppressed peoples and nations to unite and create several Vietnams in an attempt to defeat United States' imperialism. In a context of an unbalanced struggle between poor nations against the richest country in the world in the 1960s, Che's proposed violence is not an end in itself, but an expression of the struggle of the oppressed to liberate itself from the oppressor: "[t]he fundamental element of this strategic end shall be the real liberation of all people, a liberation that will be brought about through armed struggle in most cases and which shall be, in Our America, almost indefectibly, a Socialist Revolution".

To the despair of Daniels, Berman and Llosa, Che Guevara is one of the most popular icons in postmodern culture. Undeniably, as Frans Weiser (2013) points out, Che's image has reached mythical proportions (700). And this is precisely what is fascinating about Che Guevara's endurance as myth: how can his image not only outlive his vanquished body, but also outstay his own political relevance as a nineteen sixties guerrilla leader? In the last few years, different scholars have tackled similar questions, but with often diverse perspectives. For instance, the aforementioned Alvaro Llosa (2005) dedicates

<sup>10</sup> This is the son of Mario Vargas Llosa, famous Peruvian writer who once was a supporter of Cuba and later became a neoliberal politician.

<sup>11</sup> First published in 1967 by Tricontinental, the magazine of the Organization of the Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the consulted version was made available by the Marxist Internet Archive.

much of his article, entitled "The Killing Machine: Che Guevara, from communist firebrand to capitalist brand", to describe the reification of Che's image into commercial brands. He also insists on how different people have adopted Che as a symbol for a number of reasons, what he attempts to construe as a sign of how random Che's image has become (2). Clearly, Llosa is determined to prove Guevara redundant. In comparison, Fernanda Bueno (2007) does not present the same determination, although she too delves into the reification of Che Guevara's image.

Overall, Bueno (2007) makes an interesting contribution since she resorts to Roland Barthes concept of myth as a second order semiological system to investigate the role of *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles 2004) in mythologizing Che. She also offers an interesting analysis of the film in terms of character development, setting, lighting, onscreen space, in stark contrast with Llosa. The problem in Bueno's article arises from the expectation of fitting *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles 2004) in the conventions of National Cinema, as discussed in the next paragraph. Since it only partially conforms to such conventions, the film, for Bueno, becomes not more than a postcard for potential tourists. In addition, Roland Barthes argues in *Mythologies* (1991) that perhaps the best way to fight myth is to use myth against itself, producing an artificial myth:

"the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an artificial myth [...]. Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth? All that is needed is to use it as the departure point for a third semiological chain, to take its signification as the first term of a second myth" (134).

This would open an interesting possibility regarding *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles 2004), but Bueno does not mention or analyze it.

Instead, Bueno implies that *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles 2004) presented a deformed image of young Guevara as mythology of Che only to produce a filmic postcard for potential tourists in a global audience (113). However interesting her analysis and her critique of transnational cinema, she seems to be skeptic about the continuity of national allegory<sup>12</sup> in transnational cinema. For her, transnational cinema means simply the "destruction of a

<sup>12</sup> In his 1986 article entitled "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", Jameson defines national allegory as third-world texts in which "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69).

national film production" (Fredric Jameson qtd. in Bueno, 113). Bueno concludes that Salles' film resumes itself to carrying a message of political conformity and consumerism, which I consider a reductionist perspective. In addition, the transition from national cinema to transnational cinema does not necessarily mean the death of Third World Cinema, since films currently produced in Latin America – such as *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004), *La Zona* (Rodrigo Plá 2007) and *Even the Rain* (Icár Bollaín 2010) – present critical perspectives of contemporary Latin American issues: Salles' film mentions land conflicts, poverty, work migration, and different forms of fragmentation, the latter are discussed in detail in chapter two; Plá's film depicts a security paranoia typical of Third World upper class, trying to insulate itself from the surrounding poverty; Bollaín's film portrays the exploitation of Bolivians by a Spanish-led film crew, whose project is disrupted by the Cochabamba Water War.<sup>13</sup>

Returning to the issue of reification, J.P. Spicer-Escalante (2014) also presents it as explanation for Che's symbolical endurance. Differently from Bueno, however, Escalante focuses on the process of editions and deconstructions of Che Guevara's image. He begins by describing how Alberto Korda's<sup>14</sup> famous photograph of a bereted Che Guevara was taken in 1960 and the series of editions it later underwent to remove the figure from its surroundings: the profile of Jorge Masetti<sup>15</sup> and the leaves of a palm tree, during the funeral of the victims of the *La Coubre* explosion (76-79; see picture 1). According to Escalante (79), removing Guevara's figure from its surroundings was a "crucial step in an ongoing process of icon-making [that] might be seen as only the beginning of a long history of iconic 'denaturing'<sup>16</sup> of the person behind

<sup>13</sup> Protests that erupted in 1999 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, caused by the privatization of the public water company and the rise of water costs.

<sup>14</sup> Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez was a Cuban photographer that worked with fashion prior to the Cuban revolution. After the revolution, he worked as Fidel Castro's official photographer. He died in 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Jorge José Ricardo Masetti Blanco was an Argentinian journalist who covered the Cuban guerrilla in Sierra Maestra. After the Cuban revolution, Masetti accepted an invitation of Che Guevara to help create a news agency, Prensa Latina. In 1961 and 1962, Masetti fought as a guerrilla in Argel in support of the National Liberation Front. In 1963, Masetti led a guerrilla expedition to Argentina, where he was presumably killed. His body has never been found.

<sup>16</sup> Escalante uses the word denaturing, as if the series of editions removed the nature of the original photograph. Likewise, the concept of reification seems to imply something is lost in the transformation into merchandise. In contrast, Barthes prefers the term deform – changing the form – and discusses myth as

the myth". The process of "icon" making include the use of Che's image in political posters during the sixties in Europe (79), its appropriation by Pop Art (80), and the resurrection of Che Guevara by the Cuban regime (74). By focusing on the process of Che's image deconstruction, Escalante argues for the irretrievability of not only the original historical and political context, but also of other meanings associated to it. In other words, "the image comes to have 'no relation to any reality whatsoever" (Jean Baudrillard 1994, 6 qtd. in Escalante, 84). Although the image of Che has grown distant to its original context, to assert it has become completely removed from *any* reality is an overstatement.

Another author that analyzes Che as icon is Martin Kemp (2012). His book, *Christ to Coke: How Image Becomes Icon*, is an exercise in erudition, comparable perhaps to Umberto Eco's books about beauty and ugliness. The author sets out to investigate what iconic images have in common. The first chapter is about Christ and the Greek term *eikon* – image –, which came to be associated with stylized representations of Jesus. In other words, Kemp establishes Christ as the oldest icon discussed in his book and as a starting point for the analysis. Furthermore, Kemp points out that stylized representations of Christ embody the presence of the holy figure, a characteristic he seems to imply also influences our understanding of non-religious iconic images. This idea of "presence" will be discussed in more detail ahead.

Like Escalante, Kemp presents an interesting discussion of how the photograph taken by Korda became an iconic image. In chapter six, which is about Che Guevara, he challenges the myth of a snapshot taken by chance through the discussion of technical aspects of photography, the decisions a photographer has to make before shooting a photo and the edition process. Moreover, Kemp discusses how Korda's matrix was transformed in a political poster by Cuban artist José Gómez Fresquet<sup>17</sup> (182), a widely distributed photographic poster by Italian publisher Giacomo Feltrinelli<sup>18</sup> (183), and a tonal poster by Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick<sup>19</sup> (184).

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depoliticized speech that naturalizes bourgeois values. Although it escapes the scope of this Master Thesis, it would be interesting to consider in future research how such issues relate to the mythologizing of Che Guevara.

<sup>17</sup> José Gómez Fresquet, known as Fresquez, was a Cuban artist. He received Cuba's National Prize of Visual Arts in 2005. He died in 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Giacomo Feltrinelli was an Italian publisher, businessman and a left-wing activist. He died accidentally in 1972 while participating in a sabotage operation.

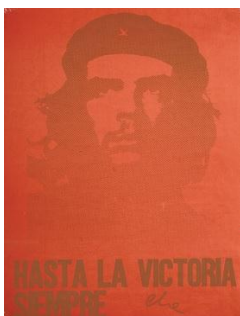
<sup>19</sup> Jim Fitzpatrick is an Irish artist and writer.



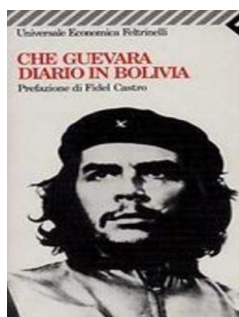
**Picture 1:** Korda's photograph. Kemp (2012).



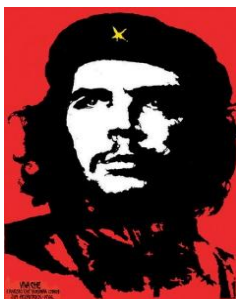
**Picture 2:** Korda's matrix. Kemp (2012).



**Picture 3:** Fesquet's poster. Kemp (2012).



**Picture 4:** Cover of Feltrinelli's edition of Che's Bolivian Diary<sup>20</sup>



**Picture 5:**Fitzpatrick's poster. Kemp (2012).

<sup>20</sup> Taken from <http://www.lafeltrinelli.it/> . I could not find Feltrinelli's poster, although Kemp (2012) and Escalante (2014) mention it, but I assume it was identical to the image of Guevara in the book cover.

Since all three posters had political associations<sup>21</sup> and started circulating right after Guevara's death, Kemp implies they were part of a militant effort involving the Cuban regime, Italian Communism and Irish Republicanism (181). Based on that, Kemp concludes Che's iconic image fits the criteria of Régis Debray's complex concept of transmission. A problem emerges at this point since Kemp rushes over the concept, trying to summarize it at the same time he applies it to Che's image (194). Furthermore, the author fails to elaborate on the implications of applying Debray's concept to Che's image. And, like Escalante, Kemp construes the reification of Che's image as proof of "Che's message" becoming obliterated.<sup>22</sup>

Llosa (2005), Bueno (2007), Kemp (2012) and Escalante (2014) give too much importance to the reification process, basically establishing it as an explanation for the present symbolic endurance of Che Guevara. In addition, the

<sup>21</sup> Fesquet's poster (Picture 3) was produced for the 1967 Havana rally in homage of Guevara; Feltrinelli, a former member of the Italian Communist Party and an international socialist activist, distributed copies of a photographic poster of Che and published an Italian edition of Che's Bolivian Diary with his version of Korda's matrix on the cover (Picture 4); and Fitzpatrick distributed his creation (Picture 5) copyright-free for revolutionary groups in Europe.

<sup>22</sup> Here we can observe tension between Régis Debray's *Mediology* and Kemp's application of its concepts. According to Debray (2004), communication is established on a paradigm of one to one or one to all through which messages are transported in space. In contrast, lasting meanings are transmitted through time, such as secrets or mysteries. In other words, "[c]ommunication needs only interest and curiosity. Proper transmission necessitates transformation if not conversion" (6). If we were to accept Korda's, Feltrinelli's and Fitzpatrick's efforts as militant, aimed solely at transmitting Che's legacy to the younger generations, a problem arises at the level of image reception since it may not entangle access to privileged information, nor does it imply conversion of any sort. Moreover, if the transmitted secrets were to be obliterated every time they were subject to reification – the latter being a fairly common process in a capitalist society –, *Mediology's* key concept of transmission would be jeopardized and the whole system proposed by Debray would be at a loss. Since that is not the case, there must be a missing piece in Kemp's jigsaw: myth, as analyzed by Roland Barthes (1991). Kemp never refers to it, although he talks about the residual message on page 345 and mentions myth several times along the book. In fact, Kemp attempts to hedge himself from the possible implications of applying Debray's concepts with many caveats (194, 345).

aforementioned authors, in varying degrees, imply a view of Che as an icon that is self-excluding. In other words, if one meaning is associated to the icon Che, such meaning necessarily excludes the existence of previous others. If, then, products carrying Che's image are marketed and sold, it becomes impossible to access alternative meanings, such as Che Guevara as a hero, villain, martyr, guerrilla leader, etc. Obviously, Che's image has been associated with many different ideas in the past fifty years, but to suppose that one possibility excludes or impedes the access to others is implausible. It is as if the aforementioned authors were implying a loss of aura took place when Che's image came to be mass produced and to be used commercially.

In order to better explore this delicate point, we must first briefly discuss the choice of concepts and words. "Icon" is a concept used by both Escalante and Kemp to refer to Che Guevara's image. Both authors claim "icon" can be used regardless of its original religious meaning (Kemp, 17; Escalante, 71). However, Escalante contradicts himself by comparing the obsession with images of present day societies to the power relics once had over the faithful (71) and also by associating aura with the power of an "iconic" image to evoke one specific idea (72). Likewise, Kemp also refers to religion in some degree, either by dedicating two whole chapters to religious icons – chapter one is about Christ and chapter two is about the cross –, or by implicitly or explicitly referring to aura (194, 344, respectively). Besides "icon", other terms often applied to Che's image also have religious origins or connotations. For example, "idol" comes from the ancient Greek *eidolon*, meaning phantom or ghost (Debray 1994, 21). In addition, "simulacrum", which is related to Baudrillard's simulacra, was the name of a wax mask reproducing the face of the deceased (*ibid*). As we can see, most of the concepts or terms used by scholars regarding Che's image have religious origins and, as a result, either an increase or decrease of aura is implied.

To address the issue of aura, one must return to Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. In his 1936 essay entitled *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin states that Karl Marx studied the formation of the capitalist mode of production – economic structure – and that it took more than half a century for the ensuing transformations in art and culture – part of the superstructure – to take place. Benjamin focuses on the reproduction of works of art and film. He says art has always been reproducible and he describes a technological continuum of how one form of reproducing works of art superseded another, from founding and stamping in ancient Greece to sound film. However, mechanical reproduction of works of art speeds up the copying process, challenging the uniqueness of the work of art:

Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original

preserved all its authority; not so vis-à-vis technical reproduction. The reason is twofold. *First, process reproduction is more independent of the original than manual reproduction.* For example, in photography, process reproduction can bring out those aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens, which is adjustable and chooses its angle at will. And photographic reproduction, with the aid of certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, can capture images which escape natural vision. *Secondly, technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway,* be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record. [...]

The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet *the quality of its presence is always depreciated.* This holds not only for the art work but also, for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie. [...] The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: *that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.* This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: *the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition* (Benjamin 2005, 6-7, *my emphasis*)



Overall, Benjamin understands technical reproduction depreciates what he calls presence or aura. According to him, the aura of a work of art can be defined as "[...] its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (5). Furthermore, he understands mechanical reproduction of works of art multiplies what was considered unique, as it changes the context in which the reproduced object is perceived and detaches art from its tradition. Hence, mass culture produces ubiquity and causes erasure of aura, understood as the presence or the uniqueness of the original. More importantly, "mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art. [...] The progressive reaction [towards film] is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert" (23).

Theodor Adorno, however, had some reservations regarding Benjamin's aforementioned essay. In a letter to Benjamin, dated 18 March 1936, Adorno wrote:

In your earlier writings, of which your present essay is a continuation, you differentiated the idea of the work of art as a structure from the symbol of theology and from the taboo of magic. I now find it disquieting [...] that you now casually transfer the concept of magical aura to the 'autonomous work of art' and flatly assign to the latter a counter-revolutionary function. [...]

Understand me correctly. I would not want to claim the autonomy of the work of art as a prerogative, and I agree with you that the aural element of the work of art is declining [...]. But the autonomy of the work of art, and therefore its material form, is not identical with the magical element in it. The reification of a great work of art is not just loss, any more than the reification of the cinema is all loss. It would be bourgeois reaction to negate the reification of the cinema in the name of the ego, and it would border on anarchism to revoke the reification of a great work of art in the spirit of immediate use-values. [...] Both bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change [...]. Both are torn halves of an

integral freedom, to which however they do not add up. It would be romantic to sacrifice one to the other, either as the bourgeois romanticism of the conservation of personality and all that stuff or as the anarchistic romanticism of blind confidence in the spontaneous power of the proletariat in the historical process – a proletariat which is itself a product of bourgeois society.

To a certain extent I must accuse your essay of this second romanticism (Jameson 1980, 123).<sup>23</sup>

As we can see, Adorno disagreed with Benjamin regarding which form of art was to be considered progressive and which was reactionary – Benjamin overestimated popular art while Adorno overestimated avant-garde art (Jameson 107). Besides that, although both Benjamin and Adorno converged on the general trend of aura reduction, Benjamin seemed to imply a more steep decline. Indeed, Benjamin's perspective regarding aura has been very influential among scholars.

Interestingly, Escalante's understanding of Che Guevara is influenced by Baudrillard's extension of Benjamin's ideas regarding aura. As a result, Escalante leans towards a perspective of loss of aura, stating Che's image has no relation to any reality whatsoever (84). Baudrillard, cited by Escalante, attempts to establish his own concept of simulacra as sort of extension of Benjamin's discussion of aura. While discussing the issue of cloning, after summarizing Benjamin's main ideas regarding loss of aura, Baudrillard (1994) affirms:

"[t]he most advanced, the most modern form of this development, which Benjamin described in cinema, photography, and contemporary mass media, is one in which the original no longer even exists, since things are conceived from the beginning as a function of their unlimited reproduction" (100). As we can see, Baudrillard's application of Benjamin's ideas regarding aura differ on the intended result. While Benjamin understood the reduction of aura as a sign of

<sup>23</sup> Adorno's letter was published in a volume about Marxist controversies about aesthetics organized by Jameson.

progressive forces liberating art from the ties of tradition, Baudrillard's conclusion of reality substitution makes any political activity redundant. Therefore, Baudrillard's perspective lends itself well to a critique of Che as an emptied and reified "icon", such as Escalante's.

Regarding aura, Kemp is ambivalent. On one hand, he adopts a matter of fact tone in observing the obliteration of "Che's message" in a context where the stylish trendiness of the "icon" substitutes – erases – the "message", which is clearly a loss of aura perspective (194). On the other hand, Kemp challenges Benjamin's perspective regarding aura loss, arguing instead the widely broadcasting of images enhances the "presence" (344). In my opinion, Kemp's ambivalence might be a result of the attention given to the process of icon making and to his understanding of Debray's concepts, on one hand, and seeing the possibility of polysemous reading of Che's "icon", on the other (189). Nonetheless, such ambivalence is left unresolved.

Another author to point out the possibility of aura increase is Debray. In his book *Life and Death of an Image* (1994), he says that instead of aura reduction, there is a personification of the aura. In other words, the artist embodies the aura. As examples, he mentions Yves Klein, Andy Warhol, Orson Welles and Federico Fellini. This perspective is compatible with his concept of transmission, since the artist becomes the one with privileged access to one's own work (55). Although a compelling argument, the proposed personification is not true for the artists that helped cement Che's myth in visual terms, since Korda, Feltrinelli and Fitzpatrick share to a considerable extent an anonymity incompatible with Debray's perspective.

Summing up, Benjamin, Baudrillard and Escalante defend aura reduction. Debray, in contrast, argues for aura increase. And Kemp is ambivalent since he sees both possibilities. But both aura reduction and aura increase are by themselves insufficient to adequately explain Che's image ubiquity combined with the survival of remnants of its political signification. If we considered a transition from a society that valued notions such as "original", "real", "authentic" and "unique" to a society of masses, which requires a culture industry based on copy distribution and myth making, we would probably expect aura to cease to exist, or at least, to dwindle. However, if we considered the processes of copying

and myth making to be multiplying the presence of the original, then we would probably expect aura to increase. Indeed, one can understand this duality as a false paradox, since myth, as analyzed by Roland Barthes (1991), needs the original's historical and political meaning to feed the signification of its copies and needs the copies to establish ubiquity. As a result, scholars who focus on the "original", such as Korda's photograph, tend to conclude there is aura reduction in editing and copying. In contrast, scholars who focus on the edition and copying process, tend to see only omnipresence – literally "presence everywhere" –, that is, aura increase. Both perspectives are insufficient because who sees aura does not in fact perceive myth, but its manifestation.

## 1.1 Myth

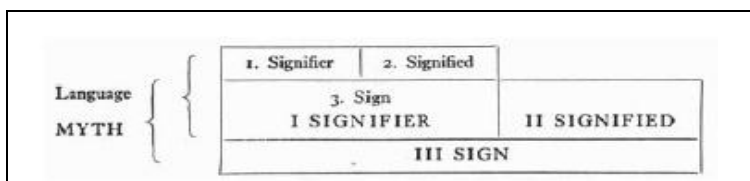
Roland Barthes' theory of myth allows us to consider the interaction between both processes, namely the deforming of the original political and historical meaning, and the ubiquitous presence of the original in the copies. Barthes (1991) contributed with a very comprehensive theory of myth as a type of speech. According to Barthes,

In myth, we find [...] the signifier, the signified and the sign. But myth is

a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second. We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth (113).

In other words, myth is a second order semiological system, since the first order sign is deformed, becoming the signifier in the second order. Hence, as we can see in picture 6, the signifier of myth already has meaning but, in the process of becoming form again, the meaning is deformed, impoverished: "there is here a paradoxical permutation in the reading operations, an abnormal regression from meaning to form, from the linguistic sign to the mythical signifier" (116). However, the first order meaning does not vanish. Instead, "[...] there is a presence of the signified through the signifier" (115). That is so because the second order form depends on the first order to exist:

But the essential point in all this is that the form does not suppress the meaning, it only impoverishes it, it puts it at a distance, it holds it at one's disposal. One believes that the meaning is going to die, but it is a death with reprieve; the meaning loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment. The meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation: the form must constantly be able to be rooted again in the meaning and to get there what nature it needs for its nutriment; above all, it must be able to hide there. It is this constant game of hide-and-seek between the meaning and the form which defines myth (117).



**Picture 6:** Representation of myth's structure.  
Barthes (1991).

For example, Korda's uncropped photograph (Picture 1) is itself a first order sign. In Picture 1, we can see one man in profile, looking at

something outside the frame to the right, and another man facing the camera, but not looking at it. Instead, the second man is looking slightly up and to the left of the frame. We can also see the second man is wearing a type of military jacket and a beret with a star, plus we see the leaves of a palm tree to the right of the frame. By attempting to describe the uncropped photo, we observe its form, the first order signifier. In comparison, by identifying the two men in the picture and the context where the photo was taken, we also notice its historical and political meaning – the signified –. In other words, the photo of two men and a palm tree becomes one of Alberto Korda's photos taken during the funeral after the explosion of the ship *La Coubre*, and the previously unknown men are identified as Jorge Massetti and Ernesto Guevara, both important individuals in 1960 Cuba.

As we know, Korda cropped the photo (Picture 2), removing Massetti and the palm leaves. By doing so, he deformed the first order signifier – the photograph itself, the form – and signified – its historical and political context, the meaning – and opened the possibility of new signification. In comparison, Fresquet, Feltrinelli and Fitzpatrick contributed to the creation of myth by creating a second semiological order. The use of Che's image in political posters and on the cover of Feltrinelli's edition of the Bolivian Diary brought new meaning: Che became a symbol for rebellion, a myth to be worshiped by the rebellious youth of late 1960s and the entire 1970s, a frozen image that eerily stands up from its vanquished body and points the way with its gaze. Thus, Fresquet, Feltrinelli and Fitzpatrick ended up creating a concept that filled the deformed form of Korda's cropped photo.

But even deprived from its context, Korda's matrix still carries a presence, reminiscent from the deformed first order signified. First, the Che we see in the cropped image is obviously the same Che we see in the uncropped photo, so we are still in a way looking at the "original" photograph, or at least, at part of it. In other words, the uncropped photo is still partially present in Korda's matrix. Such resemblance establishes strong intertextuality between the uncropped photo (Picture 1) and Korda's matrix (Picture 2). Second, even if we do not know anything about the history of Korda's matrix, we can see it is a cropped photograph, which makes us wonder what lies beyond the edges – borders – of the image. Third, a reminiscence of the historical and

political context, the first order meaning, survives in the deformed image because myth needs it in order to continue existing.

In other words, even if the person that looks at Che's mythological image in the present does not know much about Ernesto Guevara, there are some basic ideas, which outline the historic Che, required for myth to realize its potency. A good example was offered by a movie reviewer commenting about his lack of knowledge regarding Guevara prior to watching Steven Soderbergh's two part biopic *Che* (2008): "I didn't know much at all about Che except that he was involved with communist uprisings and revolutions, was buddy-buddy with Castro, and died in execution-style as a guerrilla (that, and his image appears on t-shirts everywhere)" (Review of *Che*, 2008). Notice the outlining ideas are shallow but, nonetheless, they refer to the historic individual and are necessary for myth to cause an emotional response in people. In addition, such impoverished ideas are reminiscent of the signified, which was distorted or deformed when the first semiological order sign became a second order semiological signifier (Picture 6).

The same reasoning applies to Feltrinelli's posters and book cover (Picture 4). Because his "Che" is so similar to Korda's matrix (Picture 2), there is also a strong intertextuality between Feltrinelli's Che and Korda's uncropped photo (Picture 1). Besides that, even though Fesquet's (Picture 3) and Fitzpatrick's (Picture 5) do not look identical to Korda's matrix (Picture 2), they still resemble each other and it is possible to establish intertextuality between them. After all, they underwent a similar process of editing and copying: Feltrinelli mass copied the image Korda had edited, Fesquet and Fitzpatrick "edited" Korda's matrix, mass copying their creations. Furthermore, Fesquet and Fitzpatrick's novelty was to adopt different techniques from photography, screen printing and drawing,<sup>24</sup> respectively; and to add color to the previously black and white image. Of course, it can be argued the colored posters represent a softer look, more akin to pop culture, compared to the starkness of the black and white photo posters. Nonetheless, the uncropped photo is still "present" in them as the deformed first order signified.

<sup>24</sup> According to Kemp (2012), Fitzpatrick re-drew the photograph in Litho film (185).

Indeed, we should resist the temptation of decreeing an imaginary barrier between what we consider political use of Che's image and what we believe implies no political meaning. To identify intertextuality between Korda's matrix and political posters but not do so with other products that carry Che's mythologized image is a mistake since they are instances of the same semiological system, myth. By stating reification of Che's image into paraphernalia – mugs, keychains, bikinis, T-shirts – remove or obliterate its political and historical "message" or meaning, Escalante and Kemp fall in the trap of aura loss. We must not confuse "obliterate" with distort, since Barthes defines myth in a bourgeois society as depoliticized speech, a definition that implies a defaulting (142). In other words, the alienation of the first order signified is never complete because the latter is required for the second order to exist. Furthermore, since meaning and form are not static, but are always moving, "there never is any contradiction, conflict, or split between the meaning and the form: they are never at the same place" (122).

Regarding the meaning and the form, Escalante (79) calls the process of editing Korda's uncropped photo "denaturing", which has ambivalent connotations: it points out to the distortion of first order form and meaning, and it implies that the "true" nature of the image was lost. In contrast, Barthes describes a process of naturalizing things, of passing from the complex realm of history to the shallower, contradiction-free realm of myth (143). In other words, "just as bourgeois ideology is defined by the abandonment of the name 'bourgeois', myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made" (142). That is why for Barthes the making of myths involve naturalizing history, not denaturing. Indeed, Barthes prefers to use the prefix de- differently from Escalante:

"it is now possible to complete the semiological definition of myth in a bourgeois society: myth is depoliticized speech. [...] one must above all give an active value to the prefix de-: here it represents an operational movement, it permanently embodies a defaulting" (142).

Kemp discusses edition as part of the photographic process, effectively avoiding the terms denaturing and naturalizing. However, by giving too much importance to the reification of Che's image, he falls



into the trap of aura loss.<sup>25</sup> Fortunately, at the end of his book, Kemp redeems himself by observing "[...] the message somehow seeps through its media transformations in such a way that some aspects of a recognizable core still survive, however much subverted" (345). The ideas of a surviving message, or core, pretty much corresponds to Barthes' discussion of myth's distortion of and dependence on first order signified. The survival of the first order meaning, though deformed, entails the potential for challenging myth altogether. In Barthes' typology, Che seems to have transitioned from a strong myth, in which "the political quantum is immediate, the depoliticization is abrupt", to a weak myth, one in which "the political quality of the object has faded like a color, but the slightest thing can bring back its strength brutally" (144).

Barthes' is by no means the only theory of myth. In fact, there is an entire academic field of mythology, which can be understood from an anthropological point of view – regarding the myths of different peoples – , from a psychoanalytical point of view – regarding myth's symbolism – and from a literary perspective, among others. William Ferrell (2000) names a few of the most important authors who contributed to the study of myth:

"Joseph Campbell (1904–87), a pure mythologist; Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908– ), a French anthropologist and linguist; Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), a Polish-English anthropologist noted for his field studies with a Polynesian group; German professor Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), philosopher and historian; and Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1885–1961), who is credited with establishing the archetype theory emanating from our collective unconscious" (9).

Far from an exhaustive bibliographical review, I will only comment on a few alternative theories of myth and the reasons why I chose Barthes'.

<sup>25</sup> Kemp gives so much attention to the reification of Che's image, he buys a Che shirt from the Che store in the USA, and inserts it in the analysis (193).

Ernst Cassirer (1955) distinguishes between empirical and mythical thinking:

"whereas empirical thinking is essentially directed toward establishing an unequivocal relation between specific 'causes' and specific 'effects,' mythical thinking [...] has a free selection of causes at its disposal. Anything can come from anything, because anything can stand in temporal or spatial contact with anything" (46).

Such distinction leads to two different concepts, unity of intuition – related to myth and metaphysical consciousness – and unity of thought – related to science (Cassirer 69; Ferrell 12). However, Percy Cohen considers "the weakest feature of Cassirer's theory is his resort to the concept of mythopoeic thought [...]. If mythopoeic thought is inferred from myth then it can scarcely explain it" (340).

Carl Jung considered myth to be related with *mana*, part of our collective unconscious that connects us to a spiritual source (Ferrell 13). According to Cohen (1969), parts of such collective unconscious are universal, while other parts are shared only with members of the same race, nation or culture (340). In addition, Jung identified "repeated motifs in a variety of mythical contexts" (Cohen 340), which influenced the development of archetypes theory. Jung (2004) defines archetypes as "the contents of the collective unconscious" (2). Furthermore, Jung says:

Primitive tribal lore is concerned with archetypes that have been modified in a special way. They are no longer contents of the unconscious, but have already been changed into conscious formulae taught according to tradition, generally in the form of esoteric teaching. This last is a typical means of expression for the transmission of collective contents originally derived from the unconscious.

Another well-known expression of the archetypes is myth and fairytale. But here too we are dealing with forms that have received a specific stamp and have been handed down through long periods of time (3).

Jung (2004) identified four archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit and the Trickster. Jung was interested both in clinical practice and in literature. His ideas influenced Joseph Campbell's theory of the monomyth.

"Borrowing the term monomyth, a word he identifies as one coined by James Joyce, he puts forth the ancient idea—that the mysterious energy for inspirations, revelations, and actions in heroic stories worldwide is also universally found in human beings" (Clarissa Pinkola Estés, introduction of Campbell 2004).

Moreover, Campbell (2004) understands hero narratives are typically organized in three moments: separation, initiation and return (28). However, Cohen (1969) presents important caveats regarding psychoanalytical theories approaches to myth:

first, since "the significance of real unconscious processes [...] may be relatively slight in some myths and relatively great in others [...], it is unlikely that psycho-analytic theory can account for the appeal of all myths; second, psycho-analysis does not really explain the social significance of myth" (343).

Claude Lévi-Strauss, according to Cohen (1969), considered myth as the precursor of science as abstract thought (346). In other words, "the main function of myth, the main cause promoting its existence as a mode of thought, is that it is a device for 'mediating contradictions' or 'oppositions' as experienced by men" (346). However, Cohen cautions that although Strauss wrote extensively about the issue of myth, he did not offer a clear and coherent definition of his theory (345).

Briefly considering the theories of myth referred to so far, Barthes' is the only to adequately explain the social significance of myth. First of all, Barthes is not concerned with myth as insight into culture or mind, but instead he understands myth as a contemporary semiological system. Because he defines myth as depoliticized speech, Barthes' theory of myth has political underpinnings that the other theories do not. And since the object of this research is Che Guevara, a

very political individual whose image was depoliticized to a certain degree, I understand Barthes' theory is the most adequate one for this Master Thesis.

Returning to the authors who discussed Che's reification, Llosa, Escalante, and Kemp – the last one to a certain extent – converge on a perspective of Che as a blank slate, a frozen image that does not have any meaning of its own and, therefore, can accommodate almost anything. But by insisting on a perspective of self-exclusion, ironically, they reinforce the idea of immobility of the icon. That perspective fails to explain why Che as icon is still relevant in postmodernity. An example of the inadequacy of such perspective is graffiti artist D\*Face's<sup>26</sup> parody of the famous Che Guevara bereted photograph (Picture 7). In such parody, D\*Face pictures a bereted corpse, rotten, in decay. In other words, to insist on a static perspective is to be stuck with a stagnant-decaying image. No surprise why such perspective, failing to explain the vitality of Che as icon, finds randomness a suitable explanation. Instead of a reductionist, static, cryptic perspective, I support a more holistic, dynamic, and straightforward approach. In my opinion, Barthes' discussion of myth is still the most appropriate perspective because it addresses how myth is produced, it is dynamic and it allows a polysemic approach.



**Picture 7:** D\*Face's "Cliché". (Frans Weiser 2013, 701)

<sup>26</sup> D\*Face is Dean Stockton, a British street artist and illustrator. For more information, see <http://www.dface.co.uk/>

We should complement Barthes discussion of myth with other possibilities in literature and cinema studies that might be explored to explain Che's iconic endurance in postmodernity. Fortunately, a number of scholars have discussed issues that will be helpful in our analysis. For example, Luisela Alvaray (2008) analyses the emergence of a new wave in Latin America cinema, which is characterized by the transnationalization of cinema industry in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, as well as by the emergence of partnerships with studios from the USA and from Spain. In addition, Alvaray challenges the argument that

"the entertainment value of a film excludes any possible social, political, or artistic values. [...] The articulation of different and sometimes contradictory discourses is broadening the arena for cinematic discussion" (56).

Unlike Bueno, who basically reduces *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) to its transnational features, Alvaray's perspective is more plural, less reductionist, preserving the possibility of political signification.

The movie *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) is a co-production between Walter Salles and Robert Redford. Salles' film was widely distributed and received many awards following its release in 2004. However, the other film to be analyzed in this research, Maurice Dugowson's indie documentary *El Che: investigating a legend* (1998), did not receive as much attention. The documentary was based on Pierre Kalfon's biography about Che Guevara and the film makes a critical use of interviews with friends, family and political leaders (Corseuil 2012, 68).

Anelise Corseuil analyses both films and discusses how metanarrative<sup>27</sup> is used to make representation overt to viewers (2012,

<sup>27</sup> Metanarrative in this context can be briefly defined as a rupture in the conventional code of film, causing an (un)expected reaction in the viewers as they realize the very mechanisms of representation. It can either be more explicit, as the whole "film within a film" idea in *Even the Rain* (Bollaín 2010),

67). More importantly, metanarrative is used not in substitution of political content, but rather in association with it (66). In fact, one can say metanarrative has a particular effect in each film. In *El Che* (dir. Dugowson, 1997), metanarrative lends a special emphasis to the documentary's gradual move from objectivity to subjectivity (69), aiding the overall intention of deconstructing the myth in order to unveil the individual. And in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (dir. Salles, 2004), the use of metanarrative helps counterbalance "the process of sentimentalization and linearity of the film", allowing a temporary shift from the perspective of the travellers to that of the local people (Corseuil 2009, 200).

Alessandra Brandão (2009) analyses seven contemporary Latin American films in terms of (trans)nationality and (im)mobility, including *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004). She has a similar understanding of Salles' film, compared to Corseuil's perspective, what is made clear in the enunciation of the romantic elements present in the plot (139), the heroic depiction of Ernesto (143) and the adventurous discovery of the "whole" continent (140). The author also contributes with an interesting comparison between *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) and *Easy Rider* (Hopper 1969). Despite depicting two bikers on a journey to explore the land as they search for their own identities, both travel films present a "fragmented sense of loss" (140). In Salles' film, according to Brandão, such a sense is the result of the failure in discovering a homogeneous whole, since the more the protagonists move inland, the more heterogeneity and economic exploitation they discover (140). The contact with the poor, underprivileged and local people gradually transforms Ernesto, "from a young, middle class medical student to a socially engaged leader" (142). In other words, the external journey of the protagonist parallels an internal journey. As the main character experiences a fragmented continent and the oppression of its different peoples, he undergoes an internal transformation.

If Salles' film focuses on the "rite of passage" from the middle-class Argentine doctor to the politically engaged leader as the character witnesses exploitation and oppression in the heart of Latin America

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or subtler as the sequence in suspended animation after the movie credits in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004)

(Corseuil, 2012, 72), Dugowson's documentary seems to have the exact opposite movement since "[its] main purpose [...] is to investigate the reasons that caused Che Guevara's isolation and martyrdom" (68). Puzzlingly, it is as if *El Che* were an intellectual reply to *The Motorcycle Diaries*, albeit Dugowson's film was released first. Hence, this thesis will compare the movement from the man to the romantic hero, in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004), to the movement from the myth towards the historical individual, in *El Che: investigating a legend* (Dugowson 1997).

So far, we have discussed contributions of Alvaray (2008), Corseuil (2009; 2012) and Brandão (2009) regarding transnational cinema in Latin America, travelling as a metaphor, and the rite of passage. I hope it is clear by now the reification of Che and the deconstruction of his image are not the only possibilities to explain his visual endurance in postmodernity. In order to develop the possibilities discussed so far, the following pages were divided in three sub-sections: ii) the romantic hero, in which romantic archetypes are briefly discussed; iii) the tragic fall, where concepts such as *hamartia*, *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* are defined; iv) martyrdom, in which the martyr is discussed as a visual metaphor in the crossroads between history and fiction.

## 1.2 The romantic hero

The first concept relevant for the film analysis to be carried out in this thesis is the one Brandão calls a "[r]omantic, heroic construction of the character"<sup>28</sup> (2009, 143). Ernesto and Alberto are two middle-class undergraduate students that embark on a quest to explore the "whole" of Latin America (139). Instead of finding the unspoiled essence of the continent, they find different peoples, with different identities, politically and culturally fragmented. Indeed, the journey turns out to be

<sup>28</sup> Although Ernesto and Alberto are the two main characters in *The Motorcycle Diaries*, the focus in this study is the characterization of Ernesto Guevara.

more than a dream of adventure and it prompts a *revolution* in his character, "from a young, middle class medical student to a socially engaged leader" (142). That is what Corseuil refers to when she uses the term "rite of passage". In her own words,

"[...] as in a rite of passage,<sup>29</sup> the young Guevara transforms his comprehension of society as he understands the social differences, oppression and exclusion imposed to the native peoples of Latin America" (Corseuil 2012, p.72, *my translation*).

This rite of passage metaphor is well suited to describe young Ernesto's heroic rise in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) as the protagonist is "educated" in the reality of oppression and exploitation in our continent. As young Ernesto and Granado travel from place to place, relying on solidarity and support of the locals to continue their journey, not only witnessing but also sharing their poverty, Ernesto feels a growing empathy for all the oppressed and exploited he meets. Interestingly, the protagonist undergoes an internal movement – parallel to the external one of travelling – from the somewhat voyeur and aloof position of traveler to the entangled position of leader.

Remarkably, this empathy – or pity, as Aristotle<sup>30</sup> puts it – is one of the salient features of young characters presented in the treatise *Rhetoric* (1926). The Greek philosopher defines the youth as "inclined to pity, because they think all men are virtuous and better than themselves; for they measure their neighbors by their own inoffensiveness, so that they think that they suffer undeservedly" (251). In other words, Aristotle describes the youth as being inexperienced in the disillusiones and hardships of life, and that is why they are so generous and full of hope (249). In addition, the young characters are "passionate, hot-tempered, and carried away by impulse, and unable to control their passion" (247). This *passion*, in combination with the hope

<sup>29</sup> This idea of rite of passage could perhaps be understood as *bildungsroman* or "coming of age". But I personally prefer rite of passage since it carries an implicit reference to the customs of tribal societies, which is culturally very important for Latin America and for post-colonialist studies.

<sup>30</sup> In the following section, I briefly discuss Aristotle's relevancy in contemporary literary studies.



aforementioned, is the reason given by Aristotle for the courage characteristic of the youth (249).

In the beginning of the journey on *La Poderosa*, Ernesto's passion lies in exploring a romanticized and homogeneous continent (Brandão, 138). This passion may be the reason why Alberto and Ernesto overestimate the endurance of *La Poderosa* and underestimate the distance to North America. And, as Ernesto discovers how fractured the real continent is and how dire the life of its inhabitants is, his empathy is aroused and his passion is stirred towards a new focus: rebellion. This transition from empathy to passionate rebellion might also be understood through another element discussed by Aristotle, namely how the youth is geared towards nobility of character (249). In other words, the misery witnessed by young Ernesto – understood as the result of exploitation of many by a few – is, of course, unfair and produces a moral dilemma: look the other way or resist. Obviously, Ernesto chooses the latter.

While discussing moral dilemmas, one cannot but think of Prometheus, one of the titans that stood against Zeus' tyranny. As Peter Thorslev (1962) points out, Prometheus first appeared as myth in Hesiod's *Theogony*, then, his story was adapted into tragedy by Aeschylus. Prometheus also influenced a number of Romantic writers such as Goethe, Shelley and Byron. In fact, so important was Prometheus for Romanticism that Thorslev describes him as "... certainly the most sublime of all the Romantic Heroes, and at the same time the most refined" (112). Furthermore, Thorslev refers to Prometheus as the romantic hero apotheosized, representing the extreme of dignity, sublimity and rebellion (108).

Such association between moral values and rebellion is a clear similarity between Aeschylus' Prometheus and Salles' young Ernesto. Both Prometheus and Ernesto could have just acknowledged the existing ruling powers – Zeus and capitalism, respectively. And in doing so, they would have avoided not only the troubles of fighting oppression, but also their own punishments. But could they have simply ignored the suffering of the oppressed? Perhaps not, especially under a romantic gaze. In fact, since both are young characters, they are high-minded, passionate and inclined to pity (Aristotle 1926, p.251). Indeed, Byron

(1816) also identifies the role played by pity in the resolution of the moral dilemma:

Titan! to whose immortal eyes  
 The sufferings of mortality,  
 Seen in their sad reality,  
 Were not as things that gods despise;  
 What was thy pity's recompense?  
 A silent suffering, and intense;  
 The rock, the vulture, and the chain,  
 All that the proud can feel of pain,

Byron romanticizes Prometheus rebellion to the extent of presenting a rebel that is triumphant even in his demise (Thorslev 1962, 121). In other words, Prometheus' initial pity was transformed into passionate rebellion in a very similar way as young Ernesto transitions from pity to passionate rebellion in Salles' film.

### 1.3 The tragic fall

In order to consider the tragic fall, which will be relevant for the analysis of *El Che: Investigating a Legend* (Dugowson 1998), Aristotelian concepts such as *hamartia*, *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis* and *pathos* are discussed in this section. Although written in the fourth century BC, Aristotle's treatises regarding literature continue to be influential. For instance, according to Monika Fludernik and Greta Olson (2011), "thinking of Aristotle's Poetics, one might locate narratology's roots in Ancient Greece. More recently and classically, narratology has flourished in Russian Formalism, German *Erzähltheorie* (narrative theory), and French structuralism" (18). Likewise, Terence Patrick Murphy (2015) points out Aristotle's influence in Propp's theory of plot. According to Murphy, "what Propp did was to push Aristotle's analysis beyond the terms in which he had found them" (5). Furthermore, Leon Golden (1975) calls attention to the influence of Aristotle in Northrop Frye:

Northrop Frye has recognized a basic kinship between *Anatomy of Criticism* and Aristotle's *Poetics*. After noting with regret the parochialism of many contemporary critics, he warmly alludes to Aristotle's conception of a "totally intelligible structure of knowledge attainable about poetry which is not poetry itself, or the experience of it but poetics." This conception, reflected concisely in the opening of the *Poetics*, becomes the program of the *Anatomy*. Frye, however, aspires to improve on his model by making use of all the relevant doctrines and techniques of criticism developed since Aristotle wrote (47).

Frye (1973) himself mentions Aristotle several times (13, 14, 33, 50). In his first essay, Frye refers to Aristotle's classification of characters as superior or inferior ones. According to Frye, "this passage has not received much attention from modern critics, as the importance Aristotle assigns to goodness and badness seems to indicate a somewhat narrowly moralistic view of literature" (33). However, Frye argues Aristotle's typology should not be understood morally, but instead "fictions, therefore, may be classified, not morally, but by the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same" (33).

Aristotle's ideas have also influenced more recent authors. For instance, Jose Angel Garcia Landa (2005) compares Mieke Bal's framework of three levels of vertical analysis of narrative – tragedy (narrative text), plot (story) and action (fabula) – to Aristotle's vertical analysis – tragedy (narrative text), and plot (story). Landa identifies the plot, understood as the imitation of an action, as a common element in both frameworks. In addition, Landa says that "as often happens with the basic concepts of literary criticism, the basic notion of analysis of a text through a series of levels of abstraction can be traced back to Aristotle's *Poetics*" (10).

Another example of Aristotle's relevance among contemporary authors is Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon's article about the ending of operas, entitled "Narrativizing the End: Death and Opera" (2005). The authors refer to Aristotle three times regarding different topics, such as narrative, catharsis and critical distance in drama (443-

444). Likewise, Saloni Garg makes several references to Aristotle in her extensive dissertation "Hamartia in Shakespearean Tragedy" (2005). Garg points out the pertinence of Aristotle:

"although the *Poetics* of Aristotle was said to be not known in Greek or in its translation to Shakespeare, its importance as a founding document of western literary criticism has made it the standard against which drama and tragedy in particular, written in any age has been inevitably measured" (10).

Yet another example is Philip Tonner's article "Action and Hamartia in Aristotle's *Poetics*". According to Tonner,

"tragedy is disclosive of the human situation in its precarious contingency [sic]. This disclosive function of tragedy remains instructive for aesthetic and ethical thinkers and serves to link Aristotle's account with contemporary European phenomenological philosophy" (21).

As I hope to have sufficiently argued, besides influencing scholars and traditions in narrative studies and literary criticism, Aristotle continues to be relevant since contemporary scholars refer to his concepts and use them in their analysis.

Returning now to the issue of Prometheus, briefly mentioned in the previous section, Hesiod presents Prometheus as a mischief-maker that cheats Zeus; Aeschylus, however, focuses on the demigod's actions and on his moral qualities (Thorslev 1962, 113). This is not arbitrary since undeserved misfortune arises much more pity than the punishment of villainy (Aristotle 2014, 13). That is precisely one of the elements of tragedy pointed out by Aristotle in his treatise *Poetics* (2014): "Tragedy is an imitation of persons who are above the common level" (15).

Moreover, the distinction between ordinary and superior characters is expressed by the concepts of high and low mimetic. According to Northrop Frye (1973, 34), the high mimetic mode corresponds to Aristotle's idea of superior character, that is, one superior to other humans but not to nature. Being superior to others, such a

character is a leader, but still subject to moral judgment and to the power of nature (34).

And as the high mimetic character commits a mistake, a series of events is set in motion in a way that will eventually cause his or her downfall. Such a mistake is called *hamartia* and traditionally corresponds to an action either carried out consciously or with only a partial understanding of the situation (Aristotle 2014, 14). However, *hamartia* can also be understood as a vulnerable position and not necessarily imply an action. According to Frye (1973, 38) leadership usually combines the vulnerability of isolation and the exceptionality of the leader.

The fall of the hero gains momentum in the reversal of the situation or *peripetheia*, which is "a change by which the action veers round to its opposite" (Aristotle 2014, 11). And such reversal might accompany the discovery, or *anagnorisis*, which is defined as "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune" (*ibid*). According to Frye (1973, 212),

"[t]he discovery or anagnorisis which comes at the end of the tragic plot is not simply the knowledge by the hero of what has happened to him [...] but the recognition of the determined shape of the life he has created for himself, with an implicit comparison with the uncreated potential life he has forsaken".

At the moment of the *anagnorisis*, it is too late for the character to stop the chain of events and avoid the tragic fall.

And it is precisely such powerlessness of a previously powerful individual that explains the audience's empathy. Or, in other words, the combination of reversal of action with the discovery of it being too late produce pity or fear (Aristotle 2014, 12.). And besides *peripetheia* and *anagnorisis*, another important element in the plot is *pathos*, or suffering. According to Aristotle (*ibid*), "[t]he scene of suffering is a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds, and the like". And, according to Frye (1973, 192), *pathos* is the theme of tragedy *par excellence*.

Drawing on the parallelism between the romanticized Prometheus and Ernesto, discussed in the previous sub-section, a similar analogy can be made regarding *Prometheus Bound* and Che Guevara's tragic fall. Indeed, Cecilia Badano (2009) offers an interesting clue for understanding the mythologizing of Guevara in relation to its tragic aspect: the combination between the concern for the oppressed and an early death (117).

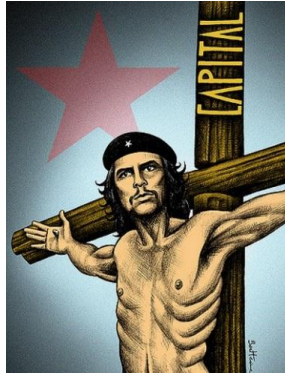
In summary, in order to further investigate Guevara's characterization as a tragic hero, the concepts of *hamartia*, *peripetheia*, *anagnorisis* and *pathos* will be essential to discuss certain sequences of *El Che: investigating a legend* (Dugowson 1997).

## 1.4 Martyrdom

Besides the romantic hero, the tragic hero and the myth, there is still one possibility not mentioned so far: the depiction of Che as a saint, martyr or messiah. For example, *San Ernesto de La Higuera* is praised by the inhabitants of la Higuera, Bolivia, where Ernesto Guevara was killed in 1967 (Escalante 2014, p. 84). Escalante, despite offering this interesting example, commits the mistake of focusing on the apparent contradiction between Guevara's atheism and his contemporary worship as a saint. I say *apparent* because Escalante seems to be eager to prove his point about Che becoming completely removed from any reality and does not elaborate on this example. Escalante does not consider that the very concept of myth involves a divine element. After all, myth corresponds to the realm of high *mimesis*, which, as discussed before, is closer to the divine. In addition, the importance of similar depictions of Che Guevara in popular culture and art should not be underestimated.

Besides a saint, Guevara has also been depicted as Christ and martyr. For example, the poet Lucero Balcázar calls Guevara "Cristo de América" in her poem *Cristo Guerrillero* (2009, n.pag.). Furthermore, Guevara has also been portrayed by the artist Ben Heine (2006) as a bereted Christ. In his version of the Korda matrix, Heine represented Guevara looking at the horizon, crucified, with "Capital" suggestively written on the cross, and with a large red star in the sky. His work is

named *The Martyring of Che Guevara*. Interestingly, both poem and drawing juxtapose religious and political symbols, which in itself is nothing new in a continent where Liberation Theology was once very prominent. But it is still fairly new concerning Guevara.



**Picture 8:** Ben Heine's *The Martyring of Che Guevara*.<sup>31</sup>

The comparison to Christ makes one wonder about the characteristics of visual representation of Christ and other Christ-like figures. In his extensive book *On Ugliness* (2007), Umberto Eco points out the shift from the Greco-Roman very distinct conceptions of beauty and ugliness to the Christian aesthetics, which introduced ugliness and suffering to the celebration of the divine (52). Furthermore, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1988) points out the symbolic meaning of Christ's passion: the sacrifice of the individual and its earthly body in favor of the transcendence of the Spirit (538). Furthermore, Hegel identifies common themes: "Christ scourged, with the crown of thorns, carrying his cross to the place of execution, nailed to the cross, passing away in the agony of a torturing and slow death [...]" (538).

At this point it is important to distinguish between the terms Christ, messiah and martyr. Although all of them relate to religion and

<sup>31</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/benheine/1553068568>

suffering, some subtleties should not be ignored. First of all, Reza Aslan (2014) distinguishes between the historic Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, and the version later created, Jesus Christ. While the Aramaic-speaking Jews were followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews, introduced substantial changes that led to the creation of Christ (171). In fact, although the term *Khristós* is the Greek equivalent for messiah, it actually means something completely different from the Jewish messianic tradition.

If Paul's Christ is not even human, "a cosmic being that existed before time", Jesus Nazareth was "[...]a zealous Galilean peasant and Jewish nationalist who donned the mantle of messiah and launched a foolhardy rebellion against the corrupt Temple priesthood and the vicious Roman occupation" (189, 169). In other words, Jesus Nazareth, unlike Jesus Christ, is inserted in a context of messianism in which religion and politics are not separate. Indeed, messianism was a path of revolution against the established powers (28). Aslan gives many examples of individuals who claimed to be messiahs, but certainly the most important ones for this research are the zealots. The zealots were known for their zeal,<sup>32</sup> a strict observance of Jewish religion and customs, as well the recognition of only God as sovereign, what meant resisting foreign masters (40).

Originally construed as the act of giving verbal witness to God, martyrdom eventually became associated with giving witness to the point of dying (Copier, 37). Laura Copier (2009) offers many definitions of martyr. Reproducing them here is not possible, nor relevant, but what is important is that they converge on the conscious decision by the martyr to sacrifice oneself as an act of non-compliance. In other words, "[t]he martyr gains power over those who have sentenced him to death, actively expressing his joy over his impending death" (36). More importantly, in this thesis, martyr is to be understood as a travelling concept. In other words, the concept that originated in religion is employed here in the sense of an aesthetic metaphor in cinema, focusing on its political and filmic implications, but without precluding other meanings associated to it.

<sup>32</sup> This idea of zeal might be relevant during the analysis to discuss the characterization of Che as idealist, disciplined and determined.



Likewise, about *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles 2004), Cristina Venegas (2015) says "the visual representations and concepts of Che 'travel' [...] as new revolutionary texts conflate with previous ones" (107). She presents an engaging analysis of Guevara's corpse and martyrdom in order to investigate Che's "resurrection" in postmodernity (106). Following her perspective, there is an interaction among different representations of Che. Therefore, we can say there is a reciprocal action between Che's corpse and Gael García Bernal, the actor who played Che in Salles' film. In a way, not only Bernal embodies Che, but also Che's image becomes influenced by Bernal's interpretation and stardom (117). It is as if Bernal symbolically resurrected Che, setting in motion a whole range of new intertextual possibilities. And to Venegas, the resulting effect is reaching a middle ground between a more political reading of Che – by the Cuban State, for example – and the mere use of Che's image as brand. Salles' film represents an example of "a new type of audio-visual landscape that overlay political and commercial territories" (109).

Hence, as we can see, Venegas recognizes the appropriation of Che's image by the capitalist economy. However, unlike Escalante, it does not erase the other meanings associated with Che Guevara. Rather, there is an overlay, an intertextual coexistence among different meanings. Indeed, the commercial aspect in Salles' film does not efface its effect as a political act (115). After all, the film was, for the most part, produced, directed and shot by a Latin American team in Latin America about a Latin American figure (114). Overall, Salles' film accomplishment is to "[...] reenergize the icon by adding a backstory and a body", and by bridging the gap between the legend and the common man (116-117). Accordingly, it is important to highlight here the non-exclusivist standpoint of Venegas' article.

A similar approach is presented by Marcos Becquer and José Gatti (1991), who argue for a re-politicization of the concept of syncretism. They define syncretism as a

"politico-aesthetic characterisation of articulatory discourses [that] entails the 'formal' coexistence of components whose precarious identities are mutually modified in their encounter, yet whose distinguishing differences, as such, are not dissolved or elided in these modifications, but

strategically reconstituted in an ongoing war of position" (69).

As a result, the syncretic articulations between symbolic systems are antagonistic, that is, they are based on "[...] relations which are animated by the partial presence of the other within the self, such that the differential identity of each term is at once enabled and prevented from full constitution" (72). Another similar approach is a palimpsest.

Based on the principle of hyper-textuality, a palimpsest is a scroll which has been scraped and re-written in a way that both new and old writings are noticeable, or in less literal terms, a palimpsest is a work derived from a previous work (Gerard Genette, p.7). Therefore, thinking now about literature and cinema, there are layers of meaning that coexist and interact in a non-exclusivist way. This, in my opinion, is an adequate concept to address historical figures "[...] that have entered the discursive space of a culture, where the texts of the past coexist within the present, while the present image becomes intelligible only in terms of prior discourse" (Sandra Messigner Cypess, p.5). In fact, this is very useful to analyze figures that are ambivalent such as *La Malinche*<sup>33</sup> and Che Guevara, since it allows interaction between different meanings associated with them.

In fact, Adorno (1994) discusses polysemy in mass media, referring to the juxtaposed layers of meaning (103). It is, therefore, analogous to the concept of a palimpsest we just discussed. A palimpsest, however, might still imply the idea of one layer on top of another. In other words, to access one meaning, one would have to follow a linear motion from the outermost layer to the innermost one. In comparison, Barthes illustrates myth as a turnstile, which is constantly moving and alternately presents first order meaning and second order form (121). The turnstile image is interesting because of the movement it implies, but it does not necessarily indicate polysemy. Another possibility is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's rhizome. However, for

<sup>33</sup> In more ways than one, Malinche and Guevara share similarities. There are different and often conflicting accounts of both of them. Furthermore, both have reached a mythological status that transcends – but does not deny – their places of birth and time. However, only Guevara will be analyzed in this thesis.

time limitations,<sup>34</sup> I will stick with the palimpsest, conceptualizing it not as ink layers on a scroll, but as dynamic interactions within and across different texts.

A non-exclusivist approach is in consonance with the idea of preposterous history presented by Mieke Bal (1999, qtd. in Copier, 11). She defines it as "the reversal of what came chronologically first ("pre-") as an aftereffect behind ("post") its later recycling" (7, qtd. in Copier, 11). As a result, the limiting force of past over present is transgressed in a way that allows a new art to alter the meaning of the art of the past. In other words, "[...] past and present art form a simultaneous order. This order is in constant flux or tension, since it incorporates both order and change" (Copier, 12). Surprisingly, Bal's preposterous history is in some ways akin to how Walter Benjamin understood history:

Those who currently rule are however the heirs of all those who have ever been victorious. Empathy with the victors thus comes to benefit the current rulers every time. This says quite enough to the historical materialist. Whoever until this day emerges victorious, marches in the triumphal procession in which today's rulers tread over those who are sprawled underfoot (2005, 4).

As we can see, Benjamin understands history as traditionally influenced by the victor in the class struggle. That is why Benjamin proposes the re-writing of history from the perspective of the defeated (Michael Löwy 2002, 203). Furthermore, history is conceptualized as not linear, dynamically flowing in a continuum, which is sometimes interrupted by revolutions. On one hand, if revolutions emerge as a break in the continuum dominated by the victor, on the other, the historical materialist must also reengage the past, actualizing<sup>35</sup> it (Löwy, 205).

<sup>34</sup> I don't want to risk being superficial about Guattari and Deleuze's rhizome, since it requires considerable reading to understand and use effectively. I would rather deal with the rhizome in a future Doctoral Dissertation.

<sup>35</sup> The term "actualize" is used in the English translations of Walter Benjamin's writings, whereas Michael Löwy chose another term – "rememoração". "Remembrance" seems not only to mean reengaging the past but also

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, actual means both "real and not merely possible or imagined: existing in fact", and "known to be correct or precise: not false or apparent". Hence, actualize<sup>36</sup> refers both to the perception of past reality and to its rewriting in the present, since past and present cannot really be separated in Benjamin's conception of History. According to Benjamin (1999, 857), dialectics consists not only of engaging the past, considering the historical situation of the object of study, but also in recognizing the interest towards the object. Such interest, grounded in the political situation of the time of the historian, influences our perception of the object's reality in a way that different interests, respectively grounded in different times and political situations, produce different "realities" or perceptions of the same object (*ibid*).

Although both Bal and Benjamin are talking about history, they both imply ideas such as movement, continuum or fluidity between past and present that are also relevant for fiction. Interestingly, the films selected for analysis reflect this crossing or dialogue between fiction and non-fiction. Salles' film is a biopic and, at the same time, an adaptation of a travel diary written by Guevara. And Dugowson's film is a biographical documentary. On one hand, they engage historical events. On the other, they are narratives and adhere to film conventions. In a way, both films are attempts to reengage the past, changing our perception of it. According to Linda Hutcheon, "[t]he past really did

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remembering Benjamin's political statement regarding the political dominance in the continuum of history. However, "remembrance" is so subtle that this twofold meaning might be overlooked. That is why I decided to stick to the term "actualize".

<sup>36</sup> In this thesis, when I say "actualize Che's image" or "actualize Che's frozen image" I do not mean substituting the past with a present representation of Che. In other words, it is not a linear operation of substitution of the past. That would be contrary to the Benjaminian understanding of past and present, which cannot be separated. As I argued in the subsection regarding myth, the frozen image, or Che's mythologized image, still carries a reminiscence of its political and historical meaning. Hence, the frozen image can still be critical. After all, a brief online search reveals many results of people in contemporary protests either wearing Che t-shirts or holding banners with his image. As I argued before, the original political meaning has been reduced, but not obliterated, and new meanings have been associated with Che's image.

exist, but we can only 'know' that past today through its texts, and therein lies its connection to the literary" (1989, 10).

Actualizing our understanding of Che Guevara, based on what was discussed so far, I will challenge Llosa, Escalante and Bueno's perspective that the endurance of Che as icon can only be explained as his reification as merchandise. Therefore, the general objective of this thesis is to actualize (in the Benjaminian sense) Che's image by comparing his characterization in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) and in *El Che* (Dugowson 1997), discussing how such representations contribute to his myth, and analyzing possible references to his martyrdom. Regarding specific objectives, the first is to investigate how Che's characterization contributes to the process of mythologizing him. And the second is to challenge the perspective of irretrievability of Che, analyzing the process of mythologizing Che according to Barthes (1991), arguing for a polysemic, non-exclusivist, approach.

In order to do so, this thesis is divided in four chapters. Besides this introductory chapter, which corresponds to Chapter one, there are two analytical chapters. Chapter two presents the analysis of selected sequences of *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004). The analysis will be based on the previously discussed concepts of rite of passage, travelling as a metaphor, empathy, passion, and rebellion. Additionally, references to martyrdom in the film are discussed.

Chapter three presents the analysis of selected sequences of *El Che: investigating a legend* (Dugowson 1997). The analysis is based on the previously discussed concepts of *hamartia*, *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* to discuss the tragic fall of Che Guevara. In addition, references to martyrdom in the film are discussed.

Chapter four is an attempt to draw conclusions related to the two previous analytical chapters and the research objectives. In addition, it presents possible implications for future research regarding the filmic endurance of Che Guevara in postmodernity.

Finally, a word about methodology. After the initial stage of deciding about the object and outlining the objectives, a lot of effort was dedicated to reading in order to establish a context for the analysis and a theoretical framework. Transitioning from reading to writing was particularly challenging because it involved observing nuances in the

analysis of different scholars and establishing dialogues between authors. Regarding the corpus selection, *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) and *El Che: investigating a legend* (Dugowson 1998), the films were selected because of the contrast potential they offer, especially considering how Che is represented. Regarding film analysis, both movies were watched several times and scenes were selected based on the theoretical discussion developed in this chapter. The selected scenes were also repeatedly watched while notes were taken in order to explore analytical possibilities in terms of narrative, Mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing and sound. The notes were then used to weave an analysis based on film language and addressing the issues raised in the theoretical framework.

## CHAPTER 2 – *The Motorcycle Diaries*

As a road movie, *The Motorcycle Diaries* conforms to most of the conventions of the genre. Timothy Corrigan identifies four main characteristics of road movies: the breakdown of the family unit; events act upon characters, instead of the opposite; increasing mechanization, embodied in the interaction between camera, characters and cars or motorcycles; masculinity and the crisis of gender (143, 135). In addition, Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark relate the road movie genre with US culture since "road movies project American Western mythology onto the landscape traversed and bound by the nation's highways" by setting "the liberation of the road against the oppression of hegemonic norms" (1). Likewise, Devin Orgeron argues that "road movies extend a longstanding cinematic tradition that posits a hopeless and lamentable mobility in an effort to eulogize or find stability" (2). However, although the genre is identified with US stories and productions, *The Motorcycle Diaries* is a road movie set in Latin America with Latin American protagonists. This has a double effect of lending nostalgia to 1950s Latin America while at the same time being an instance of appropriation of a traditionally US genre.

The idea of adapting Ernesto Guevara's biography *The Motorcycle Diaries* into a film was given by Robert Redford (Salles 2004, 1; Salles 2004b, 4). According to Walter Salles, Redford was passionate about the book and Salles himself had read it many times, but the Brazilian director was initially skeptical about the feasibility of the project since he understood the film had to be shot in Spanish – a setback for anglophone audiences, especially in the US – and because it would involve working with actors and non-actors. Indeed the project risked being canceled because of funding, since "the screenplay was refused by virtually all the American studios [...]" (Salles 2004b, 5).

The US studios' refusal to fund the film seems strange since *The Motorcycle Diaries* has some major characteristics – the plot linearity, the sentimentalization of the characters – of the Hollywood cinema. Still, the refusal can be seen as an indication that the film did not conform to Hollywood standards, as perceived by its studios, or that it was considered too political. Regardless of the studios' motivation, their

refusal fractures Bueno's argument that *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles 2004) was nothing more than a commercial enterprise. In terms of its creation, the project did not adhere to Hollywood's interests. Interestingly, during an online session hosted by the Washington Post, one user asked Gael García Bernal if the commercial use of Che's image in the film did not contradict Che's ideals. Bernal answered

"[t]he film was not designed so as to make business. If it was this, we would have done it in English. What we tried is to humanize the figure that is close to us and to expose why his ideals are so resonant and so valid these days" (2004b, 3).

Despite the skepticism of Hollywood studios, *The Motorcycle Diaries* was commercially successful, with a box office estimated in fifty seven million dollars.<sup>37</sup> It was well received in general by critics, apart from those that confused movie reviews with pamphleteering. The film was nominated for and won a number of awards, including three prizes at Cannes in 2004 – François Chalais Award, Prize of the Ecumenical Jury and Technical Grand Prize – and an Oscar for best music written for a motion picture in 2005.<sup>38</sup>

As we have previously discussed, *The Motorcycle Diaries* is part of a new wave of Latin American cinema, one that combines certain thematic and aesthetic characteristics of national cinema of previous decades with a transnational crew, production and distribution. The crew was formed by a North-American producer, a Brazilian director, a Mexican star, supporting actors from Argentina, Chile and Peru, a

<sup>37</sup> According to <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=motorcyclediaries.htm> to

<sup>38</sup> According to a radio interview (2005), the organizers of the Oscar ceremony did not allow Jorge Drexler, the Uruguayan musician who composed the song *Al Otro Lado Del Río*, to perform his song because they were worried about the TV show's rating. Instead, they had Antonio Banderas and Carlos Santana to perform it. In other words, Drexler is not famous in the US and he was just a nominee among others. To everybody's great surprise, Drexler's song won the award and instead of thanking family and friends, Drexler sang his song live a capella. For more information, see <https://omelete.uol.com.br/filmes/noticia/walter-salles-comenta-a-premiacao-de-george-drexler-no-oscar-2005/>



cinematographer from France, and other crew members from different countries. But, more importantly, the making of the movie was also a journey in itself for those involved. From 1999 to 2002, the crew did research about the project, what involved reading books by and about Che, visiting Guevara's relatives in Cuba and in Argentina, digging through the archives of the Che Guevara Institute in Havana, and interviewing Alberto Granado (Salles 2004b; Bernal 2004b). Moreover, a series of thematic seminars about the 1950s in Latin America was organized to help prepare the crew.

The seminars did more than educate, they helped bringing the crew together. According to Salles,

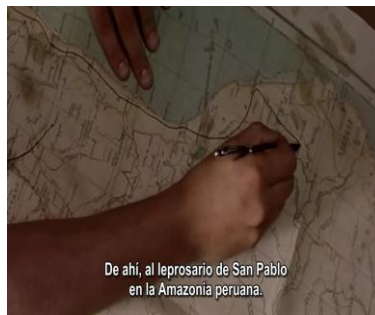
"[...]in the beginning, it was four or five of us while others found the idea especially boring. But little by little, they all started to come, and something amalgamated prior to the shoot. Therefore, the shoot itself was very interesting because we were bonding more and more as we progressed, but physically it was very, very difficult as you can probably see"(2004b, 4).

Indeed it was, since it required the crew to do the journey three times, two for location scouting and one to shoot. The film was shot in Argentina, Chile, Peru and Cuba (Picture 9). Furthermore, during the shooting there was a lot of "controlled"<sup>39</sup> improvisation between Bernal, De La Serna and non-actors, who played ninety percent of the characters, according to Salles (2004b). The crew had to be flexible, being ready to record in just one take improvisations that could hardly be repeated, and taking the time to blend in with the one hundred extras at San Pablo leper colony before introducing the camera, for example.

<sup>39</sup> Within the framework of the script.



**Picture 9:** Shooting locations. Film credits (Salles 2004).



**Picture 10:** Alberto traces the route (Salles 2004).

Besides the challenges in production, I would like to comment on the justifications of the US studios to reject funding the film. According to Salles (2004b), there was difficulty in understanding the structure of the script since it was not dividable in acts. First of all, the script was adapted from Ernesto's diary and Alberto's book *Con el Che Por Sudamérica*, neither of them novels, the typical source for Hollywood film adaptations. Second, regarding the script, Salles likes to have a certain degree of flexibility in shooting road movies to be able to incorporate non-actors (Salles 2004b, 2). Besides that, Granado and Guevara's journey carries an increasing sense of geographical

fragmentation, which frustrates the initial linear plan described in voice-over<sup>40</sup> at the opening of the film:

*El plan: recorrer ocho mil kilómetros en cuatro meses. El método: la improvisación. Objetivo: explorar la América Latina que sólo conocemos por los libros. Equipo: La Poderosa, una Norton 500 del [año] 39 que está rota y gotea. El piloto: Alberto Granado, amigo panzón de veintinueve años y bioquímico, vagabundo científico declarado. El sueño del piloto: coronar el viaje con su treinta aniversario. Copiloto: ése vendría a ser yo, Ernesto Guevara de La Serna, "El Fuser", veintitrés años. [...] El periplo: de Buenos Aires hasta la Patagonia y después a Chile. Luego, al norte, hasta los seis mil metros por la columna vertebral de los Andes hasta Machu Pichu. De ahí, al leproario de San Pablo en la Amazonia peruana. Destino final: la península de Guajira en Venezuela, en la punta norte del continente*<sup>41</sup> (Salles 2004).

This voice-over narration describes the plan as a mission briefing, a common trope in science fiction, war, spy and adventure films, but not in biopics. Because of the comic tone Ernesto uses to describe his friend Alberto and the motorcycle, we, as audience, understand this "mission"

<sup>40</sup> Sarah Kozloff (1988) defines voice-over as "distinguishable by the fact that one could not display the speaker by adjusting the camera's position in the pictured story space; instead the voice comes from another time and space, the time and space of the discourse" (3).

<sup>41</sup> "The plan: cover eight thousand kilometers in four months. The method: improvisation. Objective: explore Latin America, which we only know from books. Equipment: La Poderosa, a Norton 500 1939 defective and leaky motorcycle. The pilot: Alberto Granado, a twenty-nine-year-old fat friend and biochemist, a self-declared scientific vagabond. Copilot: that would be me, Ernesto Guevara de La Serna, El Fuser, twenty three years old. The odyssey: from Buenos Aires to Patagonia and then to Chile. After that, north through the six thousand meters altitude of the Andes to Machu Pichu. Then, to San Pablo Leper Colony, in the Peruvian Amazon Forest. Final destination: Guajira peninsula in Venezuela, the northernmost point of the continent" (Salles 2004, my translation).

is not supposed to be taken too seriously, but nonetheless the film successfully taps into our cinematic knowledge of briefings and creates an expectation for adventure. As we shall see, such expectation is reinforced by other means. Besides that, while Ernesto narrates in voice-over, an introductory sequence sets the background for the journey: the audience is quickly introduced – as the camera cuts – to the protagonists, the motorcycle, Ernesto's family, routine, rugby and asthma. Gustavo Santaolalla's *chacarera Apertura*<sup>42</sup> sets the rhythm for the whole sequence. Then, there is a cut to a very short establishing shot of Alberto and Ernesto in a café, followed by another cut to a medium shot of Alberto as he swings a map over the table. After that, there is a reverse shot of Ernesto looking at the map, followed by a cut to an extreme close up of Alberto's hand as he traces the route. With the sound of the guitar still on the background, the voice of Alberto is reduced in volume and superimposed by Ernesto's voice-over narration. As Ernesto mentions each place they plan to visit in voice-over, synchronically, Alberto's hand traces it in their itinerary (Picture 10).

As we can see, the initial sequence sets the background for the journey, introduces Ernesto as voice-over narrator and creates an expectation for adventure. Besides the briefing, the map is another element that cues the prospect of adventure. Indeed, the map is an important prop<sup>43</sup> that is used in different moments in the film. For example, in the aforementioned scene at the café, it gives visual support to the voice-over narration and reinforces the assumption of linearity. As a long trace on the map, the itinerary is set for a long motorcycle journey with the road as primary locus for action. The only fragmentation the map reveals are the borders between countries and, even so, South America looks more or less homogeneous on paper. Overall, the map helps cement the expectation that as long as Alberto

<sup>42</sup> Chacarera is a traditional rhythm of Argentina, originally from Santiago del Estero, in the north of the country. In *Apertura* (opening), the techniques called *rasgueo* and *chaqueo* set an energetic and fast pace suitable for the rapid transitions between the scenes of the introductory sequence. The tempo is comparable to a horse at full gallop or a speeding motorcycle. The music is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdmsHYJApLQ>

<sup>43</sup> According to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2008), "[w]hen an object in the setting has a function within the ongoing action, we can call it a prop", which is short for property (117).

and Ernesto stick to the road, and keep the motorcycle running, they will be able to reach the destination in approximately four months.

Another element that reinforces the expectation for linear adventure is the characters' discourse. For instance, in the café scene, Alberto talks about his expectations when reaching Guajira peninsula in Venezuela: "*buches llenos de vino, beldades tropicales. Con suerte, hermanitas*"<sup>44</sup> (Salles 2004). As discussed in chapter one, young characters are often represented as passionate. But this excerpt presents more than insight into Alberto's sexuality, it envisions Venezuela – and South America per extension – as a tropical paradise, implying a dangerous parallel between virgin land and female bodies to be explored by modern *conquistadors*. In fact, Rita Lauro Segato (2010) establishes the native female body as an intersection between colonialism and patriarchy and considers gender<sup>45</sup> the key theoretical category to analyze colonialism (12).

Another example of the expectation for adventure is offered by Alberto when the two young men are preparing to leave. In this sequence, an establishing shot situates the group of family members saying goodbye to Alberto and Ernesto on a Buenos Aires street. A sequence of shots and reverse shots depict Alberto and Ernesto arranging their bags on the motorcycle as they talk with friends and family (Picture 11). Alberto compares *La Poderosa*, the motorcycle, to Don Quijote's horse Rocinante and to San Martín's<sup>46</sup> mule. Such literary and historical references are relevant because, as mentioned in voice-over in the opening sequence, their knowledge about South America to this point comes only from books. In addition, he says "*nos embarcamos en un viaje a los confines más remotos del espíritu humano*."

<sup>44</sup> "Stomachs full of wine, tropical beauties. If luck is on our side, a few girls" (Salles 2004, my translation).

<sup>45</sup> A gender study of *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) is a very interesting prospect. However, it is not my focus at the moment. In this chapter, later on, I will discuss possible postcolonial readings of Salles' film. And for a further discussion of native female bodies, please see my unpublished article "Invading territories and exploring bodies: Hernán Cortés and La Malinche".

<sup>46</sup> José Francisco de San Martín y Matorras was one of the liberators of South America in the wars of independence against Spain. This is possibly a reference to the 1817 crossing of the Andes with the aid of horses and mules.

*Conoceremos nuevas tierras, nuevos himnos, nuevos frutos*"<sup>47</sup> (Salles 2004). This line can be understood as a reference to colonial speech, more specifically to the chronicles of the first contacts between European invaders and the lush green of the new lands.



**Picture 11:** Alberto and Ernesto say goodbye to family and friends (Salles 2004).



**Picture 12:** Point-of-view shot of the open road (Salles 2004).

After a shaky start we will describe in more detail further on, the characters reach the open road (Picture 12). A point-of-view shot gives the audience the perspective of the bike and bikers while Ernesto reads in voice-over a letter to his mother, Celia de la Serna. According to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2008), an optical point-of-view shot allows the audience to see what the characters see while, at the same time, restricting the former to the perspective of the latter (389). As we assume this subjective point of view, as if we were riding the motorcycle ourselves, Ernesto says in voice-over: "*Querida vieja, Buenos Aires quedó atrás. Atrás también quedó la perra vida – la facultad, los exámenes y las disertaciones soporíferas. Ante nosotros se extiende toda América Latina*".<sup>48</sup> This sequence offers a glimpse at, to

<sup>47</sup> "We embark on a journey to the limits of the human spirit. We will discover new lands, new hymns, new fruits" (Salles 2004, my translation).

<sup>48</sup> "Dear vieja, Buenos Aires stayed behind and so did the bad life of college, the exams and tedious dissertations. Before us lies the whole of Latin America" (Salles 2004, my translation). This fugere urbem perspective is short lived since, one minute later, just before falling for the first time, Ernesto says in voice-over

use Bordwell and Kristin's nomenclature, Ernesto's perceptual and mental subjectivity since we gain access to his vision and his reasons for traveling. In addition, the bareness of the road and the reference to the whole of Latin American reinforce the expectation of an adventure through a homogeneous continent.

Still in the same sequence, the voice-over continues: "[d]e ahora en diante sólo confiaremos en *La Poderosa*".<sup>49</sup> When Ernesto says the name of the motorcycle, we hear its roar offscreen and it moves onscreen, as if summoned. Interestingly, there is no cut and what had been a point-of-view shot becomes a following shot. Gradually, the heavy loaded motorcycle moves away. Despite the trust deposited on *La Poderosa*, the motorcycle soon proves to be too unstable with a heavy load of two adults and their belongings. And the instability gets worse as the conditions of the roads deteriorate from asphalt to gravel and, eventually, ice. As a result, Alberto and Ernesto fall three times, but survive with minor injuries (Pictures 13-15).



**Picture 13:** First fall (Salles 2004).



**Picture 14:** Second fall (Salles 2004).

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"I am happy to have left behind what they call civilization and to be a little closer to the land". The interaction between voice-over and the footage of the falling pilots a little too close to the land is obviously ironical.

<sup>49</sup> "From now on we will rely only on *La Poderosa*" (Salles 2004, my translation).



**Picture 15:** Third fall (Salles 2004).



**Picture 16:** Collision with a cow (Salles 2004).



**Picture 17:** Repairing at Chichina's house (Salles 2004).



**Picture 18:** Repairing the front wheel (Salles 2004).

Furthermore, the protagonists are frequently repairing the motorcycle (Pictures 17 and 18), searching for a mechanic (Picture 19) or being forced to push it (Picture 20) as a sort of awkward wheelbarrow. It becomes more and more unreliable to the point it is more of a hindrance than an asset, leading Ernesto to consider abandoning it and moving on foot (Picture 20). The last accident, caused by malfunctioning brakes and a herd of cows (Picture 16), results in a wrecked motorcycle that is considered irreparable. As a result, the two travelers are left without their means of transportation in Chile.





**Picture 19:** Searching for a mechanic. One of the mechanics is playing a *charango*<sup>50</sup> (Salles 2004).



**Picture 20:** Pushing *La Poderosa* (Salles 2004).

In retrospect, the initial sequence prepares the audience for such outcome through comical comments regarding the motorcycle. The first example, already mentioned, is Ernesto's description of the motorcycle in voice-over as defective and leaky. After that, in the goodbye sequence, Alberto tries to start the engine, but it does not work. While a frustrated Alberto tries a second time, there is a cheesy comment offscreen: "[b]uena excusa para ir caminando",<sup>51</sup> which foreshadows what will happen later on the narrative. After the engine starts, shot and reverse shot once again depict the bikers leaving and the group saying goodbye. Then, there is a cut to a medium long shot of the back of the motorcycle as it moves away (Picture 14) – now we can clearly see it is overloaded –, followed by a point-of-view shot which gives the audience the perspective of family and friends. The camera does not follow and, as the motorcycle approaches the corner of the street, an oblivious bus driver makes a dangerous turn almost running over the two adventurers. At the last moment, Alberto is able to swerve out of harm's way. The reverse shot shows the apprehension on the faces of the group members and their indignation at the bus driver, followed by shots of the motorcycle sputtering and spreading a cloud of smoke as it makes its way through the busy streets of Buenos Aires.

<sup>50</sup> A charango is a musical instrument popular in the Andes. It has five sets of double strings.

<sup>51</sup> Literally, "good excuse to walk" (Salles 2004, my translation).



**Picture 21:** Overloaded (Salles 2004). We can see the bus in the background.



**Picture 22:** Pampas (Salles 2004).



**Picture 23:** Patagonia (Salles 2004).



**Picture 24:** Frías Lake (Salles 2004)



**Picture 25:** Desert (Salles 2004).



**Picture 26:** Andes (Salles 2004).



**Picture 27:** The Amazon River  
(Salles 2004).



**Picture 28:** Chichina's *hacienda*  
(Salles 2004).

As we can see, it is not a good start. Alberto's grandiose explorer discourse and Ernesto's ambitious description of the plan are contrasted by the condition of the motorcycle – old, leaky and overloaded –. If the motorcycle initially brings status to the two travelers, it becomes increasingly a source of concern, since it causes injuries to the travelers, delays and "dies" in Chile, less than half the distance to be covered. In his diary, Ernesto (2003) wrote "[i]t was our last day as 'motorized bums'; the next stage seemed set to be more difficult, as 'bums without wheels'" (61). As a prop, it contrasts Alberto and Ernesto's expectations to the means they have at their disposal, possibly cuing the audience to have some reserve regarding the expected great adventure through a homogeneous continent. In addition, the literal fragmentation of the bike – it loses parts along the way – is the first of many fractures the film presents along the narrative.

Perhaps the most noticeable is the geographical fragmentation, perceivable in the different settings. For example, the protagonists cross the pampas, Patagonia, the lakes region on the border between Argentina and Chile, the Andes, the Atacama Desert and the Amazon River (Pictures 22-27). The diverseness of the biomes contrast with Alberto's expectations of finding a tropical paradise with unknown fruits. Furthermore, settings also introduce social fragmentation in terms of class. For example, Chichina, María del Carmen Ferreyra, is from a traditional and rich Cordoban oligarchical family. Her family's

house at Miramar, a coastal city famous for its beaches, looks like the colonial house of an *hacienda*<sup>52</sup> (Picture 28) and plays a metonymic function of representing (post-)colonial oligarchy, a major social, political and economical force in Argentina, and Latin America in general, to this day.

Throughout the sequence in Chichina's *hacienda*, Alberto and Ernesto are treated with a certain disdain, merely tolerated. For example, during a meal in the dining hall with family and friends, a custom of *hidalguía* in oligarchical families with nobility aspirations, Don Horacio, Chichina's father, asks Esteban to talk about his trip to Europe. The young man from an oligarchical background that goes to Europe to study is here embodied by Esteban, who mentions Cambridge and London, to which all the guests sigh, except Alberto and Ernesto. Alberto replies to Esteban's description of the trip with "*Qué privilegio!*",<sup>53</sup> which could also be interpreted literally as a veiled critique. When Chichina's mother comments Esteban is going to be a doctor soon, with the obvious intention of showing off a bit more, Ernesto asks Esteban if he is going to be a medical doctor. When Esteban says he is taking his doctorate in Law, Ernesto remarks to Alberto "*Ah! Leyes*", with a tone of cynical disappointment.

After dinner, the guests start dancing to the piano music in the spacious and well decorated dancing hall. The camera pans to the left, following Alberto and Chichina, who are dancing together. The reverse shot shows a timid Ernesto observing the pair and indicates the previous shot was actually his perspective. The camera then moves away from Ernesto and pans again to the left in search of Alberto and Chichina. Interestingly, there are other pairs dancing but Chichina and Alberto are by far the most confident and agile. Chichina's parents look reproachfully to the dancing partners.

Comical relief is offered when Alberto eyeballs the camera to look left. The camera, a point-of-view shot to be more specific, "looks"

<sup>52</sup> Haciendas are large rural private properties where monoculture is practiced. A single crop or meat is produced in large quantities to be exported. The land is used inefficiently and the whole process is based on cheap human labor of the campesinos, peasants who have little or no land at all.

<sup>53</sup> "What a privilege!" (Salles 2004, my translation).

left only to find Chichina's father looking angry and suspicious at the camera, which we know at this moment represents Ernesto's perspective. The reverse shot shows Ernesto's reaction. Then, Chichina wants to dance with Ernesto, who is depicted as someone with no dancing ability. The point-of-view shot reveals Ernesto struggling and Chichina laughing at him. Then, the camera leaves the pair and pans to the right after a good looking maid. The reverse shot reveals this is Alberto's perspective now, who is interested in the maid. After that, a cut to Chichina and Ernesto, who are discussing the possibility of escaping aunt Rosana's vigilance – she was assigned by the family to watch the couple to make sure nothing improper would happen –. Then, Ernesto looks offscreen and calls Chichina's attention. A point-of-view shot again, indicating their perspective, depicts Alberto and the maid dancing in the hallway. Then, a cut to aunt Rosana, who is now curious and looks at the hallway. Another point-of-view shot, now with Rosana's perspective, fortunately misses Alberto and the maid, showing an empty hallway.



**Picture 29:** Alberto and the maid having sex on the left. In the background, to the right, the tent (Salles 2004).



**Picture 30:** Two indigenous people and their blind cow.

The dancing sequence is a good example of an unusual alternation of point-of-view shots to indicate access to the perceptual subjectivity of different characters. But regarding the class issue, it indicates Alberto and Ernesto's presence causes discomfort and is merely tolerated by Chichina's family. This idea is reinforced by Ernesto

and Alberto having to sleep outside since the family did not offer them a room to spend the night (Picture 29). Furthermore, social inequality can also be perceived when Ernesto and Alberto are fixing their old motorcycle next to the very expensive family's car (Picture 17). Therefore, in my opinion, the film successfully represented social tensions between Chichina's family and the protagonists, tensions which are recognized by María del Carmen Ferreyra herself:

*"Su desparpajo en la vestimenta nos daba risa y, al mismo tiempo, un poco de vergüenza. No se sacaba de encima una camisa de nailon transparente que ya estaba tirando a gris, del uso. Se compraba los zapatos en los remates, de modo que sus pies nunca parecían iguales. Éramos tan sofisticados que Ernesto nos parecía un oprobio".<sup>54</sup>*

<sup>54</sup> "His lack of care for his clothes made us laugh and, at the same time, was reason for embarrassment. He frequently had on him a nylon transparent shirt that was already gray because of wear. He bought his shoes in auctions so that the left one and the right one did not match. We were so sophisticated that Ernesto was an embarrassment to us." (Ferreyra 2016, my translation).

After reading her interview, after the initial shock, I think it was probably best Ernesto and Chichina each followed their own paths. After all, they had very little in common. To illustrate my point a bit more, let me quote Guevara's father, who explains the issue about the shoes: "One afternoon his close friend Carlos Figueroa came to offer Ernesto a business deal. He brought with him a cutting from a newspaper that [...] mentioned a remote address where shoes would be auctioned. This was, according to Carlos, a great opportunity. Nobody would turn up at that auction and they would be able to buy several lots of shoes for very little money. It was not a bad idea. So off they went with the little money they had managed to put together between them. Of course the first lots went for an amount of money they did not have. Towards the end of the auction all there was left was a lot consisting of several bags of unmatched shoes. So they bought it for very little money. Our house in Aráoz Street became a shoe shop. The shoes had to be classified and paired off. Very few shoes had a matching one. Some of them could be paired off because the differences were minimal, but there were many that remained unmatched. Carlos and Ernesto left with their merchandise. As they sold the shoes for very little, they soon managed to get rid of those pairs that were a near-match. But now the real difficulty began. They were left with single shoes that bore no resemblance to



**Picture 31:** *El mate* (Salles 2004).



**Picture 32:** Seafood market  
(Salles 2004).



**Picture 33:** The Argentine accent  
(Salles 2004).



**Picture 34:** Reasons for traveling  
(Salles 2004).

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each other. But they were not disheartened. I cannot remember which of the two had the idea, but they approached a man who lived round the corner who had lost his left leg and offered him a single right-foot shoe. He was delighted to buy it. So off they went to find other men who had lost a leg. They managed to place most of the shoes. The remaining ones, which were totally different in color and shape, were worn by Ernesto." (Ernesto Guevara Lynch 2008, 210, my emphasis).





**Picture 35:** Two Quechua women in Cuzco (Salles 2004).



**Picture 36:** On the Amazon River (Salles 2004).

Besides the types of fractures discussed so far – the motorcycle's, geographical and class fragmentation – there are also instances of cultural and linguistic contact. According to Mary Louise Pratt (1992), contact zones are "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (4). In *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004), instead of a European ethnographer recording his impressions of the land and their inhabitants, we have two Argentine travelers in contact with travelers, dwellers, their cultures, regional variations of Spanish and different languages. As a result, there is interaction in a cultural and linguistic level.



**Picture 37:** The Inca Sanctuary



**Picture 38:** The Colonial Capital



For example, right after they crash with a cow, the protagonists and the mangled motorcycle are picked up by a small truck. The other hitchhikers are a young indigenous man, his father, and their cow (Picture 30). Father and son are speaking in their native language and the audience, as Ernesto and Alberto, are unable to understand the conversation. It is unclear if the two indigenous men are talking about Ernesto and Alberto. We, as audience, do not know what people<sup>55</sup> they belong to or the language they speak, and the movie presents no subtitles at this particular moment. As a result, the audience experiences a feeling of estrangement, a linguistic barrier. Although we are not dealing with a novel but with a film, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of polyglossia seems appropriate since it corresponds to the multiplicity of languages and their interaction (51, 431). The same issue is also present in the Cuzco sequence, when Alberto and Ernesto talk with a group of indigenous women. One of them speaks only Quechua since she had to work from an early age and was unable to go to school. Hence, she is only able to communicate with the Argentine travelers through another woman, who speaks both Quechua and Spanish (Picture 35). Both sequences present a communication breakdown or barrier between different languages – *Mapudungun* and Spanish, Quechua and Spanish – that entangle cultural differences as well, a topic we will comment further on.

Other sequences present instances of what Bakhtin (1981) calls heteroglossia, which is related to the internal differentiation, the stratification of a language (67). For example, in the sequence at the food market at Temuco (Picture 32), Ernesto asks a lady about different types of seafood that probably look different to him. Ernesto points to one product and asks what that is and the lady replies it is *maltón*. Ernesto seems not to recognize it and asks "¿*Maltón*?". She then replies it is called "*chorro maltón*", a type of shellfish. In this first question, Ernesto probably meant not literally "what is this?" but "what type of seafood is this?"; the answer would allow him to compare this new variety of seafood to his prior knowledge. Instead, the lady replied to the

<sup>55</sup> In his diary, the location is indicated by Ernesto as near Malleco (2003, 61), which is located between Temuco and Los Ángeles, in Chile, in the Mapuche region. So, it is possible the two men are Mapuche speaking in their native language, *mapudungun*.

ambiguous question literally, giving the popular and regional name instead of explaining it is a type of *marisco* – shellfish. After that he asks in a confirmation tone if the *almejas* – clams – are regular ones. The lady then answers that "*almeja o taca es lo mismo*"<sup>56</sup>. In the second question, Ernesto and the lady were able to better communicate in comparison with the first attempt. Besides the regional variation of lexicon, Ernesto's feeling of estrangement may also reveal differences between the Chilean and the Argentine cuisines since beef and chicken meat are more consumed in Argentina than seafood.

Similarly, in the boat trip on the Amazon river (Picture 36), Luz tells Alberto she saw one *bufeo* in the river. Alberto does not recognize the name and she explains *bufeo* – porpoise in English or *boto* in Portuguese – is a type of *delfín* – dolphin. Luz then tells an anecdote of indigenous men who have sex with the *bufeos*, which reveals cultural tensions between her lifestyle and of the native riparian inhabitants. Another example of linguistic fragmentation is presented when the two Chilean sisters recognize the two travelers as Argentine because of their accent and the use of the interjection *che* (Picture 33). The others' perception of their nationality is used by the two travelers to get food. When the two sisters invite the travelers for a bottle of wine to celebrate the one year anniversary of their journey – they were in fact on the road for only four months – Ernesto acts troubled and refuses the drink. Alberto then tells the curious sisters about an old custom they have in Argentina: one cannot drink with empty stomachs. Obviously, the custom is false, but the sisters do not know about it.

Likewise, in other sequences of the film, linguistic fractures also reveal cultural fragmentation. For instance, in the already mentioned sequence with the two *Mapuche* men and their cow (Picture 30), Ernesto tries to cross the linguistic barrier by starting a conversation with the young man in Spanish. The young man speaks Spanish but seems not to be very interested in talking to Ernesto. And when Ernesto calls attention to the cow, which is going blind, the young man shrugs his shoulders and replies "[p]or la mierda que va a ver..."<sup>57</sup>. For the young medicine student from Buenos Aires, the cow's failing vision is a

<sup>56</sup> "Clam or taca is the same" (Salles 2004, my translation).

<sup>57</sup> "With the shit she sees" (Salles 2004, my translation).

problem that must be treated. But for the poor native peasants, the cow going blind is nothing extraordinary, it is just one more unfortunate thing bestowed on them.

Other instances of cultural fragmentation presented by the film are not necessarily introduced by linguistic differentiation. For example, in the Temuco food market sequence, after Ernesto and Alberto finish their meal and before Ernesto explores the seafood stalls, the shopkeeper offers Ernesto *mate*. Curiously, Ernesto at first does not recognize it and asks what it is. The shopkeeper explains it is mate and that it is bitter, without sugar. Ernesto's initial estrangement and the shopkeeper's explanation reveals the different ways mate is served. In Argentina, the *yerba mate* leaves may or may not be mixed with other herbs or sugar, and the drink is served in a calabash gourd with a metal straw, a *bombilla*. In Temuco, however, the shopkeeper serves the herb pure in a metal mug and with a wooden straw. Another example of cultural fragmentation is presented in the sequence where the two travelers and their young guide talk with a group of native women in Cuzco (Picture 35). The two students from a middle-class urban environment, talk with the native women that come from a rural background and dedicate themselves to handcrafting. The women present the travelers with coca leaves and teach them the proper way of consuming. Coca leaves are a type of stimulant that help the native peoples of the Andes to hike great distances, also reducing hunger and tiredness. More than that, the leaves are part of larger ritual offerings to the mountains and nature spirits – *apus* – the sun – *Inti* – or the earth – *Pachamama*.

Another interesting example of cultural fragmentation is the transition between Machu Pichu and Lima. After a sequence depicting Alberto and Ernesto's visit to the Machu Pichu ruins where they think, write and talk about the Inca empire, a cut abruptly transitions from the beautiful ruins of the Inca sanctuary (Picture 37) to the ugliness of the former colonial capital, Lima (Picture 38). Reinforcing the sense of clash between cultures, Ernesto asks in voice-over: "*¿Cómo se explica que una civilización capaz de construir esto sea arrasada para construir esto?*".<sup>58</sup> Yet another example of contact between different

<sup>58</sup> "How can we explain that a civilization capable of building this was destroyed to build this instead?" (Salles 2004, my translation).

cultures is Ernesto confusing mambo with tango towards the end of the film. During Ernesto's birthday party at the leper colony, Alberto plays a trick on his friend by saying a tango Ernesto used to dance with Chichina is now playing, when in fact it was a mambo. Unable to recognize the difference because of his lack of musical sensibility, Ernesto attempts to dance a tango to the sound of mambo and everybody laughs. In summary, all the instances of fragmentation mentioned so far – geographical, economic, linguistic and cultural – disrupt the expectation for adventure in a homogeneous continent and allow instead contact and interaction between the culture of the travelers and the cultures of those they meet along the way. Furthermore, instead of a single major conflict to be overcome, as the script readers working for the big US studios probably expected, the journey presents a multitude of small problems.

In fact, the movie's conflict is internal, not external (Salles 2004b, 5). The journey through Latin America is both a catalyst and a metaphor for the internal journey of the characters, especially of Ernesto. In the beginning of the film, Ernesto is represented as an introvert, inexperienced, ordinary medicine student that lacks *savoir faire*. But by the end, Ernesto has become experienced, humane, confident to the point of being bold, charismatic. In order to convey such diverse array of emotions, Salles (2004b, 6) decided to cast Gael García Bernal in 2001 because of his visceral and mature interpretation in *Amores Perros* (Alejandro González Iñárritu 2000).

Besides his capacity to explore emotions in depth, he was also in his twenties at the time of the casting, which was important for playing young Ernesto. In fact, Bernal pointed out he was twenty four during the shooting of the film, the same age of Ernesto Guevara when traveling with his friend Alberto (Bernal 2004, *Radar*). In addition, Bernal's embodiment – interpretation – of Ernesto Guevara actualizes the mythical frozen image with new vitality and signification. Indeed, it represents a crossing between the "sexy, and smart global Latin American, and of the rough, unpolished, wildly commanding revolutionary" (Venegas 2015, 124). Another reason for selecting Bernal, although Salles does not mention it, is that Bernal had played Che Guevara in David Atwood's *Fidel* (2002). Although his interpretation of Comandante Guevara is convincing, the full potential of his internal interpretation was not explored in Atwood's film. In other

words, Che is a flat character in Atwood's film that only aids the development of the narrative but is not himself fully developed.

Rodrigo de La Serna was chosen to play Alberto Granado after a screen test. Salles saw in his interpretation "the humanity that you had in Italian cinema of the [19]60s" (2004b, 6). Indeed, De La Serna's supporting role as Alberto is fundamental for the development of the internal journey of Ernesto not only because of the rapport with Bernal, but also because Alberto acts as a sort of mentor to Ernesto and functions as an affective filter. Normally in biopics, the function of serving as an emotion filter for the audience to perceive the impact of events narrated falls upon the homodiegetic narrator, also known as character-narrator, who usually also narrates in voice-over. The protagonist, homodiegetic narrator, voice-over narrator and affective filter is generally the main historical figure or some sort of confidant or close associate. Either way, it is unusual to have more than one character as affective filter. In *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004), Ernesto is the most important character, the homodiegetic narrator, voice-over narrator and one of the two affective filters, with Alberto also offering insight on how events are to be perceived and felt. Furthermore, besides Alberto and Ernesto's role in narration, the study of the two characters' representations also offers an interesting interplay.



**Picture 39:** Old man dozing off (Salles 2004).



**Picture 40:** Alberto's critique (Salles 2004).



**Picture 41:** Gazing, reading and writing (Salles 2004).



**Picture 42:** Using the newspaper article (Salles 2004).

Throughout the film Alberto is represented as flamboyant, witty and tactful, acting as a mentor for Ernesto. Although De La Serna is only two years older than Bernal, in the film Alberto is twenty nine

while Ernesto is twenty three. Furthermore, if Alberto is a more outward character, Ernesto is represented as a more inward one: he is frequently reading, writing, gazing (Picture 41), exploring his inner grasp of the outer world. In the café sequence at the beginning of the film, a more experienced Alberto mentors the less experienced Ernesto, who is reluctant to embark on the journey. To motivate Ernesto, Alberto points to an old man dozing off while reading a newspaper (Picture 39) and states "*Vos no querés terminar tu vida así, Fuser*".<sup>59</sup> Here we have dwelling contrasted to traveling, a safe and comfortable life opposed to the challenges of the journey. Beyond that, the older man stands for the opposite of what youth represents. According to Aristotle, older men are negative, lethargic, suspicious and little minded, they desire only the necessities of life (1926, 253).

Because of the motorcycle's unreliability and the shortage in money, the travelers increasingly rely on other people's solidarity for transport, shelter and food. Alberto, with his charming gab is usually able to tip the sympathies towards the travelers. Ernesto, however, is represented as bluntly honest. In western Argentina, after Alberto tries to convince a potential host of the scientific importance of their journey, the man asks Alberto and Ernesto to have a look at a swelling he has on his neck. Ernesto says it is a tumor, which obviously alarms the host, while Alberto tries to convince the man it is only a cyst. The man is angry at discovering he has a potential life threatening condition and that there is nothing the two travelers can do for him, so he send the travelers away to a nearby lake instead of housing them. Afterwards, when they reach Chile, Alberto critiques Ernesto, saying he is too honest (Picture 40). Ernesto listens silently, has an idea and goes in the local newspaper building, *El Diario Austral*, without verbalizing what is on his mind. Later, when the newspaper publishes a farfetched article about the two scientists, we finally learn it was a trick devised by Ernesto to help gain sympathy (Picture 42). From this moment on, although he remains frank, he develops more savoir fare in dealing with people.

In the Atacama Desert, in Chile, the two Argentine travelers meet a couple searching for work. This encounter is a turning point in

<sup>59</sup> "You do not want to end your life like that, Fuser" (Salles 2004, my translation).

the narrative since it functions as a catalyst for Ernesto's internal transformation and for the resulting heroic rise. The sequence starts with an extreme long shot of the desert landscape with the Andes Mountains in the back. The sun is setting and it will soon be dark. The road itself is not visible, but we watch as a truck drives past two human figures, probably Ernesto and Alberto, refusing them a lift. When the truck moves offscreen, we notice there are two other shadows moving in the opposite direction. As they approach, we hear in voice-over Ernesto greeting the couple and introducing himself. Then, the camera cuts to a fire crackling and a kettle next to it, followed by another cut to a medium close-up shot of Alberto taking his precious map and handing it to someone else offscreen. The reverse shot, also a medium close-up, reveals a man and a woman looking at the map. After that, the camera cuts to a medium close-up of Ernesto watching the couple. The pauses between the lines of the characters, the absence of music – besides the voices, the only other sounds are the fire crackling and crickets chirping –, and the darkness enveloping the characters create tension. The camera then returns to the couple as the man indicates on the map their place of origin and says they did not have much, only a few dry lands. The woman adds the lands were from the man's grandfather.

Then, the man says "*Eran nuestras hasta que llegó el terrateniente y nos sacó a patadas*" and the woman comments ironically "*Y a eso le llaman progreso*".<sup>60</sup> But there is no ironical grim or laughter since they seem to be far beyond the point of laughing at their problems. The camera cuts to Ernesto to show his reaction and then cuts back to the couple, who continue to describe their ordeal. Deprived of their land, they had to leave their son with family members in order to look for work and escape González Videla's<sup>61</sup> repression. The camera cuts to a puzzled Alberto, who asks why they were persecuted. The camera cuts back to the couple: the man is staring at the fire and the

<sup>60</sup> "They were our lands until a terrateniente – someone who owns a lot of land – expelled us by force" and she says "And they call that progress" (Salles 2004, my translation).

<sup>61</sup> Gabriel González Videla was elected President of Chile in 1946 supported by different groups under a populist program. However, suffering pressure from the United States, he enacted the Ley de Defensa Permanente de la Democracia, which ironically restricted political freedoms and banned the Chilean Communist Party.



woman looks to the right, at Alberto, before explaining they are communists.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, when the woman is pronouncing the word communists, the camera cuts briefly to Ernesto before returning to the man, who explains they are traveling to the mine, where they plan to seek work. He says: "*Parece que son tan peligrosas que ni si fijan de qué partido es uno*".<sup>63</sup> The camera immediately cuts to Alberto, who looks down and to the right of the screen, and then it cuts to Ernesto, who looks to the left, as if both characters were looking at each other in awe.

Then there is an interesting example of culture shock as the woman asks if Ernesto and Alberto are also looking for work. Ernesto replies they are not and the woman asks "*Entonces, ¿por qué viajan?*" (Picture 34). Alberto, unsure what to say, looks at Ernesto, who reluctantly answers "*Viajamos por viajar*".<sup>64</sup> Here we have the contact between those that are compelled to travel, because of land conflicts and political repression, and those that choose to travel because they like it. Even though Alberto and Ernesto do not have their motorcycle anymore and rely on other people's solidarity to get by, their harsh journey becomes a privilege compared to the couple's, who have been deprived of everything besides the comfort of each other's company. The tension reaches its climax as we wait for the couple's reaction to Ernesto's honest answer.

Fortunately, the tension is resolved as the couple interprets Alberto and Ernesto's way of traveling as a blessing. Clearly touched, Ernesto removes the blanket which was wrapped around his body and hands it to the couple, and Alberto offers them a hot drink, *un mate*. The initial tension is dissolved and the symbolism of the sequence is resignified. The glow of the firelight on each one's faces, the contrast between the cold darkness beyond and the orange warmth of the fire, the medium close-ups, followed by an establishing shot (Picture 43), all

<sup>62</sup> A communist or socialist does not have to commit any "crime" to be persecuted in Latin America, especially during right-wing governments and dictatorships: the mere existence of a communist is seen as a capital offense.

<sup>63</sup> "We heard they are so dangerous they do not care what party one belongs to" (Salles 2004, my translation).

<sup>64</sup> "So, why do you travel?" and "We travel for travelling" (Salles 2004, my translation).

help create a sense of companionship, which is reinforced by Ernesto's voice-over narration:

*"Esos ojos tenían una expresión oscura y trágica. Nos contaron de unos compañeros que desaparecieron en circunstancias misteriosas y que, al parecer, terminaron en alguna parte del fondo del mar. Esa fue una de las noches más frías de mi vida. Pero conocerlos me hizo sentir más cerca de la especie humana, extraña, tan extraña para mí".<sup>65</sup>*

As we can perceive in the voice-over above and in the way the tension is resolved, social and cultural differences in this film are not cause for repulsion, but for attraction. Ernesto, the young medicine student and inhabitant of Buenos Aires, is not disgusted by the two Chilean communist peasants forced into becoming migrant workers. On the contrary, he is fascinated by the couple, which assumes a metonymical capacity: "[t]he couple, numb with cold, huddling against each other in the desert night, were a living representation of the proletariat in any part of the world" (Guevara 2003, 70). Furthermore, the juxtapositions of light and darkness, of cold and warmth, of the desert night and the characters huddled around the fire, help create the feeling of tacit cooperation. The juxtaposition of light and darkness is also perceptible in the man's eyes as he inclines his body over the fire and raises his eyes, staring at the camera in a point-of-view shot (Picture 44). Although the camera remains stationery in this shot, the fact that the actor moved towards it creates a slight zoom effect, which reinforces the sense of intimacy. The character's dark eyes reflect the flames of the fire as if a fire were burning inside him. As he hands something – probably *el mate* – to the camera – probably representing Ernesto's perspective –, we could interpret he is indeed passing on something much more symbolic to Ernesto: the torch of rebellion. The reference to the strangeness of humanity and the symbolism of the fire, especially in

<sup>65</sup> "Those eyes had a dark and tragic color. They told us about militants that disappeared in mysterious circumstances and probably ended at the bottom of the sea. That was one of the coldest nights of my life, but to meet them made me feel closer to the human kind, so strange to me" (Salles 2004, my translation).

a sequence that suggests rebellion in face of injustice, might be interpreted as an allusion to the Byronic Prometheus, which we discussed in chapter one.



**Picture 43:** Companionship (Salles 2004).



**Picture 44:** The fire (Salles 2004).



**Picture 45:** The couple – indicated by the arrows – is separated (Salles 2004).



**Picture 46:** Perception of change (Salles 2004).

The next morning, the couple waits in the scorching sun with other migrant workers until a foreman handpicks a few "lucky" ones who will have work, while the others must resume their search. Alberto and Ernesto are nearby and are surprised to notice the foreman separated the couple (Picture 45). The only comfort the couple had – each other's company – has just been taken from them. Worse, there is no time for a proper goodbye and much is left unsaid – how they will communicate, where she will go, where/when/how/if they will be reunited –. After

that, Ernesto and the foreman have an altercation, with the former taking the workers' side and the latter complaining about invasion of private property. The foreman says the territory belongs to the Anaconda Mining Company, which was a United States mining company that owned the Chuquicamata copper mine until the nationalization of the copper mines by Salvador Allende in 1971. Furthermore, the name anaconda gives the mine, and the mining interests behind the enterprise, a monstrous look. As a monster, the mine swallows the miners and constricts the richness out of the country.

Ordered to leave and unable to do anything for the workers, Ernesto commits a small act of rebellion. He takes a rock, throws it at the side of the truck, and curses the foreman. Interestingly, Ernesto is framed at a slightly low angle. After, the camera cuts to an extreme long shot of a group of people walking over a mountain range. The reverse shot frames Ernesto, again in a low angle, looking through the truck's window (Picture 46). Then, the camera cuts back to the extreme long of shot of the people – now we know this is in fact Ernesto's perspective – and we hear in voice-over "*Al salir de la mina, sentimos que la realidad empezaba a cambiar. ¿O éramos nosotros?*".<sup>66</sup> The group watched by Ernesto is probably formed by the workers not selected in the previous sequence, including the woman he met the previous night. The point-of-view shot follows the migrant workers until they disappear on a road curve, and the voice-over above indicates the night on the desert changed Ernesto.

There are other encounters that reinforce this internal movement, such as with the group of women in Cuzco (Picture 35) and with an indigenous peasant also expelled from the land he inhabited. But more important is a voice-over in the Machu Pichu sequence, which offers the audience insight into Ernesto's thoughts. After hiking up the trail, visiting the historical sight and taking pictures, Alberto and Ernesto are resting in the ruins. While writing on his diary, we hear in voice-over: "*Los incas tenían un alto conocimiento en astronomía, medicina, matemática, entre otras cosas. Pero los invasores españoles tenían la*

<sup>66</sup> "When we left the mine, we felt as if the reality was beginning to change. Or were we changing instead?" (Salles 2004, my translation).

*pólvora. ¿Cómo sería América hoy si las cosas hubieran sido diferentes?"*<sup>67</sup>

This is a very appropriate question to be asked, especially in the ruins of Machu Pichu. Ernesto's question makes overt the violence behind the official history. Interestingly, there are references to the use of force by the State, landowners and the mining company in the film, representing the contemporary reverberations of colonialism. In addition, the question challenges the Eurocentric representation of the native peoples as inferior, illiterate and uncultured. Bernal, for example, recognized visiting Cuzco for the film led him to deconstruct the notion of economic development and its association to Spanish as opposed to Quechua (2004, *Radar*, 1).

Another sequence politically meaningful is the one when Ernesto and Alberto are reading the books borrowed from Doctor Hugo Pesce<sup>68</sup> Pescetto's library. The sequence starts with the camera panning to the left and zooming in Ernesto. The beautiful soundtrack composed by Gustavo Santaolalla begins with melodic fingerpicking in an acoustic guitar. In voice-over, Doctor Pesce's voice presents a summary of Mariátegui's ideas:

*"Mariátegui habla fundamentalmente sobre el potencial revolucionario de los indígenas y campesinos de América Latina. Dice que el problema del indio es el problema de la tierra y que la revolución no será calco ni copia, sino creación heroica de nuestro pueblo".*<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> "The Incas had an advanced knowledge of astronomy, medicine, mathematics, among other things. But the Spanish invaders had the gunpowder. What would America be like today if things had been different?" (Salles 2004, my translation).

<sup>68</sup> Hugo Pesce Pescetto was a Peruvian doctor who dedicated his life to studying and treating leper. He and José Carlos Mariátegui found the Peruvian Socialist Party in 1928.

<sup>69</sup> "Mariátegui basically talks about the revolutionary potential of the indigenous peoples and of the peasants in Latin America. He says the indigenous issue is in reality a land issue and that the revolution will not be a

Here we have a Latin-American talking about Latin America, once again a critique of Eurocentric models and the necessity of revolutionary methods that reflect the continent's reality.

Immediately after *nuestro pueblo*, the camera cuts to the first cinemagraph<sup>70</sup> in the film (Picture 48) as we hear *el rasgueo* of the acoustic guitar. It is a medium long shot of the two indigenous men, father and son, Ernesto tried to engage in conversation in the back of a truck. The black and white contrasts with the color of the previous sequences and creates a nostalgic effect, as if Ernesto were remembering of the indigenous people and peasants he met along the way as he reads Mariátegui's book. It is not a still image but a moving picture in which the human figures are still, as if waiting for a photography to be taken, or as if inhabiting the realm of one's memory.



**Picture 47:** Ernesto and Alberto reading (Salles 2004).



**Picture 48:** First cinemagraph (Salles 2004).

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mere copy, but it will be a heroic creation of our people" (Salles 2004, my translation).

<sup>70</sup> Cinemagraph is a term coined by visual artist Kevin Burg and fashion photographer Jamie Beck (2011). It is also known as animated photography. Instead of a still photo, several stills are put together by means of image editing software in order to create a self-repeating sequence. Besides *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004), the same technique has been used in *Fidel* (Atwood 2002) and in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Chris Columbus 2001).



**Picture 49:** Second cinemagraph (Salles 2004).



**Picture 50:** Third cinemagraph (Salles 2004).



**Picture 51:** Fourth cinemagraph (Salles 2004).



**Picture 52:** Ernesto reading Mariátegui's book (Salles 2004).

Like in the introductory sequence, the music establishes the rhythm of this sequence. On the second *rasgueo*, the camera cuts back to Ernesto reading in the hospital bed. Alberto is already offscreen and the camera continues to pan to the left and zoom in. Then, the camera cuts to the second cinemagraph and we see the migrant workers that were waiting near the Chuquicamata mine (Picture 49), followed by the third cinemagraph of an old woman on the street (Picture 50). The camera cuts back to Ernesto reading Mariátegui's book, the title of which is now visible, *Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de La Realidad Peruana*.<sup>71</sup> The camera is still panning and zooming. Then, there is a cut to the fourth cinemagraph of a family on the way to Cuzco. After

<sup>71</sup> Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality (Mariátegui 1971).

that, we return to Ernesto reading (Picture 52), this time the camera is stationary, and Pesce's voice-over resumes: "*Somos muy pocos para dividirnos*", dice. *'Todo nos une, nada nos separa'*".

The idea that everything unites us and nothing separates us is very powerful, but it is also an overstatement. The film itself provides the audience with many examples of geographic, cultural and linguistic fragmentation, as we have discussed in this chapter. Nonetheless, the sequence presents a critique of Eurocentric models of revolution and establishes the necessity for the native peoples of Latin America to be the subjects of the revolutionary experiences, rather than objects or spectators. Hence, this sequence carries the potential for a postcolonial interpretation.

Furthermore, the aforementioned sequence represents insight into Ernesto's mental subjectivity, if we interpret these four cinemagraphs as flashbacks. Regarding the narrative, the sequence reinforces the turning point in the desert and Ernesto's question in the Machu Pichu ruins. If in the beginning of the film Ernesto starts as a common young man – superior neither to nature nor to others – at this point he has definitely taken the side of the oppressed and his political aspirations are starting to germinate. By the end of the film, especially in Ernesto's birthday speech and in the swim crossing of the Amazon river, the character development is completed and Ernesto becomes a young, charismatic and confident leader, although not the guerrilla revolutionary one day he would become.

The sequence at *San Pablo* leper colony, therefore, is quite significant since it offers many opportunities for Ernesto to prove himself as a medic and as a human being. A distinguishable characteristic is Ernesto's bedside manner and his rapport with patients. From the outset, he and Alberto risk infuriating Mother Superior by refusing to wear gloves when visiting the patients at the South bank of the river. Papá Carlito, the leader of the patients played by Peruvian musician Pedro Carlos "Caitro" Soto de La Colina, is shocked by Ernesto's wanting to shake hands without gloves (Picture 53). With Doctor Bresciani's acquiescence, patient and doctor shake hands without gloves (Picture 54).





**Picture 53:** Papá Carlito's reaction (Salles 2004).



**Picture 54:** Shaking hands without gloves (Salles 2004).



**Picture 55:** Bedside manner (Salles 2004).



**Picture 56:** Vigil at Silvia's bedside (Salles 2004).

After, Ernesto volunteers to talk to Silvia, a leper patient who refuses to undergo surgery. Instead of presenting himself as a doctor and talking about the risks for her health, he presents his most vulnerable characteristic, asthma, and has a patient to patient conversation. She hints at the probable reasons for her refusal to do the surgery by saying "*Esta vida es un calvario*" (Picture 55) – notice the interesting composition with Ernesto and Silvia in the same shot. Ernesto agrees

with her by saying "*Sí, es bastante jodida. Hay que luchar por cada bocanada de aire y mandar la muerte al carajo*".<sup>72</sup>

Ernesto is able to convince Silvia and he helps doctor Bresciani during surgery. After the procedure, he keeps a vigil at her bedside (Picture 56). Other instances of Alberto and Ernesto's humanity are treating an injury on Papá Carlito's foot (Picture 57), helping to build a patient's house (Picture 58), playing music with the patients, and playing soccer with staff and patients (Picture 60).



**Picture 57:** Treating Papá Carlito (Salles 2004).



**Picture 58:** Helping to build (Salles 2004).



**Picture 59:** Playing music (Salles 2004).



**Picture 60:** Playing soccer (Salles 2004).

<sup>72</sup> Silvia says "This life is a calvary" and Ernesto replies "Yes, it is pretty fucked up. One has to fight for every breath and tell death to fuck itself" (Salles 2004, my translation).

After such instances of humanity, Bresciani, the hospital and lab staff, and the nuns, throw a birthday party for Ernesto. At the end of the birthday party sequence, Ernesto delivers an impromptu speech that is also a form of goodbye, since Alberto and Ernesto are leaving the following day. After thanking for the affection and hospitality, he says

*"Creemos, [...] que la división de América en nacionalidades inciertas e ilusorias es completamente ficticia. Constituimos una sola raza mestiza desde México hasta el Estrecho de Magallanes. Así que, tratando de librarme de cualquier carga de provincialismo, brindo por Perú. Y por América unida".*<sup>73</sup>

There are two significant elements in this excerpt: challenging the national borders and the reference to the mestizo race. The first, in my opinion, does not mean ignoring national differences. After all, the film, and the birthday sequence itself, presents many examples of geographical, cultural and linguistic fragmentation. By referring to the continent's division into unstable and illusory nations, Ernesto acknowledges their existence but questions their historical origins and their political signification. In other words, the contemporary division into national states and the configuration of borders in Latin America cannot be traced back to the native peoples, but are the result of colonialism, on one hand, and the wars of independence, on the other. In addition, Florestan Fernandes (2015) points out

*"the independence belonged to the privileged strata and the national state was born before the nation [...], that is, as a way to organize the political voice of the powerful and to continue the production and exportation structures previously formed" (103, my translation).*

<sup>73</sup> In his diary, Guevara wrote "we believe, and after this journey more firmly than ever, that the division of America into unstable and illusory nations is completely fictional. We constitute a single mestizo race, which from Mexico to the Magellan Straits bears notable ethnographical similarities. And so, in an attempt to rid myself of the weight of small-minded provincialism, I propose a toast to Peru and to a United Latin America" (132).

In other words, national independence did not entangle autonomous development and national bourgeois revolutions, but meant only that Latin America moved away from the Spanish Empire influence towards the influence of the United Kingdom and the United States.

The second element I would like to highlight in the speech is the reference to *la raza*. By comparing the movie transcript to Guevara's diary (footnote 36), we can see the former refers to "one mestizo race" while the latter is even more explicit by referring to "a single mestizo race, which [...] bears notable ethnographical similarities". Although the idea of having only one mestizo race could perhaps be criticized as romantic and reductionist, because of the racial diversity found in Latin America, Ernesto's position can be interpreted as a reference to the first nations' heritage and as a political statement for unity. In fact, Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) discusses the political importance of the poem "I am Joaquín" and of the founding of *La Raza Unida* party in enabling a collective self-recognition as one people (85). In addition, Anzaldúa writes:

Now that we had a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together – who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become. Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place. In the meantime, *tenemos que hacer lucha* (85).

Although Ernesto is referring to Latin Americans in general and Anzaldúa is talking about Chicanos in particular, there are interesting similarities: the reference to native ancestry, the recognition of fragmentation and the necessity for political struggle. The inner integration, proposed by Anzaldúa, and the continent's unification, suggested by Ernesto in his speech, show a romantic perspective of Latin America, especially if we interpret them as going back in time to an unspoiled essence. However, I understand them as political proposals of cooperation in the struggle to overcome postcoloniality and all forms of dependence it entangles – including racial prejudices of the whites and mestizos towards the indigenous populations, an issue ignored by

the film –. If we add such interpretation to the significance of previous sequences of the film – challenging the Eurocentric history in the Machu Pichu sequence; the critique of Eurocentric models of revolution and the necessity for the native peoples to be the subjects of the revolutionary experiences, in the Mariátegui sequence – we have the potential for a postcolonial "reading" of the film.

Such reading is reinforced by the symbolism of the river crossing from the North margin – which has the hospital, lab, the housing quarters for staff and nuns, plus electrical power – to the South margin – which has the leper patients' huts and crops. In the film, after the birthday party speech and toast, Ernesto goes outside and looks at the faint lights on the South margin of the Amazon, where the patients reside (Picture 62). Once again we have the camera in a low angle to reinforce the rise of the hero. Actually, this is not the first time Ernesto sees the river for what it is, a barrier between the healthy and the infected. From the house they occupy at the southernmost part of the North margin, Ernesto interrupts his reading and gazes at the river (Picture 61). But on his birthday, Ernesto decides the southernmost tip of the North is not enough, he wants to cross the river to be with the patients in the South.



**Picture 61:** River (in)sight (Salles 2004).



**Picture 62:** Looking at the South (Salles 2004).

When Alberto follows Ernesto outside and asks if everything is alright, Ernesto reveals his intention of crossing the river swimming to celebrate his birthday on the other side. Alberto tries to convince him otherwise, but Ernesto has made his mind. Ernesto starts to swim and

Alberto starts to shout at him to go back. Drawn by Alberto's outcry, Doctor Bresciani comes outside and soon joins Alberto in shouting at Ernesto to go back. Soon, others join the chorus on the North margin. We then have a strange shouting contest between the representatives of the two margins, the northerners dissuading (Picture 63) and the southerners encouraging Ernesto (Picture 64).



**Picture 63:** North margin (Salles 2004).



**Picture 64:** South margin (Salles 2004).



**Picture 65:** Ernesto swimming (Salles 2004).



**Picture 66:** Reaching the South (Salles 2004).

The shots of the two margins are alternated with shots of Ernesto swimming (Picture 65). There is no music and what sets the rhythm for the sequence is Ernesto's asthmatic wheezing, desperately trying to get air in his lungs as he swims southward. We can also hear muffled sounds coming from the two margins, an example of Ernesto's perception subjectivity. And like the sequence in the desert night, the

darkness of the sky above and of the murky waters below threaten to swallow the hero. Many things could go wrong – an asthma attack, cramps, drowning, being attacked by a hidden predator. Nonetheless, the hero persists in his feat of bravery and reaches the South margin to be helped and cheered by all the community (Picture 66).

Besides a testament to Salles's adaptation abilities in interweaving existing events – the river crossing and the birthday party were recorded in Guevara's diary but with different contexts and timing – into new orders for dramatic effect, and the last feat of bravery in Ernesto's rite of passage, the river crossing has also postcolonial potential because of its symbolism of North versus South. The North margin with all its infrastructure and specialized staff comes to represent at the same time the point of departure in the narrative – Buenos Aires – and, more importantly, Europe and the United States. The South Margin with its primitive infrastructure, inhabited by lepers rejected by their families, stands for the former colonies that are now dependent on capitalist countries.

With the river crossing, the development of Ernesto as a character is complete: from an introvert, inexperienced, ordinary medicine student to an experienced, humane, confident and charismatic leader. In other words, an ordinary man has risen to become the hero of the oppressed. And after crossing Colombia and reaching Venezuela, we have the final sequence of the film, at the airport. Alberto is to remain in Venezuela because of a work opportunity and Ernesto is going to Miami. The film does not depict Ernesto's trip in the United States, his return to Argentina or the new journey through Latin America between 1953 and 1956. Instead, the narrative ends with the separation of the two friends. But the film does cue the audience for the possible consequences of Ernesto's internal journey through the characters' dialogue. When Alberto invites Ernesto to work with him in Venezuela, Ernesto replies that their journey has caused something, which he needs to think about for a long time. Finally, Alberto gives his precious map to Ernesto as symbolic gesture of passing the torch of traveling.

As the Douglas DC-3 door is closed and the airplane takes off, the camera pans to the left following the plane ascending towards the sun, with the back of Alberto framed against the orange sky. This interesting sequence presents literally the rise of the hero, insinuating

the future mythological status Ernesto will achieve as Che Guevara. But more importantly, we have a close-up of De La Serna as Alberto watching the plane fly away while Ernesto in voice-over repeats the same warning presented at the beginning of the film, an adaptation of Guevara's preface, creating a type of metanarrative frame for the story:

No és este el relato de hazañas impresionantes. Es un trozo de dos vidas tomadas en un momento en que cursaron juntas un determinado trecho con identidad de aspiraciones y conjunción de ensueños. ¿Fue nuestra visión demasiado estrecha, demasiado parcial, demasiado apresurada? ¿Fueron nuestras conclusiones demasiado rígidas? Talvez. Pero este vagar sin rumbo por nuestra mayúscula América me ha cambiado más de lo que creí. Yo ya no soy yo. Por lo menos, ya no soy el mismo yo interior.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> From Guevara's diary: "This is not a story of heroic feats, [...] it is a glimpse of two lives running parallel for a time, with similar hopes and convergent dreams. [...] Is it that our whole vision was never quite complete, that it was too transient or not always well-informed? Were we too uncompromising in our judgments? Okay, but this is how the typewriter interpreted those fleeting impulses raising my fingers to the keys, and those impulses have now died. Moreover, no one can be held responsible for them. The person who wrote these notes passed away the moment his feet touched Argentine soil again. The person who reorganizes and polishes them, me, is no longer, at least I am not the person I once was. All this wandering around 'Our America with a capital A' has changed me more than I thought" (40).





**Picture 67:** Cinematographs (Salles 2004)



**Picture 68:** Cinematographs (Salles 2004)



**Picture 69:** Alberto and...  
(Salles 2004)



**Picture 70:** Alberto (Salles  
2004)

Afterwards, there is a sequence of twelve cinemagraphs (Pictures 67 and 68) with Gustavo Santaolalla's music "From Ushuaia to La Quiaca". In total, there are seventeen cinemagraphs in the film: four in the Mariátegui sequence, one in the ship sequence (Picture 71) and the final twelve. Corseuil (2012) argues the cinemagraphs call attention to the making of the film and to cinematic language, helping balance the sentimentalization surrounding the narrative, at the same time allowing the actors/non-actors to appear as real subjects (73). I agree with her and I would like to add the frontal stare is a common feature in all the cinemagraphs. According to Kemp, the full frontal stare is disconcerting and has a primitive potency that has been used for political and religious purposes (16). In the film, the cinemagraphs situate each person in the corresponding environment as a subject that looks continuously at us – that is how we perceive the point-of-view shot – with the political effect of calling us – the audience – to act upon the "realities" we just have been introduced to.

A similar effect was obtained by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas in portraying Guevara's body and sustaining a close-up of Guevara's face for three long minutes at the end of *La Hora de Los Hornos* (1968). Obviously, Getino and Solana's use of the frontal stare is more emphatic and ghostly, entangling possible martyrdom associations. In comparison, there is no reference to Guevara's dead body in Salles' film, either as a photograph or as representation, such as Bernal's interpretation of dead Guevara in *Fidel* (Atwood 2002, Picture 72). Nonetheless, the full frontal stare in the cinemagraphs have a political

potential that does not exclude alternative "readings". For example, as we discussed before, the four cinemagraphs in Mariátegui's sequence and the one in the ship sequence can also be interpreted as flashbacks or as insight into Ernesto's subjectivity.

The sentimentalization of Ernesto's internal journey is balanced by the cinemagraphs and additional elements: the fore and afterword, cultural, linguistic, economic and geographical fragmentation, and Alberto's role as an additional affective filter. Interestingly, since the film is primarily about Ernesto's internal journey, and Ernesto is the voice-over homodiegetic narrator and one affective filter, it could be expected that Ernesto would be the last character on screen. Instead, in the airport sequence, Ernesto embarks on the airplane and Alberto is the last character onscreen (Picture 69). After the final cinemagraph, historical information is provided to bridge the gap between the end of the narrative and the rest of Ernesto and Alberto's lives, followed by a close-up of Alberto Granado as himself looking at the horizon (Picture 70). This transition from De La Serna's Alberto (Picture 69) to Alberto as himself (Picture 70) can be interpreted either as a flashforward to the present – in 2004 –, or potentially establish the whole journey narrative as a flashback, as Alberto Granado's recollections. Indeed, despite the homonymous titles, the film is an adaptation of both Guevara's diary and of Alberto's book. Hence, regardless of a flashback or a flashforward, having Alberto as himself is also an acknowledgment of his contribution for the film.



**Picture 71:** Cinemagraph in the river (Salles 2004).



**Picture 72:** Che's corpse in *Fidel* (David Atwood 2002).

Regarding martyrdom, the leper colony sequence offers examples that could be interpreted from a religious perspective, such as the topic of corporeal suffering in Silvia and Ernesto's dialogue, the resemblance between Ernesto treating a wound on Papá Carlito's foot (Picture 57) with Christ washing the feet of the apostles, the curing of lepers, and even crossing the river. Although such sequences reinforce the hero's self-sacrifice and empathy towards others, they do not introduce an aesthetics of Christ-like physical suffering, as the one discussed by Hegel (1988).

Furthermore, the character representation and the character development do not fit the criteria for an interpretation based on the martyr archetype. For instance, Ernesto becomes increasingly bold, to the point of challenging the authority of Mother Superior twice – the first is by wearing no gloves; the second is when Alberto and Ernesto protest to Mother Superior not being served food because they did not attend the Sunday mass; in fact, three patients challenge the rule and take food to Ernesto. Interestingly, Ernesto's respectful attitude towards the Cuzco women performing the Coca leaves ritual contrasts with his somewhat confrontational behavior towards Mother Superior. If we consider the Cuzco women performing the ritual represent native religiousness and the nuns represent the Catholic Church, one of the most important colonial institutions, it would be incongruent to assume the instances of self-sacrifice in the leper colony support a Pauline martyr archetype. Instead, Ernesto's deeds in the film do not lend themselves explicitly to any cause but his own search for self-discovery, not a spiritual quest.

That is probably one of the reasons why Joseph Campbell's (2004) model of the hero's journey – divided in departure, initiation and return – does not apply. After all, Ernesto is not called to adventure by gods or angels, nor does he receive any supernatural aid and, in a way, Ernesto does not really return home since he went back to Argentina only to take the final exams and left again on a new trip in 1953, never returning to Argentina – regardless, the film does not depict any return. In comparison, Susan Mackey's (2001)<sup>75</sup> version of Campbell's model

<sup>75</sup> She says "[t]his journey moves the individual out from known territory (the parochial/ the home/ego-consciousness) to unknown territory (often a descent

might be more appropriate to discuss the film's plot, but there is still tension between her model and the film, probably because Campbell's ideas are based on the monomyth and on Carl Jung psychology.

Mario Cesareo (1995) discusses the Catholic missionaries rhetoric of martyrdom in Spanish coloniality, which I hoped would be helpful in discussing martyrdom in Salles' film, but once again, Ernesto does not conform with the characteristics proposed. According to Cesareo, Catholicism divided geographical space aesthetically in sacred or profane in order to support the crusade discourse. Although interesting, such division does not apply to the film because space is not divided by the characters as good or bad and because difference is cause for attraction rather than repulsion. The other element proposed by Cesareo, the martyr's body as locus for coloniality, does not apply either because the film focuses on the internal journey and does not portray Guevara's corpse. Instead the lifeless body of Che, we have the vitality of Gael García Bernal, as discussed by Venegas (2015, 125).

If there are not enough elements to support a martyr archetype, there is one martyrdom element that needs to be discussed a bit more: the suffering motif. Despite the absence of Christ-like physical agony – flagging, crucifixion, torture –, the theme of suffering is first established through Ernesto's three asthma crisis. And in his dialogue with Silvia, Ernesto uses his asthmatic struggle to breath as a metaphor for resisting against life's sufferings. Hence, suffering is not limited to bodily agony but is extended to other forms found throughout the narrative, such as sickness, misery and injustice. As a result, surviving the seizure of one's land, political persecution, lack of education and employment becomes an act of resistance in itself, a way of challenging death.

If, according to Cesareo, the missionary's body represents the colonial institutions, Ernesto's asthmatic wheezing becomes a metaphor for the peasants and indigenous peoples' resistance to the greed of

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into strange or terrible lands/unconsciousness) where the individual is sometimes aided (mentors/gods/shamans/ dreams), and is often sorely tested (demons/Shadow-self ), in a search for a treasure or boon (gold/grail/enlightenment/individuation) that the individual then shares with the culture upon returning home (cultural enlightenment/awareness of the undivided nature of being/transconsciousness)" (Mackey 2001, 13).

landowners and foreign corporations, the brutality of the State, misery, injustices and death itself. Accordingly, crossing the river swimming at night becomes the perfect rite of passage, not only because of the already discussed symbolism of North and South, but also because the risk of death is superimposed in Ernesto's asthmatic breathing, symbolically equating his efforts with the patients' resistance to the disease. In conclusion, if Cesareo's martyr is embedded in coloniality, the most plausible interpretation of martyrdom in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) is related to Postcolonialism.

### CHAPTER 3 – *EL CHE*

Before actually starting the analysis of the second film, I would like to briefly comment on this chapter's structure. Unlike the previous one, in which the discussion of relevant topics was woven along the narrative of *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004), in this chapter more descriptive paragraphs will first situate the reader regarding *El Che: Investigating a Legend* (Dugowson 1998) and then relevant issues will be analyzed in detail. The reason for such a choice is that, if I juxtaposed my critical comments with the description of the film, I would risk jeopardizing the perception of the narrative as tragic.

*El Che: Investigating a Legend*,<sup>76</sup> in French *El Che, Ernesto Guevara, enquête sur un homme de légende*, is a 1998 documentary, directed by Maurice Dugowson, based on Pierre Kalfon's biography entitled *Ernesto Guevara, a Legend of the Century* (2004).<sup>77</sup> In contrast with *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004), it is very difficult to find information in English about *El Che*. In fact, only three reviews were found and no interview of the director is available. In French, biographical information and the filmography of the director Maurice Dugowson can be retrieved from the internet, but the same cannot be said of interviews regarding the making of the film. In addition, information about box-office could not be found, but we do know it was not as widely distributed as Salles's film, being exhibited mostly on television and on docu-forums,<sup>78</sup> according to David Rooney (1997).

What we know about the film is that it was a French-Spanish production of Cineteve and Igeldo Komunikazioa, that it made extensive use of archival footage and that Pierre Kalfon collaborated extensively – he is credited with co-writing the screenplay and narration with Duwgowson, the film is an adaptation of his book and he helped direct the interviews for the documentary. Regarding Maurice Dugowson, he was a French director of comedies and documentaries, such as *Sarah*

<sup>76</sup> Not to be confused with an Argentine biopic called *El Che*, directed by Aníbal di Salvo and released in 1997.

<sup>77</sup> First edition in 1985.

<sup>78</sup> National and international events where documentaries are exhibited.

(1983) and *Televisions, Histoires Secretes* (1996). Pierre Kalfon is a French journalist, a specialist in Latin America, who also collaborated in the making of the documentary *11 de septiembre de 1973. El último combate de Salvador Allende* (Patricio Henríquez 1998).

*El Che* (Dugowson 1998) starts with a pre-credit sequence that establishes the mythological status of Che Guevara and sets the expectation for "a tragedy that changed his life in a blaze of destiny", as Ian Marshall's portentous voice-over announces. After that, we have the film credits juxtaposed with extreme close-ups of Guevara and accompanied by Carlos Puebla's song *Hasta Siempre*. The film opens with a docudrama sequence of Ernesto and Alberto's motorcycle trip in 1951 and the voice-over compares Guevara to Jack Kerouac and to Don Quijote. After, the film retells his second trip through Latin America. The voice-over describes him as an "insatiable nomad" who has "wind at the soles of his feet". Such representation is further reinforced by Fernando de La Serna, Ernesto's cousin, who describes him as having "[...] *hormigas en el culo. Es decir, esos tipos que no se pueden estar quietos, necesitan salir, necesitan salir y moverse y avanzar y no se sabe que, ni para que, y después encuentran el motivo*"<sup>79</sup> (Dugowson 1998).

Guevara's stay in Guatemala is briefly described, as well as his involvement with Hilda Gadea. Only one person is interviewed regarding such important period in Ernesto's life, Oscar Valdovinos, an Argentine student travelling to Guatemala, a friend of Ricardo Rojo.<sup>80</sup> The film also speeds through Guevara's two year stay in Mexico, focusing on meeting Fidel, what the voice-over indicates as a "turning point in Ernesto's life". Then, the film starts to describe in detail the Cuban political context at that time, the dictator Batista's<sup>81</sup> increasing

<sup>79</sup> "I'd say he had ants in his pants. He was one of those people who couldn't sit still, who need to keep moving, to keep going, without knowing why", English subtitle (Dugowson 1998).

<sup>80</sup> Ricardo Rojo was an Argentine journalist that was forced to leave Argentina because of his criticism of Perón. He met Guevara during his second Latin American trip. Later he published a biography about Guevara, entitled *My friend el Che* (1968), which was criticized by Guevara's family and by guerrilleros who fought with Guevara.

<sup>81</sup> Fulgencio Batista Zaldívar, born as Rubén Zaldívar, was a Cuban Sergeant



brutality, the attack on the Moncada Barracks<sup>82</sup> and the founding of the July 26 movement. After, the film returns to Ernesto and Fidel's meeting, qualified by the voice-over as "the decisive encounter in Guevara's life". The tragical cue is reinforced by stills of Ernesto and Fidel looking at each other (Picture 73) and the voice-over saying:

For ten years it will be Fidel and Che, Che and Fidel. Until 1965, the two *barbudos*, united in mutual admiration, will write one of the exceptional pages in the revolutionary history of the twentieth century. Different conceptions of revolution and the pitfalls of power will give their story Shakespearean dimensions (Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 73:** Che and Fidel  
(Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 74:** Granma (Dugowson  
1998)

Throughout the sequence, a tango plays as if Che Guevara and Fidel Castro were two partners in the dance for power. The idea of a

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that gained power with the Sergeants Revolt in 1933. In 1940, he was elected President of Cuba under a populist platform. After 1944, he lived in the United States. In 1952, he was once again a presidential candidate in Cuba but when the polls indicated he would not be elected, he seized power in a coup d'État.

<sup>82</sup> The attack on the Moncada military barracks, in Santiago, took place in July 26, 1953. The group was formed by the Youth of the Orthodox Party, under the leadership of Fidel Castro.

tragedy introduced by the voice-over in the pre-credit and the reference to Shakespeare are indications of the chosen narrative structure, a tragical one. The film then narrates in detail Fidel's plan of assembling and training a guerrilla group in Mexico and taking it to Cuba to overthrow Batista. While the voice-over describes the plan, we watch a reenactment of the boat *Granma* struggling against the waves (Picture 74), an instance of docudrama similar to the one in the motorcycle sequence. Archival footage of Cuban reenactment of the landing and US newsreels are juxtaposed with Benigno's<sup>83</sup> (Picture 75) account of the guerrilla fight in the *Sierra Maestra*. When Benigno mentions Guevara's asthma, the movie digresses to the latter's childhood, representing it as a continuous battle against the disease that would help shape his attitude towards the world. Celia de La Serna, Guevara's mother, is represented as a fighter, a headstrong woman, and Ernesto's love towards her is described as "Oedipan".

That is basically the information given regarding Guevara's childhood, which is associated with the metaphor of life as a battle against impossible odds, and the film quickly resumes the narrative of the Cuban revolution. By now, we realize the film devotes much of its time to the period between 1956 and 1967, comprising Guevara's participation in the Cuban revolution, his role in the ensuing period of transition, as well as the expeditions to Congo and Bolivia. Following the victory at Santa Clara and the triumph of the revolution, Guevara is appointed to several important positions, such as director of the Industrialization department at the National Institute of Agrarian Reform, president of the National Bank, and minister of Industry. The combination of his military accomplishments, his political importance, asceticism and wit make Guevara so popular among the Cuban people he is compared to a god by Benigno, "*estos son una serie de actos que se van dando en la vida y que son lo que van conllevando a que donde*

<sup>83</sup> Alias of Dariel Alarcón Ramírez, a peasant in the Oriente province in Cuba who joined the guerrilla after his wife was killed and his hut burned by the Cuban regular army. He served under the leadership of Camilo Cienfuegos. In 1966, he was selected to be part of the guerrilla in Bolivia, under the command of Ernesto Guevara. After the defeat, he was one of the five survivors. In 1996, he defected while in Paris, where he lived until his death in 2016. His interview is very important in the development of the film and more will be said about him later on.

*quiera que el Che aparezca aparecía como el diós de todo el pueblo Cubano*"<sup>84</sup> (Dugowson 1998).

In fact, at this point in the film Guevara is represented as an individual different from other revolutionaries and superior to the people in general. In other words, he has achieved a position of leadership, which combines the vulnerability of isolation and the exceptionality of the leader (Frye 1973, 38). Indeed, the voice-over builds such representation upon Guevara's asceticism and on his conception of a New Man: "Che dreams of a total revolution that will change men in the deepest sense. There are few, even in the topmost ranks who are ready to follow to such heights". Furthermore, his distaste for privileges, his radicalism and his stubbornness turn him into a target for criticism of the foreign Communist Party delegations. According to Janette Habel<sup>85</sup> (Picture 76),

"the delegates of foreign Communist Parties [...] – particularly the French Communists – didn't hesitate to call Che and adventurer, a petty bourgeois or a leftist dreamer. Among these elements, there clearly was a campaign to discredit him. I think he made people uneasy" (Dugowson 1998).

Che's vulnerability is further suggested by the interaction between images – the camera zooms out of an extreme close-up of Fidel's eyes (Picture 77) to reveal Fidel is looking at Che, followed by a photograph of Che with eyes closed and pinching the bridge of his nose (Picture 78) – and voice-over: "as long as Fidel had confidence in him, the pressure of the anti-Che lobby had no effect, but the Soviet presence in Cuba was becoming greater" (Dugowson 1998). As we can see, the conditions for

<sup>84</sup> "And all these things were to make Che – wherever he went – a sort of a god figure for the Cuban people", English subtitles (Dugowson 1998). Since there is no subtitle in Spanish, I had to transcribe it myself. So, I beg your pardon if there is any mistake in Spanish.

<sup>85</sup> Known as Janette Habel, her real name being Jeanette Pienkny, she is a French political scientist and scholar at the University of Marne-la-Vallée and at the Institute of Latin American Studies. She was a member of Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire, Communist Revolutionary Youth during the 1960s. In the film, her name appears as "Jeanette Habel".

the fall of the hero are set since, according to the film, he is powerful yet vulnerable and his fate depends on pleasing Fidel.



**Picture 75:** Daríel Alarcón Ramírez, "Benigno" (Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 76:** Jeannette Pienkny, known as Janette Habel (Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 77:** Extreme close-up of Fidel's eyes (Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 78:** Che looking vulnerable (Dugowson 1998).

The action begins to reverse after Guevara's critique of the USSR, construed by the film as a significant mistake that will precipitate the hero's fall. Che's critique is established by the juxtaposition of Janette Habel's comment that "it soon became apparent, in 1963-64, that he intended to achieve a different kind of Socialism. And gradually, his critical view of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union became clearer" and excerpts from two of Guevara's speeches. The first one is in French, date and location not given:

"we mindlessly imitated our brother nations and this was an error. Not a serious one, but it has hindered our development and contributed dangerously to a phenomenon that must be fought energetically within a Socialist revolution, bureaucratization" (Dugowson 1998).

While Guevara calmly reads the words in French, we expect at any moment one of the other two men on the panel to jump on their seats or express their disgust at Che's words. They do not. However, both of them have their arms folded and the man on the right of the frame turns his head and looks at Che, then looks ahead briefly and looks at Che again, what could be easily interpreted as a sign of awe (Picture 79).



**Picture 79:** "bureaucratisation"  
(Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 80:** Footage shown during the voice-over. It is unclear where and when it was recorded (Dugowson 1998).

Immediately after Che's first critique, as if in retaliation, Cuba gives in to Soviet pressure to focus on sugar production and, according to the voice-over, "the sugar sector is withdrawn from Che's ministry. It is a disavowal. He has been shuttered aside. [dramatic pause] Castro thinks the moment has come to distance himself from Che and begins to send him around the world as the ambassador of the Cuban Revolution" (Dugowson 1998). At this point in the narrative, the fall of the tragic hero has initiated, although it has not gained momentum yet, which

happens after the second speech criticizing the USSR, at Algiers in 1965. Once again, the voice-over narrates events: "he does not specifically mention the USSR but it is clear what he means when he says 'the socialist countries are to some extent the accomplices of imperialist exploitation. The development of countries on the road to liberation must be paid for by the Socialist countries". Unlike the previous speech, which is shown in the actual footage, the second speech is only read by the voice-over narrator while we see footage of then Argelia's president Ahmed Ben Bella receiving Guevara at the airport, followed by slow motion footage of Guevara delivering a speech (Picture 80).

According to the film, the result of Guevara's second public critique of the USSR is immediate. After returning to Cuba, he disappears from the public eye. Secretly, he goes to Congo to foment guerrilla there. Indeed, the voice-over presents his expedition to Congo as a sort of self-imposed exile of someone who had gambled and lost: "beaten on the political front, disavowed in an economic level, after his provocative speech in Algiers, Che has no choice but to pursue the course that allows him to remain faithful to his internationalism" (Dugowson 1998).

It is in Congo that Che as tragic hero begins to grasp the extent of his fall. The first sign things are not well is the contrast between the Cubans' expectations and what they find in the Congo. According to Benigno, "*habían muchas preguntas que hacíamos nosotros y una della [sic] era 'que hacemos nosotros en Congo? A que hemos venido aquí? Pues no hay dirigentes'*"<sup>86</sup> (Dugowson 1998). In his diary, Guevara (1999) makes several references to the disorganization, lack of discipline and conflicting information among the Congolese forces, what was made worse by the absence of leadership, since many Congolese leaders spent considerable time in Kigoma, a place with brothels and liquor.

The situation of the tragic hero gets worse when he learns about the death of Celia de La Serna, his mother. According to the voice-over,

<sup>86</sup> "There were many questions we asked ourselves and one of those was 'what are we doing in the Congo? Why have we come here? Because the leaders are nowhere" (Dugowson 1998, my translation).

"it is a great blow for him. His closest confidant, his true accomplice is gone". And it gets even worse as Che learns about Fidel reading his farewell letter in which he resigns his Cuban citizenship, rank and position at the Cuban Communist Party. According to the film, the letter was supposed to be read in case Guevara was killed in action and, as a result, reading it in public in 1965 represents an act of betrayal by Fidel. Indeed, Benigno's testimony plays a crucial role in representing Guevara's alleged reaction when discovering the betrayal. He says that

para Che fue una gran sorpresa la lectura de aquella carta. El Che había pedido que esa carta si hiciera publica si Fidel lo entendía después de una posible muerte de Che Guevara – no en vida. Y lo sentimos muy molesto cuando dice 'Stálin fue un culto a la personalidad pero hay otras personas que quieren igualarse a Stálin y están dando paso a un culto a la personalidad muy aceleradamente. [...] Esta lectura de esta carta obliga a mi desaparición política y explica por si que nada tengo que regre[sar]...ir a buscar em Cuba. Ya no es mi Cuba'<sup>87</sup> (Dugowson 1998).

Fidel's betrayal of Che, as portrayed by the film, marks the moment of discovery, in which the tragic hero realizes the predicament he inadvertently caused or contributed to. And it is accompanied in the film by the failure of the Congo expedition, which, in turn, further humiliates and leaves him no alternative but to set out in a new expedition, now to Bolivia. Once in Bolivia, he discovers the Bolivian Communist Party, whose Secretary General Mario Monje<sup>88</sup> promised

<sup>87</sup> "Che wasn't at all prepared for this letter to be read. He had asked it be made public – if Fidel thought it necessary – but only after his death, not while he was alive. We knew he was upset when he said 'Stálin promoted a personality cult, but now there are others who want to follow Stálin's example and are heading in the direction of a personality cult far too quickly.[...] Reading that letter in public forces me to disappear from the political scene and confirms the fact that I have nothing more to do in Cuba. It is no longer my Cuba!'" (Dugowson 1998).

<sup>88</sup> Mario Monje Molina was one of the founding members of the Bolivian Communist Party and was Secretary General during the 1960s. He now lives in Moscow.

support in establishing an urban network, will not participate or aid the guerrilla.

Without the promised support, desperate for recruits, a few blunders are made. According to Benigno, the ill chosen Bolivian recruits include a mental impaired man and a former police officer.<sup>89</sup> In addition, Régis Debray<sup>90</sup> and Ciro Bustos<sup>91</sup> were later captured by the Bolivian Army. The latter, according to Benigno, cooperated with the interrogators and drew detailed sketches of the guerrillas. As a result of recruits who defected or were arrested, the Bolivian armed forces gain precious intelligence and begin to encircle the guerrilla. The Bolivian Army is aided by the US Army Rangers and by the CIA agent Félix Ramos.<sup>92</sup> Obviously, the defeat is imminent. Guevara and remaining

<sup>89</sup> This assertion is not verified by other sources.

<sup>90</sup> Jules Régis Debray is a French scholar and former government official. From a very influential family, he studied under the guidance of Althusser and became an advocate of guerrilla struggle. His role in the Bolivian guerrilla, despite aiding the preliminary efforts of organization, was to create a solidarity network in Europe to raise support. During his trial in Bolivia, an international campaign was organized in order to free him. Sentenced to thirty years for his participation in the guerrilla in Bolivia, he only served three. After his release in 1970, he distanced himself from Cuba and eventually became a critic.

<sup>91</sup> Ciro Roberto Bustos Marco is an Argentine painter and former guerrilla. After the revolution, he went to Cuba and, eventually, he was asked to be part of the Argentine guerrilla expedition under the leadership of Jorge Massetti. After the failure of such experience, he was able to escape repression. Before the expedition to Bolivia, he was asked by Che to organize a guerrilla network in Argentina that would be supported by the guerrillas in Bolivia. During the trials, he was portrayed as a traitor and became the scape goat. However, in 2001, two Swedish journalists released a documentary called *Sacrificio: Who Betrayed Che Guevara* (Erik Gandini and Tarik Saleh 2001) that challenged the representation of Bustos as traitor. According to Gandini and Saleh, in an article published by *Folha de São Paulo* (Moraes 2001), two Bolivian generals and the CIA agent Félix Rodríguez said it was in fact Debray who first collaborated with the investigators, not Bustos. Bustos has published a book telling his side of the story in 2007, entitled *El Che Quiere Verde*. Since 1976, he has lived in Sweden. One month before the coup in Argentina, he and his family sought asylum in Sweden.

<sup>92</sup> Félix Rodríguez, known as Félix Ramos, is a former CIA agent and veteran of the Bay of the Pigs who was responsible for setting up an intelligence



*guerrilleros* are trapped. Guevara is arrested, interrogated and executed. At the movie's climax, Gary Prado's<sup>93</sup> testimony reinforces the suspicions over Fidel:

[...] para saciar un poco mi curiosidad, hacerle algunas preguntas, pero en un tono de conversación no en un tono de interrogatorio. Me interesaba a mi saber por ejemplo porque habían escogido Bolivia para eso cuando estaba precisamente todo en contra de que el mismo en sus libros y sus escritos propugnaba de las mejores condiciones para iniciar una guerrilla. [...] Su reposta fue que, bueno, la decisión no había sido exclusivamente de él, que otros niveles habían participado. Y cuando yo pregunté este otro nivel quiere decir Fidel, el Che [dice] 'no, otros niveles'<sup>94</sup> (Dugowson 1998).

Prado reproduces Che's reply, "*no, otros niveles*", with a cynical smile on his face (Picture 81), what can be interpreted as a suggestion that Fidel was indeed responsible. Furthermore, Prado's testimony is followed by Benigno saying "*yo considero que precisamente ha habido una maniobra ya no solamente de Fidel pero si de Fidel, Rusos, Mario Monje*"<sup>95</sup> (Dugowson 1998). Right after that, there is footage of Fidel

network in Bolivia's countryside to gather information about the guerrilla movements (Ryan 1998, 96).

<sup>93</sup> Gary Prado Salmón is a retired Bolivian general who, as a captain in 1967, was responsible for the unit that captured Guevara and Willy – alias of Simón Cuba.

<sup>94</sup> "[...] and to satisfy my own curiosity, I questioned him, but it was more a conversation than an interrogation. I wanted to know why he had chosen Bolivia where the conditions were in complete contrast to what he described in his writings as being the ideal conditions for a guerrilla. [...] He answered that the decision was not his alone, it had been made at other level. I asked him if he meant Fidel. He replied 'no, other levels'" (Dugowson 1998, my emphasis). Notice the difference in translation in the highlighted sentence. The original says that other levels had participated, while the subtitles says the decision was made at other levels, excluding Guevara's participation.

<sup>95</sup> "It seems more likely to me that we were manipulated not so much by Fidel, but rather by the Russians and by Mario Monje" (Dugowson 1998).

talking about his friendship with Guevara, a juxtaposition that indicates irony. Immediately after, we hear in voice-off four shots and we see the schoolhouse in La Higuera, where Guevara was kept prisoner. The shots, another instance of docudrama, further implicate Fidel as the one responsible for Guevara's decline and demise.



**Picture 81:** Gary Prado  
(Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 82:** Julia Cortez  
(Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 83:** Headlines  
(Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 84:** Che's body  
(Dugowson 1998).

After the hero's mistake, the reversal of the action and the discovery, comes the moment of suffering or death. In other words, according to the film's tragic plot, Guevara has paid the ultimate price for trusting wholeheartedly in Fidel and for publicly criticizing the USSR. Julia Cortez (Picture 82), the teacher at La Higuera, said that upon hearing the shots she went to the schoolhouse to investigate and found Guevara's body on the floor, near the entrance, "[...] *de espaldas con las piernas muy separadas y con los brazos completamente*

*extendidos*"<sup>96</sup> (Dugowson 1998). After Julia Cortez's testimony, we see Che's body. This is not the first time it appears in the film – the first time is during Debray and Busto's trial, as newspaper front pages (Picture 83) – but now it is a more dramatic and closer look, not as someone reading a newspaper but as if we had temporarily assumed Cortez's visual perspective looking down at the body<sup>97</sup> (Picture 84).



**Picture 85:** Crowd waiting to see Che's corpse (Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 86:** Frontal stare (Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 87:** Freddy Alborta's



**Picture 88:** Andrea Mantegna,

<sup>96</sup> "He was lying on his back, his legs spread wide and his arms stretched out like this" (Dugowson 1998).

<sup>97</sup> This photograph was taken at the wash house in Vallegrande, not at the schoolhouse in La Higuera. However, its juxtaposition right after Julia Cortez's testimony creates the effect of temporarily assuming her visual perspective.

photograph (Dugowson 1998).

Dead Christ (Kemp, 189).

Although dirty and ragged, there is also something fascinating about Guevara's corpse. Like the crowd of people waiting their turn outside the wash house in Vallegrande (Picture 85), we are attracted and compelled to gaze at it for some reason difficult to define. Obviously, a corpse has metaphysical connotations, since it is at the border between different realms, such as life and death, material and spiritual. But there is something more about Che's corpse. A hint is offered by Eco, when he comments about Augustine's interpretation of Christ's aesthetics "[...] stating that Jesus certainly appeared deformed when he was hanging on the cross but through that superficial deformity He expressed the inner beauty of his sacrifice and the glory it promised us" (49). Maybe that is what compels us to continue looking at Che's body, the representation of the sacrifice as something beautiful. And although he is neither whipped, crowned with thorns nor crucified, there certainly is similarity between the image of his corpse and the representations of Christ's dead body. In Hegel's words,

"[...] the subject-matter itself implies that the external bodily appearance, immediate existence as an individual, is revealed in the grief of his negativity as the negative, and that therefore it is by sacrificing subjective individuality and the sensuous sphere that the Spirit attains its truth and its Heaven" (538).

Furthermore, photographs or archival footage often represent Che's corpse in a frontal angle, as if he were looking at the camera (Picture 86). As we have discussed, the frontal stare brings political and religious connotations, but taking into account the tragic, phantasmagorical and legendary context in which the images of Che's corpse are inserted in the film, the religious significations prevail in this case. In fact, Kemp points out a striking resemblance between Freddy Alborta's photograph and Andrea Mantegna's painting *Dead Christ* (Pictures 87 and 88). Alborta's Che and Mantegna's Christ are both bearded and long-haired figures, lying on their backs, the corpses partially covered, the head slightly tilted to one side, and both are subject to the gaze of other people. Indeed, even "[...] the officer who is pointing to one of the fatal bullet holes thrusts his hand towards Che's

side [looks] like a doubting Thomas confirming Christ's lance wound" (188).

The aforementioned similarity between the representation of dead Che and Christ goes beyond the formal resemblance if we consider the process of reconceptualization of the defeat involved in the process. In other words,

"[w]ithout the resurrection, the whole edifice of Jesus's claim to the mantle of the messiah comes crashing down. [...] If Jesus did not actually die – if his death were merely the prelude to his spiritual evolution – then the cross [...] would be transformed into a symbol of victory" (Aslam 2014, 176).

And the Bolivian Army may have unwillingly contributed to the mythologizing of Che by killing him and displaying his body. According to Kumm, "[t]he Bolivian army and the Americans, he said, might have made the same mistake that the Romans did nineteen hundred years earlier. Instead of destroying Guevara, they helped create the myth of Guevara" (1997, 32). Venegas has a similar understanding when she says:

If his contribution to the Cuban Revolution had not already immortalized him, the events following Che Guevara's death secured his mythical status in the pantheon of revolutionary heroes. A symbol of ideological resolve, tenacity, and moral conviction, the revolutionary's body, now a corpse, became invested with immense political meaning both by those who venerated him and those who scorned him. His hands were severed in order to make a definitive identification, his face disfigured in a crude attempt to make a death mask, and the corpse, arms tied behind the back, was tossed into an unmarked grave by the Bolivian military. For Vallegrande, where these events took place, the dead Che literally became a Christ symbol and a lay saint. Buried in anonymity, his enduring presence became legendary in the Bolivian mountains. Popular culture referred to *la*

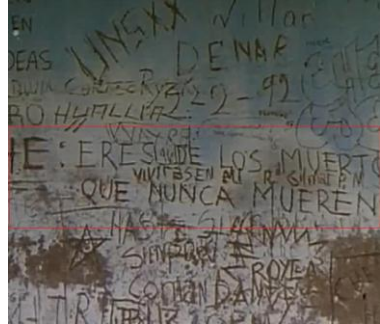
*maldición del Che*, the Che curse, a narrative that reiterated mythic postmortem events, telling of mysterious tragedies suffered by many of the people associated with his capture and execution. It is a fact that most of those involved died within the next decade (105).

Popular culture and journalists have sustained the myth of the curse, conferring spiritual powers to the defeated Che to avenge his assassination in a very similar way the resurrection recycles Jesus the Nazareth's death into Jesus Christ, who is victorious even when humiliated and killed. Besides the curse, the myth is also manifested in his celebration as a lay saint, in the pilgrimage to Vallegrande and La Higuera, and on the celebration of the wash house in Vallegrande as both relic and shrine (Picture 90). Interestingly, the film departs from Guevara's mythological and legendary level, attempts to historicize him, and returns to the myth. Such symbolic return can be perceived in the establishing shots of Vallegrande – we see Christ the Savior with arms wide open – at the beginning and at the end of the film (Picture 89). Such establishing shots function as a sort of phantasmagorical frame, a dramatic effect highlighted by the fact Guevara's remains had not been found yet during the shooting of the movie. Hence, in the pre-credit we have the search for the remains and, by the end of the film, the closest and most concrete representation of Guevara was the wash house at Vallegrande. In fact, the voice-over depicts it as a shrine: "[...] perhaps the only real tumb of the man in the beret with a star, the man who smoke cigars and answered to the name of Che is this bare laundry room, where people still remember" (Dugowson 1998). As the last line is voiced, there is an extreme close-up of flowers, probably left by a visitor. Then, we have an extreme close-up of the walls, filled with messages left by people who visited the place. As the camera pans to the right, one message stands apart, "*Che: eres de los muertos que nunca mueren*"<sup>98</sup> (Picture 90).

<sup>98</sup> "Che, you are the type of dead that never dies" (my translation).



**Picture 89:** Christ the Savior (Dugowson 1998).



**Picture 90:** Messages written on the wall of the wash house at La Higuera. Notice the message highlighted in red by me (Dugowson 1998).

But the symbolic return to the realm of myth presents a problem, since the aim of the film is to investigate the legend, that is, to move away from the realm of myth and towards the historical individual. I am not saying it is possible to actually reach the historical individual, who is long dead; I am saying the objective of the film seemed to be to historicize Guevara, getting closer to the man and challenging the myth. Although the film does historicize him, history in this documentary is subordinate to story. In other words, the tragic plot is the most salient feature of the film, favoring a symbolic return to myth for dramatic effect.

Obviously, as Hayden White (1991) has argued, there is always a narrative supporting the telling of history. Therefore, having a narrative is not under debate here, but what type of narrative and how well the chosen narrative lends itself for the task at hand, including the expectations associated with the film's genre. In *El Che*, we have a tragic plot – the focus on the hero's actions and virtues, his vulnerability as a leader, the mistakes of trusting Fidel and criticizing the USSR, the reversal of the action in the loss of status and power, followed by humiliation and defeat, and finally, death – that achieves a very dramatic effect: developing empathy towards the tragic hero Che Guevara, who is betrayed and, like a martyr, continues true to his ideals to the end, sacrificing everything, even his life for his cause. Although very seductive and compelling, such narrative structure actually celebrates

Che as the epitome of virtue and self-sacrifice, lending itself more to the reproduction of the myth rather than to challenging it. In addition, there are also problems in rendering the historical information in the film.

As a biographical documentary, some degree of historical depth and rigor is expected. This is part of the genre. In comparison, a biopic is expected to take greater liberties in telling a story for dramatic purposes. A biographical documentary, however, must exercise some caution towards the interviewees and their subjective perspectives of events. In other words, by comparing different sources and even by adopting a more cautious tone, a documentary can attempt to hedge itself from inaccuracy and mistakes.

The first topic I would like to discuss is, as previously mentioned, the epic and tragic tone of the voice-over narration. By focusing on Guevara's deeds, during the Cuban revolution, and on his shortcomings, during the Congo and Bolivia campaigns, the drama builds up. However, a side effect is the individualization of collective history. For example, the movie claims Guevara was responsible for organizing the radio station *Radio Rebelde*, the printing of leaflets and books, literacy courses and health aid stations in the mountains, all of which were in fact the combined effort of hundreds of people. Indeed, other important people during the Cuban revolution, such as Camilo Cienfuegos<sup>99</sup> and Celia Sanchez,<sup>100</sup> are not even mentioned. Because they were important figures in the collective history of the Cuban Revolution, they should at least be mentioned. Instead, the narrative focus on Fidel and Che in order to establish the argument of Fidel's betrayal. Furthermore, by focusing on the period between 1956 and 1967, little attention is given to Guevara's childhood and formative journeys around Latin America. In comparison, Roberto Savio (1972) dedicated sixty minutes – the whole first part of his three part documentary – to Guevara's childhood

<sup>99</sup> Camilo Cienfuegos Gorriarán was a Cuban Comandante in the revolutionary army. He commanded one of the columns that took the fighting to the west of Cuba. He died in 1959 in a plane crash.

<sup>100</sup> Celia Sánchez Manduley was a Cuban revolutionary and politician. She helped organize the urban network that support the guerrilla in the mountains and was a member of the general staff of the Rebel Army. After the victory, she worked as Secretary to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. She died in 1980 of lung cancer.



and travels. Furthermore, not enough attention is given to Hilda Gadea and Aleida March, his first and second wives. Gadea, for example, was a well connected exile who introduced Guevara to Marxist professor Harry White, to Guatemala's economic minister Alfonso Bauer Paiz, to Guatemala's President Arbenz's secretary, Jaime Díaz Rozzoto, and, more importantly, to Professor Edelberto Torres, whose house was a gathering point for left wing activists and political exiles in Guatemala (Anderson, 162 and 166). It was, in fact, in Torres' house that Guevara befriended a number of Cuban exiles, which would eventually lead to meeting Raul and Fidel Castro once in Mexico.

But perhaps one of the biggest problems is relying on a single person – Benigno – who fought with Che to offer insight on what he said and did on the battlefield when there were many others available by the time the film was made – to name a few, Rodolfo Saldaña,<sup>101</sup> Orlando Borrego<sup>102</sup> and Harry Villegas.<sup>103</sup> The most critical of Benigno's testimonies is when he talks about Guevara's reaction upon discovering Fidel read his letter publicly. As we have described in this chapter, Benigno even quotes what Guevara supposedly said regarding the personality cult, a harsh criticism aimed at Fidel. Since Dariel Alarcón "Benigno" publicly defected from Cuba in 1996, we do not know if his words are his personal opinion about Fidel or if in fact are his recollections of what Guevara supposedly said. Still, the most concerning issue is his participation in Congo, which is disputable. As far as I know, besides Kalfon and Dugowson, the only other source that represents Benigno as a veteran of the Congo is John Lee Anderson, in

<sup>101</sup> Rodolfo Saldaña was a founding member of the Bolivian Communist Party. He had experience in Bolivia's biggest tin mine where he recruited people and established the Party's political presence. He also underwent guerrilla training in Cuba. Born in 1932, he died in Havana in 2000.

<sup>102</sup> Orlando Borrego participated in the Cuban Revolution under the leadership of Guevara. Following the victory, he worked as Guevara's right hand man in the Agrarian Reform National Institute. In 1964, he was designated to be the minister of the Sugar Industry. Later becoming an economist and PhD in Economics, he currently works as an advisor for the Transport Ministry.

<sup>103</sup> Harry Antonio Villegas Tamayo is a Cuban Brigadier General and a veteran of the Cuban Revolution, the Congo expedition, the Ñancahuazú guerrilla (Bolivia), and Angola. He fought under the leadership of Guevara in the Congo and Bolivia. He was one of the five survivors of the Bolivia expedition.

passing. In contrast, Villegas only mentions Benigno's participation in the Cuban revolution and in the Bolivian guerrilla (328). Likewise, Guevara makes no reference to Benigno in his Congo diary, while he makes several references to him in his Bolivian diary. It is suspicious, to say the least. After all, if Benigno was not part of the Congo expedition, he would not have been able to witness Guevara's reaction when learning about Fidel reading the letter. And even if Benigno did participate in the Congo guerrilla and did relay what he heard Che said, it is a bit odd that no other testimonies of such words exist.

In his biography of Che, first published in 1985, Kalfon speculates upon Benigno's testimony saying the

"letter obviously had a posthumous tone; it was not meant to be made public while Guevara was alive. [...] By saying goodbye to a welcoming country, Che helped the relations between Castro and Moscow but, if it was made public, Guevara could not return while still alive" (Kalfon, 427, *my translation*).

Kalfon's interpretation of the tone of the letter as posthumous is reductive when compared to Anderson's, who considers it "was at once a farewell letter, a waiver of any responsibility the Cuban government might be perceived as having for his actions, and a last will and testament" (721). In other words, Anderson refers to the polysemy of the letter, that is, its ambiguity, since it referred both to matters of life and death. In contrast, Kalfon favored one meaning, that of a posthumous letter, removing the letter's ambiguity. In addition, while Anderson reproduced the full text of the letter, Kalfon quoted only fragments, and Dugowson cut parts of the original footage of Fidel reading the letter, pasting them together seamlessly (Picture 91).

« Year of Agriculture »  
Havana, April 1, 1965.

Fidel:

At this moment I remember many things: when I met you in Maria Antonia's house, when you proposed I come along, all the tensions involved in the preparations. One day they came by and asked who should be notified in case of death, and the real possibility of it struck us all. Later we knew it was true, that in a revolution one wins or dies (if it is a real one). Many comrades fell along the way to victory.

Today everything has a less dramatic tone, because we are more mature, but the event repeats itself. I feel that I have fulfilled the part of my duty that tied me to the Cuban revolution in its territory, and I say farewell to you, to the comrades, to your people, who now are mine.

I formally resign my positions in the leadership of the party, my post as minister, my rank of commander, and my Cuban citizenship. Nothing legal binds me to Cuba. The only ties are of another nature – those that cannot be broken as can appointments to posts.

Reviewing my past life, I believe I have worked with sufficient integrity and dedication to consolidate the revolutionary triumph. My only serious failing was not having had more confidence in you from the first moments in the Sierra Maestra, and not having understood quickly enough your qualities as a leader and a revolutionary.

I have lived magnificent days, and at your side I felt the pride of belonging to our people in the brilliant yet sad days of the Caribbean [Missile] crisis. Seldom has a statesman been more brilliant as you were in those days. I am also proud of having followed you without hesitation, of having identified with your way of thinking and of seeing and appraising dangers and principles.

Other nations of the world summon my modest efforts of assistance. I can do that which is denied you due to your responsibility as the head of Cuba, and the time has come for us to part.

You should know that I do so with a mixture of joy and sorrow. I leave here the purest of my hopes as a builder and the dearest of those I hold dear. And I leave a people who received me as a son. That wounds a part of my spirit. I carry to new battlefronts the faith that you taught me, the revolutionary spirit of my people, the feeling of fulfilling the most sacred of duties: to fight against imperialism wherever it may be. This is a source of strength, and more than heals the deepest of wounds.

I state once more that I free Cuba from all responsibility, except that which stems from its example. If my final hour finds me under other skies, my last thought will be of this people and especially of you. I am grateful for your teaching and your example, to which I shall try to be faithful up to the final consequences of my acts.

I have always been identified with the foreign policy of our revolution, and I continue to be. Wherever I am, I will feel the responsibility of being a Cuban revolutionary, and I shall behave as such. I am not sorry that I leave nothing material to my wife and children; I am happy it is that way. I ask nothing for them, as the state will provide them with enough to live on and receive an education.

I would have many things to say to you and to our people, but I feel they are unnecessary. Words cannot express what I would like them to, and there is no point in scribbling pages.

**Picture 91:** Guevara's complete letter. In yellow is the version reproduced in the film.

It can be argued the full text, or the full footage of Fidel reading the letter, would be too long to be reproduced in a ninety-six-minute documentary. Although the last argument is something to be considered in film making, the focus on a posthumous interpretation of the letter and the depiction of Fidel reading it publicly as an act of betrayal also point to the influence of Kalfon in the making of the documentary. Indeed, the letter episode builds up on the theme of strayed relations between Fidel and Che, which, as Anderson points out, was Moscow's initial speculation to explain Guevara's disappearance of the public eye:

As Sergo Mikoyan recalled, the initial reports trickling through Moscow were that there had been a confrontation between Fidel and Che and that Che had been exiled or punished. "The general opinion among the apparatchiks was that there had been a fight between Fidel and Che," he said. "Or maybe not a fight, but that Fidel didn't want Che in Cuba—that he wanted to be the only leader, and that Che was in competition with him." Mikoyan stressed that he had never given credence to this scenario. "I knew them both and I knew that Che was absolutely unambitious. ... He would not even imagine competing with Fidel. That version seemed ridiculous and I didn't believe it. But our people thought of Stalin and Trotsky, then Khrushchev and Brezhnev, who were always fighting—and they thought it was the same in Cuba." (Anderson, 728)

As we said before in this chapter, the dispute for power or "the pitfalls of power", mentioned in voice-over in the film, establish the expectation for a Shakespearean tragedy. Unsurprisingly, Kalfon also cements such tragic representation by comparing Fidel and Guevara to Achilles and Patroclus, Thomas Becket and Henry II, Castor and Pollux:

the magical couple of the Cuban Revolution break up [...], Achilles leaves Patroclus. Although Guevara began reading Freud when he was fourteen years old, he certainly did not have time to reflect about what was fascinating and

mysterious about a friendship between two men [...]. Because these two beings loved each other, because they cared about each other. Later, the king realized he had to get rid of his anti-Machiavelli. Jean-Pierre Clerc, Castro's biographer, regarding Castro and Guevara, refers to the Shakespearean couple Thomas Becket and Henry II, "the poignant friendship, the wonderful complicity that, for opposing political views, came to an end. And the king will never again find happiness or peace".

[...]

Did Castor indeed sacrifice Pollux? Was the beautiful, wonderful friendship between the Argentine and the Cuban fatally wounded that day? Did politics win over the politician? From this moment, [Concerning Castro reading Guevara's letter], the general perspective of the relations between the two men demand revision (314, 342, *my translation*).

In contrast, Anderson understands Castro and Guevara were actually putting on an act, working together: "most evidence suggests that Che and Fidel were working in tandem, even coordinating their public remarks" (716). As examples, Anderson mentions a strong critique of the Soviet model, delivered by Fidel on January 2, 1965, and Fidel's critique of Soviet and Chinese lack of military aid to the Vietnamese people, during a speech at Havana University on March 3, 1965. If we consider Che's speech at the Second Economic Seminar of Afro-Asian Solidarity was delivered on February 25 of the same year, we see Anderson's argument is compelling. After that speech, when he returns to Cuba, Che is met at La Havana airport by Fidel, Aleida March and Osvaldo Dorticós, which is construed in the documentary as an example of the embarrassment and conflict caused by Che's speech at Algiers. In comparison, Anderson refers to a completely different interpretation of the airport episode:

Maurice Halperin<sup>104</sup> saw it rather differently. “I was astonished when I read the speech a few days later,” Halperin wrote. “When I asked a high official in the ministry of foreign trade what the meaning was of Che’s blast, he answered with a broad grin: ‘It represents the Cuban point of view.’” Halperin concluded that this was quite likely. *He thought that Fidel’s appearance at the airport to welcome Che back to Cuba personally was his way of showing his approval.* Indeed, Che’s speech in Algiers was later printed in *Política Internacional*, the official government quarterly, which would seem to erase any doubts about Fidel’s own position (Anderson, 716, *my emphasis*).

Moreover, Anderson refers to Fidel warning Alendr Alexiev, the Soviet ambassador in Havana, of Guevara's expedition to Congo. According to Anderson,

"Fidel’s whispered confidence to Alexiev about Che’s mission was no doubt a discreet hint to Moscow that Fidel remained loyal despite his public bearbaiting. Che might be off assisting a predominantly Chinese-backed revolutionary faction in the Congo, but that should not affect relations between the Kremlin and Havana" (729).

As we can see, according to Anderson's perspective, although there were certainly political differences between Havana, Moscow and Beijin, especially at the public level, there was also a lot of backstage negotiation. That is why I consider Fidel's and Che's speeches, as part of

<sup>104</sup> A specialist in Latin American issues, a former member of the Communist Party of the USA, and a US diplomat working at the Office of Strategic Services, he was later accused of being a Soviet spy. After the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee started to investigate him in 1953, he fled to Mexico and later to the USSR. He accepted Guevara's invitation to go to Cuba in 1962, where he spent five years, working for the government. After political tensions, he moved to Canada where he became a political science professor. He died in 1995.

the political public discourse, should not be considered separately of the more covert negotiations and plans, which are a crucial part of the political and historical contexts.

Unfortunately, there are two instances of reproducing Guevara's sentences out of context. The first is Guevara's speech at the First Seminar on Economic Planning held at Algiers in 1963<sup>105</sup> – in the film, the footage does not identify the name, location or date of the seminar. The excerpt, previously quoted in this chapter, gives the impression Guevara is first and foremost criticizing the bureaucratism of the USSR, when in fact it exemplifies a mistake committed by the Cubans in attempting to apply the Soviet experience of economic planning to the Cuban reality (Guevara 1963b). Out of context, the excerpt becomes criticism against the USSR rather than an instance of self-critique. In fact, a few months prior, Guevara (1963) had published an article entitled "*Contra el burocratismo*" in the magazine *Cuba Socialista*. Similar to the 1963 speech at Algiers, the article presents an assessment of the socialist planning in Cuba in both political and economical terms. Hence, Guevara's speech at Algiers was not the first time he was addressing the issue.

The second speech at Algiers,<sup>106</sup> at the Afro-Asian Conference in 1965, as quoted in the film, not only removes the context but also alters the structure of the quoted sentences. Regarding the context, the speech is not a direct attack at the USSR, but rather a direct attack on neocolonialism, which accounts for much of the speech. To counter such international threat that looms over the former colonies, Guevara proposes a socialist effort at an international level. In fact, he even refers positively to the USSR and China twice as examples of such international effort, one regarding the agreement of selling sugar at "prices set above those of the so-called free world sugar market", the

<sup>105</sup> The version consulted for this thesis is in Spanish, published on the website of the Cuban Revista Infodir, and there is a reference to Centro de Estudios Che Guevara, which is headed by Aleida March. It is available at <http://bvs.sld.cu/revistas/infdir/n1311/infdir0813.htm>

<sup>106</sup> The version consulted for this thesis is in English, published on the Marxists Internet Archive, with references to both 2005 Ocean Press's Che Reader, Aleida March and Che Guevara Studies Center. It is available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/02/24.htm>

other regarding the military aid China and the USSR provided to the Cubans (3, 7). Besides removing its context, the first quoted sentence in the film is transformed from a conditional sentence to an assertion, probably for dramatic emphasis. In the film, the quoted period is "the socialist countries are to some extent the accomplices of imperialist exploitation. The development of countries on the road to liberation must be paid for by the Socialist countries", while the original is:

How can it be "mutually beneficial" to sell at world market prices the raw materials that cost the underdeveloped countries immeasurable sweat and suffering, and to buy at world market prices the machinery produced today in today's big automated factories?

*If we establish that kind of relation between the two groups of nations [socialist countries and former colonies], we must agree that the socialist countries are, in a certain way, accomplices of imperialist exploitation (Guevara 1965, my emphasis).*

Notice the highlighted sentence corresponds only to the first quoted sentence in the film. The second quoted sentence was taken from another part of the speech:

We said that each time a country is liberated it is a defeat for the world imperialist system. But we must agree that the break is not achieved by the mere act of proclaiming independence or winning an armed victory in a revolution. It is achieved when imperialist economic domination over a people is brought to an end. Therefore, it is a matter of vital interest to the socialist countries for a real break to take place. And it is our international duty, a duty determined by our guiding ideology, to contribute our efforts to make this liberation as rapid and deep-going as possible. A conclusion must be drawn from all this: the socialist countries must help pay for the development of countries now starting out on the road to liberation. We state it this way with no intention whatsoever of blackmail or dramatics, nor are we looking for an easy way to get closer to



the Afro-Asian peoples; it is our profound conviction (Guevara 1965, my emphasis).

As we can see, the original first sentence is a powerful critique, but is still hypothetical, conditional, and modalized by the expression "in a certain way". It is not an assertion. And the context is very important because Guevara emphasizes the challenges the newly independent colonies face during the 1960s, achieving political freedom but still facing military invasion, like Congo, or economic dependency. Furthermore, the recently independent countries, whose economies are usually dependent on exporting a handful of raw materials, not only have to find new trade partners – the USA would not trade with Cuba anymore after the nationalization of oil refineries, for example – but also have to deal with the lack of capital, experts and technology. To make a revolution or to conquer formal political independence are, therefore, not enough. Former colonies must find ways to develop their countries, which Guevara proposes can be achieved through a combination of economic planning, a socialist state and support from the socialist countries – mainly USSR and China.

Notice the original version of the speech says the socialist countries must *help* pay for the development of countries, while the quoted version in the film says the development of countries must *be paid* by the socialist countries. As we can see, the film alters the sentence for dramatic purposes. The problem is that the meaning of what Guevara is proposing is also drastically altered, from a new level of international cooperation against neocolonialism, to a form of utopian charity. In the film, after (mis-) quoting the second speech at Algiers, two testimonies represent Guevara's speech as a direct attack on the USSR and as a utopian proposition. First, Habel says "Che's speech was a frontal attack, a direct criticism of Soviet trade policy with the Third World. It was unheard of!" (Dugowson 1998). Although I agree with her Che was in fact criticizing the trade policy of the socialist countries, the USSR and China, I disagree it was a frontal attack. Instead, as I have argued, it was a direct criticism of neocolonialism and a proposition of a new level of international cooperation between socialist countries and Third World countries committed to socialism. In other words, Guevara recognized the importance of the trade agreements regarding the selling price and of the military aid, but he also indicated those efforts were

insufficient to help the recently liberated countries to promote development.

The second testimony is of René Depestre,<sup>107</sup> who says "Che's speech proved to be extremely subversive as it rejected the rules of international commerce applied by other Socialist countries when trading with the Third World. He wanted Socialist countries to forget all notions like value and give handouts!" (Dugowson 1998). Depestre's testimony suggests Che was proposing Third World countries to either set the selling price randomly and/or receive loans without paying them. Both ideas are wrong. In order to discuss them, I have to briefly visit the realm of Marxist economy, although I do not want to digress.

Regarding the issue of the selling price, it entangles the problems of value and of capital accumulation. In other words, for a country to develop its industry in capitalism, the trade value of the final product must pay beyond the costs of labor, raw materials, machinery and capital, it must also allow accumulation of capital. According to Ruy Mauro Marini (2005), the flood of commodities and raw materials, offered internationally by the former colonies, helped reduce the cost of the work force in First World countries, increasing therefore profits and the accumulation process (147). Such accumulation led to the increase in the productivity through the development of the division of labor and of machinery. In other words, trade between First and Third World countries led to the increase in the productivity of the former.

Third World countries, however, struggle with the lack of capital and machinery, and the low productivity. In addition, there is the problem of unequal exchange rates, as the prices of commodities and raw materials exported by Third World countries tend to fall while the prices of manufactured goods and machinery exported by First World

<sup>107</sup> René Depestre is a Haitian poet and novel writer who criticized the dictator François Duvalier and, as a result, was exiled. He spent twenty years in Cuba. Like Benigno, Depestre also defected from Cuba, but in 1978. Unlike Guevara, who was a medic by background but was both student and author of marxist economy texts, Depestre is an expert in literature and perhaps he is not the most qualified person to critique Guevara's second speech at Algiers, which is rooted in the marxist Theory of Value and in ideas that later would be developed by the Theory of Dependency.

countries tend to be stable. The fall of the prices of commodities is explained by First World countries selling manufactured goods and machinery at prices superior to their value, causing a valor transference from the Third World countries to the First World countries (Marini, 152). In order to compensate the comparative loss of value, the Third World countries resort to the cheap and abundant labor, increasing the exploitation of its own work force. As a result, international commerce based on trade value should not be understood merely as a matter of accountancy since it has dire political consequences: at the same time it entangles the development of a few nations, it causes the underdevelopment of others.

So, Guevara is right in proposing a form of international commerce that is not based on trade value. Likewise, Marini affirms the necessity of subverting economic relations based on trade value instead of merely arguing for equivalent commerce between nations, which is simply an impossibility in capitalism. Therefore, to be independent at an economic level as well, nations must rid themselves of an economy based on trade value both in their own territories and in international commerce. In other words, it can only be achieved under Socialism. Therefore, Guevara's proposal is indeed subversive but it is in accordance with Marxism and with the ideas developed by Marini.

Beyond setting prices above the capitalist world market and providing military aid to revolutions, Guevara takes the discussion of internationalism to another level. He aims at two obstacles in the development of former colonies, lack of capital and technology. Guevara (1965) proposes Socialist countries offer international loans to be annually paid by the recipient countries in fixed quantities of goods (4) – use value<sup>108</sup> instead of trade value<sup>109</sup>. This is a very interesting

<sup>108</sup> According to Karl Marx, "the utility of a thing makes it a use value. But this utility is not a thing of air. Being limited by the physical properties of the commodity, it has no existence apart from that commodity. A commodity, such as iron, corn, or a diamond, is therefore, so far as it is a material thing, a use value, something useful. [...] Use values become a reality only by use or consumption: they also constitute the substance of all wealth, whatever may be the social form of that wealth. In the form of society we are about to consider [capitalist society], they are, in addition, the material depositories of exchange value" (n.p.).

proposal, especially if we consider how "developing" countries such as Brazil have become dependent of foreign direct investment. Unlike capitalist loans, which must be paid with interest, draining the economy rather than developing it, Guevara's proposal at the same time addresses the lack of capital issue and allows a counterpart in fixed quantities of goods, which is in accordance with a planned economy, supplying the socialist countries with the necessary commodities and raw materials, and escaping the previously discussed traps of trade value and transference of value.

The other measure proposed by Guevara addresses the lack of technicians and the technological dependency of Third World countries. He proposes Socialist countries to send technicians to aid the organization of technical education (4). This is a very important policy since unequal trade does not happen only between the exchange of commodities and manufactured goods but also between advanced technology and older technology. According to Marini,

"the industrialization in Latin America corresponds to a new international division of labor based on transferring to the dependent countries inferior stages of the industrial production – such as steel and iron industry – and reserving the most advanced to the imperialist

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<sup>109</sup> Trade value, or exchange value as Marx calls it, "at first sight, presents itself as a quantitative relation, as the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort, a relation constantly changing with time and place. [...]A given commodity, e.g., a quarter of wheat is exchanged for x blacking, y silk, or z gold, &c. – in short, for other commodities in the most different proportions. Instead of one exchange value, the wheat has, therefore, a great many. But since x blacking, y silk, or z gold &c., each represents the exchange value of one quarter of wheat, x blacking, y silk, z gold, &c., must, as exchange values, be replaceable by each other, or equal to each other. Therefore, first: the valid exchange values of a given commodity express something equal; secondly, exchange value, generally, is only the mode of expression, the phenomenal form, of something contained in it, yet distinguishable from it" (n.p.). According to Marx, exchange value is the mode of expression of Value, that is, "the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour time socially necessary" for the production of a certain article (n.p.).

centers – such as electronic, alternative energies" (Marini, 175, *my translation*).

Beyond the issue of the speeches at Algiers, the film represents Guevara as a good communist and a makeshift economist, building on the famous anecdote regarding Che's role as the president of the National Bank. Actually, representations of Guevara tend to emphasize his combat experience and his ideas about the New Man, while frequently ignoring or downplaying his role in the economic transition in Cuba. As I hope to have demonstrated, Guevara, despite not being an economist, understood a lot about economics. In fact, Michel Löwy (1999) dedicates a whole section of his book, *O Pensamento de Che Guevara*, to the economic debate that went on publicly between 1963 and 1964 in the Cuban press. Löwy lists twelve different participants of such debate, among them are the Finance minister Luis Álvarez Romm, the minister of Foreign Commerce Alberto Mora, the French marxian economist Charles Bettelheim, and marxist Ernest Mandel. Guevara is credited with seven articles. Furthermore, Helen Yaffe (2009) highlights Guevara's contribution to the creation of the Budgetary Finance System, developed in the Ministry of Industries, and his initiative in different areas, from accounting to research and development (3). Interestingly, she says the division of the Ministry of Industries into smaller ministries, such as the Sugar Ministry, was part of his policy (261), what challenges the film version of losing control over the sugar sector as a political disavowal.

Another issue to be considered briefly concerns the voice-over narration. Unlike Savio (1972), who keeps voice-over narration to a minimum, often appearing within the frame during interviews or at least asking the questions in voice-off, Dugowson's film does not show the interviewer or his voice. As a result, we have a bodiless, portentous and ubiquitous voice which seems to be in complete control of events. Likewise, Sarah Kozloff (1988) discusses "the authoritative, booming narrator making grand statements about world events" in *The March of Time*, a short film series shown in movie theaters between 1935 and 1951. According to Kozloff, the narrator, Westbrook Van Voorhis, was referred to as "The Voice of God" (29). Ian Marshall, the narrator in Dugowson's film, can be considered a more contemporary version of the voice of god. Although the technique of voice-over narration can have different applications, Ian Marshall's authoritative omniscient narration

in *El Che* seems to reinforce the feeling of entrapment of Che as tragic hero, of his declining power.

Another issue to be briefly considered are the references to Quijote in the film. The first one is in the beginning of the movie, in the docudrama sequence of the motorcycle journey. While we watch the reenactment of Ernesto and Alberto riding the Norton 500 motorcycle, we hear in voice-over: "he has read his *Don Quijote* and his steed Rocinante is an old motorcycle that he shares with a doctor friend" (Dugowson 1998). The second reference is made by Dupestre, who asks

"[...]Was there a rift between Fidel and Che? Or was it a friendly arrangement? A sort of division of labor: I stay in Cuba, given my position as pragmatic leader to solve the current problems of the Cuban revolution while you mount your 'Rocinante' and foment revolution in the rest of South America...I wonder" (Dugowson 1998).

Although Dupestre's allusion to Guevara as Quijote seems ironical, it is unclear which of the two possibilities he thinks is right. The film, however, chooses the first version, that of a rift between Fidel and Guevara. As a result, instead of the ironic contrast between Quijote's chivalry expectations and his redundancy in the journey, the film focus on the problems and mistakes in the expeditions to Congo and Bolivia, reinforcing the tragic fall of the hero. However, there is still the possibility of an ironical reading of the film.

Irony, as discussed before in this chapter, is perceptible in the juxtaposition of footage of Fidel, who is talking about his friendship with Guevara, with the washhouse in Vallegrande and the four shots in voice-over, a reenactment of Che's death. As a result, the sequence raises suspicion over Fidel's words and over his loyalty to Guevara. But beyond that, there is still room for an ironical interpretation of *El Che*, more specifically concerning the theme of passion in Salles' and Dugowson's films. In the former, the passionate hero does not yet have the means to realize his struggle for the liberation of the continent. Nonetheless, his passion and internal journey led him to rise as a hero. In Dugowson's film, it can be argued that the very passion of the hero has led him to his ruin, as the passionate rebel is enveloped and

outmanouvered by the pitfalls of power. However, I consider the tragic plot to be a more salient feature of the film.

## CONCLUSION

Che Guevara is a very polemic figure, having been celebrated as a hero (Kumm 1967; 1997), portrayed as a villain (Daniels 2004; Berman 2004; Llosa 2005), and having achieved mythological status (Fernanda Bueno 2007; J.P. Spicer-Escalante 2014). Furthermore, many scholars focus on the reification of Guevara's image, arguing the myth and ubiquity of Che Guevara have precluded his political and historical meaning. That is the case of Llosa (2005), Bueno (2007), Kemp (2012) and Escalante (2014), who basically understand the reification process as the only possible explanation – or the most important, regarding Kemp – for the present symbolic endurance of Che Guevara.

However, as discussed in Chapter One, I argue such perspective is shortsighted because it focuses only on the process of distancing the image from its original context, overvaluing it. According to Barthes (1991), myth is a second order semiological system, that is, the first order sign becomes a signifier (113). In the process of becoming form again, the first order meaning is deformed, impoverished (116). However, the first order meaning does not vanish or is excluded because the second order form depends on it to exist. In fact, the meaning is a reservoir of history where form is able to feed and hide (117). Because of myth's dependency on the first order meaning, the separation between them can never be completed. Hence, there is always the possibility of challenging myth, which could be achieved through the creation of a third semiological order or by re-historicizing Guevara.

*The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) is a good example of the former, since it creates a new mythology of Che Guevara, re-energizing the myth in the process. After all, those who tell the story of Guevara tend to emphasize his role as guerrilla leader and as a communist, and Salles's film is probably the first cinematic project to devote itself entirely to the period of Guevara's life prior to the guerrilla. Savio (1972) had indeed given much attention to Guevara's formative years in the first part of his documentary, but his leadership in Cuba and in Bolivia is also discussed in the other two parts of the film. In contrast, *The Motorcycle Diaries* moves away from the guerrilla years altogether and from the typical mythical representations of Guevara. Such



resolution can be perceived in interviews of key members of the crew. For example, Jorge Drexler, the author of the Oscar winning song *Al Otro Lado Del Río*, was furious upon discovering Carlos Santana would perform his song wearing a Che t-shirt. He said "I would not have worn a Che t-shirt. The great thing about this film is that it does not depict the icon, but the human being" (Drexler 2005b, *my translation*).

Likewise, Walter Salles said in an interview "I was very careful not to highlight future aspects of Che and to completely distance myself from the myth the marketing has appropriated to sell posters and t-shirts" (Salles 2004, *my translation*). And in another interview, Salles declared "[showing the humanity of Guevara] was the most important thing for us, not to look for the iconic image but on the other hand, go in the opposite direction to try to understand the man behind the myth" (Salles 2004b). As we can see in the excerpts above, Salles talks about distancing himself from the myth and about historicizing Guevara. A similar point is manifested by Bernal, who said "[i]t is actually when you study the life, the icon ceases to exist and becomes a human being, which is what he was and what made him so wonderful...that it could be anyone, it could be you or me" (2004c).

Interestingly, although Drexler, Salles and Bernal insist on the humanity of Ernesto in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004), Guevara's story in the film becomes associated with a new dose of idealism, of a common man who became a hero. In fact, the same issue was addressed by Salles, who said

"he also makes us understand that it's not utopian to ask for change. [...] On the contrary, what Guevara tells us is that you can't live without idealism. This is basically why he still resonates with us. You have somebody who kept his integrity to the end; he was faithful to himself from the beginning to the very last day of his journey" (Salles 2004b).

Interestingly, the above quoted excerpt captures much of the film's appeal: an effort to re-politicize Guevara that is associated with a romanticized idealism.

Indeed, the combination of the film's focus on Guevara's first journey through Latin America, Ernesto's internal journey from an Argentine middle class medical student to an engaged leader, and Bernal's embodiment of young Ernesto Guevara, results in a new mythology of a common man turned hero that also re-energizes the myth by giving it a young body and by bringing him closer to the twenty-first-century audience. The film manages to ground the characters in the past while making Ernesto's internal journey, precipitated by the oppression he encounters along the way, very contemporary. But there is a certain ambivalence in the film. On one hand, *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004), understood as a third semiological order, successfully challenges the myth by politicizing and historicizing Che as young Ernesto. On the other, the film does not completely break with the myth since the political and historical aspects are subordinate to the narrative of the heroic rise.

The sentimentalization of the narrative, however, is well balanced by different types of fragmentation. As discussed in Chapter two, the instances of fragmentation also frustrate the expectation of a liner adventure through a homogeneous continent. The first example of fragmentation we discussed was the gradual break down of the motorcycle, which becomes a hindrance, forcing the travelers to interact with and rely more on the different peoples they meet along the way. Furthermore, there is also geographical fragmentation, since the travelers cross different biomes, such as the Pampas, Patagonia, the lake region between Argentina and Chile, the Atacama desert, the Andes, and the Amazon river. Yet another form of fragmentation is the issue of class and of privilege that is noticeable in the sequences at Chichina's house and in the desert at night. In the former, the economic differences between Chichina's family and the two travelers is cause for disdain and distrust. In contrast, the peasant couple searching for work at the mines react positively towards the two Argentine travelers, who travel not because of work but because they like it.

Furthermore, there are also instances of cultural and linguistic fragmentation. For example, the travelers are exposed to native languages, such as in the truck sequence where Ernesto unsuccessfully tries to communicate with an indigenous man and his father, or in the Cuzco sequence where Ernesto and Alberto learn from a group of Quechua women. In the former, besides the linguistic barrier between

the hitchhikers, the different attitudes towards the blind cow reveal cultural fragmentation. In the latter, there is an interesting contact between the culture of the urban students and the culture of the rural Quechua women. In addition, there are also examples of regionalism in the different words employed in the sequence at the food market in Temuco – possibly revealing different eating habits of Chileans and Argentinians – and in the sequence at the ship on the Amazon river – revealing tensions between Luz's lifestyle and that of the native riparian inhabitants. Moreover, other examples of cultural fragmentation are present in Ernesto's difficulty to recognize *mate* in Temuco, the contrast between Machu Pichu and Peru, and Ernesto's mistaking mambo for tango.

Another issue worth mentioning is how the anti-colonial or postcolonial discourse aids the development of the character, by making him more aware of Latin American problems and more politicized. Probably the first example is the metonymical capacity of the Chilean peasant couple to represent the proletariat, which is symbolically reinforced by the Anaconda Mining Company, a foreign corporation, separating the couple at the Chuquicamata mine. Another interesting example is Ernesto's internal monologue, which we hear in voice-over as he writes on his diary in the Machu Pichu ruins: "[t]he Incas had an advanced knowledge of astronomy, medicine, mathematics, among other things. But the Spanish invaders had the gunpowder. What would America be like today if things had been different?" (Salles 2004, my translation). Furthermore, while Ernesto is reading Mariátegui's book at the hospital infirmary, we hear Doctor Pesce's voice-over: "Mariátegui basically talks about the revolutionary potential of the indigenous peoples and of the peasants in Latin America. He says the indigenous issue is in reality a land issue and that the revolution will not be a mere copy, but it will be a heroic creation of our people" (Salles 2004, my translation) superimposed with cinemagraphs of native peoples Ernesto met.

Yet another example is Ernesto's speech during his birthday party at the San Pablo leper colony:

"we believe, and after this journey more firmly than ever, that the division of America into unstable and illusory nations is completely fictional. We constitute a single mestizo race from

Mexico to the Magellan Straits. And so, in an attempt to rid myself of the weight of small-minded provincialism, I propose a toast to Peru and to a United Latin America" (Salles 2004).

As we can see, there are two significant elements in Ernesto's speech: challenging the national borders and the reference to the mestizo race. The postcolonial implications of his speech are reinforced by the symbolical crossing from the North margin of the Amazon river to the South, where the leper patients live.

As discussed in Chapter two, the San Pablo leper colony sequence offers many examples of Ernesto's humanity that could be perhaps interpreted from a religious perspective. However, I argue the character representation and the character development do not fit the criteria for an interpretation based on the martyr archetype because Ernesto becomes increasingly bold, to the point of challenging the authority of Mother Superior twice. Furthermore, Ernesto's deeds in the film do not lend themselves explicitly to any cause but his own search for self-discovery, not a spiritual quest. In addition, the absence of a body or of bodily suffering limits the possibility of a martyr archetype. However, the film does construe the motif of suffering, established by Ernesto's three asthma attacks and reinforced by his dialogue with Silvia, but also extended to other forms found throughout the narrative, such as sickness, misery and injustice. As a result, surviving the seizure of one's land, political persecution, lack of education and employment becomes an act of resistance in itself, a way of challenging death.

Finally, the sentimentalization of Ernesto's internal journey is balanced by the seventeen cinemagraphs, the fore and afterward, cultural, linguistic, economic and geographical fragmentation, and Alberto's role as an additional affective filter. The cinemagraph call attention to the making of the film and to cinematic language, allow the actors/non-actors to appear as real subjects and can be understood as a call to act upon the "realities" we as audience have just been introduced to.

Regarding the documentary *El Che: Investigating a Legend* (Dugowson 1998), its most salient feature is the tragic narrative. The documentary focuses on the period of Guevara's life between 1956 and 1967 and gives a lot of emphasis to the relations between Castro and

Guevara. The expectation for a tragedy is introduced early in the film, in the pre-credit sequence, when the voice-over heterodiegetic narrator announces "[d]ead at thirty nine, the incurable romantic is the hero of a tragedy that changed his life in a blaze of destiny" (Dugowson 1998). Afterwards, the tragical cue is reinforced when the voice-over comments on Fidel meeting Guevara by saying "[d]ifferent conceptions of revolution and the pitfalls of power will give their story Shakespearean dimensions" (Dugowson 1998).

During the Cuban Revolution sequence, the film introduces the idea of exceptionality of Che Guevara, since he is a foreigner fighting for the liberation of Cuba and because of the victory at Santa Clara. Indeed, his position of leadership is accompanied by the vulnerability of isolation and the exceptionality of the leader, which is built upon Guevara's asceticism and on his conception of a New Man. According to Janette Habel, Guevara becomes a target for the criticism of foreign communist delegations, who were trying to discredit him. Guevara's vulnerability is further reinforced by the voice-over: "as long as Fidel had confidence in him, the pressure of the anti-Che lobby had no effect, but the Soviet presence in Cuba was becoming greater" (Dugowson 1998). At this point, the conditions for the fall of the hero are set since he is powerful yet vulnerable and his fate depends on pleasing Fidel.

Then, Guevara commits the mistake of criticizing the USSR by stating "we mindlessly imitated our brother nations and this was an error. Not a serious one, but it has hindered our development and contributed dangerously to a phenomenon that must be fought energetically within a Socialist revolution, bureaucratization" (Dugowson 1998). As a result, Guevara loses control over the sugar sector, a disavowal, and he is sent by Castro on a series of international trips. At this point in the narrative, the fall of the tragic hero has initiated, although it has not gained momentum yet, which happens after the second speech criticizing the USSR, at Algiers in 1965. The second speech, according to the voice-over, interviews of Janette Habel and René Dupestre, is a direct attack on the USSR's international trade policy.

As a result of the mistakes committed by the hero, the action is reversed with his disavowal in the economical and political fronts, forcing Guevara to clandestinely go to Congo. It is in Congo that Che as

tragic hero begins to grasp the extent of his fall. The first sign things are not well is the contrast between the Cubans' expectations and what they find in the Congo. Furthermore, he learns about the death of Celia de La Serna, his mother. And his situation gets even worse as Che learns about Fidel reading his farewell letter in which he resigns his Cuban citizenship, rank and position at the Cuban Communist Party, a letter that was supposed to be read only in case Guevara was killed in action, according to Benigno's testimony.

Hence, the hero's discovery of his own predicament is completed with Fidel's betrayal of Che. Following the defeat in Congo, further humiliated, Guevara has no choice but to go on to Bolivia. Likewise, the guerrilla in Bolivia faces many problems, such as the lack of support by Mario Monje, the Secretary General of the Bolivian Communist Party, in fulfilling the promise of establishing an urban network. Furthermore, a number of ill chosen recruits defect and, following capture, offer valuable intelligence to the Bolivian Army. Aided by the US Army Rangers and by the CIA agent Félix Ramos, the Bolivian Army encircles the guerrilla. Obviously, the defeat is imminent. Guevara and remaining *guerrilleros* are trapped. Guevara is arrested, interrogated and executed. Gary Prado's testimony suggests Fidel's responsibility in sending Guevara to Bolivia. In addition, Benigno attributes the guilt for the failure in Bolivia to Fidel, Monje and Moscow.

After the hero's mistake, the reversal of the action and the discovery, comes the moment of suffering or death. Julia Cortez, the schoolteacher at La Higuera, said she found the body with arms wide open. Then, there is an alternation of archival footage and photographs of Che's body. There is similarity between the image of his corpse and the representations of Christ's dead body, not only physically, but also regarding the representation of the sacrifice as something beautiful. Furthermore, the frontal stare entangles possible religious connotations. In addition, Kemp points out a striking resemblance between Freddy Alborta's photograph of Che's body and Andrea Mantegna's painting Dead Christ. As a result, we can compare the representation of Guevara's death in the film to the process of re-conceptualization regarding the defeat of Jesus. In other words, the tragic death comes to symbolize the ultimate sacrifice instead of plain defeat. Afterwards, the wash house in Vallegrande, where the corpse was displayed in 1967, is represented as a shrine.

Interestingly, the film departs from Guevara's mythological and legendary level, attempts to historicize him, and returns to the myth. But the symbolic return to the realm of myth presents a problem, since the aim of the film is to investigate the legend, that is, to move away from the realm of myth and towards the historical individual. Although the film does historicize him, history in this documentary is subordinate to story. In other words, the tragic plot is the most salient feature of the film, favoring a symbolic return to myth for dramatic effect. Although very seductive and compelling, such narrative structure actually celebrates Che as the epitome of virtue and self-sacrifice, lending itself more to the reproduction of the myth rather than to challenging it. In addition, there are also problems in rendering the historical information in the film.

The first problem discussed in Chapter Three is the epic and tragic tone of the film. By focusing on Guevara's deeds, during the Cuban revolution, and on his shortcomings, during the Congo and Bolivia campaigns, the drama builds up. However, a side effect is the individualization of collective history. Furthermore, other important people during the Cuban revolution, such as Camilo Cienfuegos and Celia Sanchez, are not even mentioned. Instead, the narrative focus on Fidel and Che in order to establish the argument of Fidel's betrayal. Moreover, by focusing on the period between 1956 and 1967, little attention is given to Guevara's childhood and formative journeys around Latin America.

But one of the biggest problems is relying on a single person – Benigno – who fought with Che to offer insight on what he said and did on the battlefield. In fact, the whole letter sequence is based on Benigno's testimony of what Guevara supposedly said when he found out Fidel read the letter. The problem is his version of Guevara's reaction is not corroborated by other sources and even his participation in the Congo guerrilla is disputable. For example, Villegas only mentions Benigno's participation in the Cuban revolution and in the Bolivian guerrilla (328). Likewise, Guevara makes no reference to Benigno in his Congo diary, while he makes several references to him in his Bolivian diary.

The other problems concern selecting excerpts of Che's letter to Fidel and of the two speeches at Algiers while not making the selection

overt. As a result, the audience is led to believe the film versions of the letter and speeches are complete. Regarding the letter, Dugowson cuts parts of the original footage of Fidel reading the letter, pasting them together seamlessly, removing the letter's ambiguity. Regarding the first speech at Algiers, the excerpt quoted in the film is removed from its context, altering the meaning in the process. The excerpt gives the impression Guevara is first and foremost criticizing the bureaucratism of the USSR, when in fact it exemplifies a mistake committed by the Cubans in attempting to apply the soviet experience of economic planning to the Cuban reality (Guevara 1963b).

Likewise, the second speech is also removed from its context. Instead of a direct attack on soviet international trade, it was in fact an attack on neocolonialism. Furthermore, the first quoted sentence in the film is transformed from a conditional and modalized sentence to an assertion, probably for dramatic emphasis. The second quoted sentence, taken from another part of the speech, is also altered: from the socialist countries must *help* pay for the development of countries, it becomes the development of countries must *be paid* by the socialist countries. As a result, Guevara's proposal is also altered, from a new level of international cooperation against neocolonialism, to a form of utopian charity. In addition, the film's representation of Guevara as a good communist and a makeshift economist, further reinforced by Dupestre's simplistic critique of Guevara's second speech, reproduces traditional representations of Guevara which tend to emphasize his combat experience and his ideas about the New Man, while frequently ignoring or downplaying his role in the economic transition in Cuba.

Another issue briefly discussed concerns the voice-over narration, a bodiless, portentous and ubiquitous voice which seems to be in complete control of events, characteristics common to the narrator of *The March of Time* and to Ian Marshall, the narrator in Dugowson's film. Although the technique of voice-over narration can have different applications, Ian Marshall's authoritative omniscient narration in *El Che* seems to reinforce the feeling of entrapment of Che as tragic hero, of his declining power.



### Overall assessment and suggestions for future research

Overall, I consider *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) to be a successful film, especially if we consider its multiplicity, since it is a biopic, a road movie, and an adaptation of Ernesto Guevara's diary and Alberto Granado's memoir. Furthermore, I consider the film's greatest achievement not to be historicizing Ernesto Guevara, which it does satisfactorily, but creating a mythology of Che as young Ernesto, actualizing the frozen image, while at the same time balancing the sentimentalization of the character development and presenting the audience with cultural and linguistic fragmentation that enriches the cinematic experience.

Because of the diversity of issues entailed by Salles's film, there is a number of possibilities for future research. For instance, it would be interesting to analyze the representation of characters and their discourse based on gender. Furthermore, the film presents a rich variety of different rhythms from Argentina, Chile and Peru. Therefore, a deeper analysis of the importance of the music in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) would be meaningful. In addition, because of Salles's documentary background, and the interaction between actors and non-actors, a comparative study between *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles 2004) and the documentary *Tracing Che* (Lawrance Elman 2009) would also be interesting. Moreover, since Walter Salles directed both *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *On the Road* (2012), a comparative study between both films in terms of film adaptation and road movies might be relevant.

Overall, *El Che: Investigating a Legend* (Dugowson 1998) presents a lot of information about Guevara and of particular significance are the interviews of the school teacher at La Higuera, Nino de Guzmán, and Gary Prado, who could not have been interviewed by Savio in 1972 for political reasons. Furthermore, the film gives evidence of CIA involvement – Félix Ramos is actually Félix Rodríguez – and hints at Mario Monje's betrayal, although it does so ambiguously and does not link it to Moscow's policy of peaceful coexistence – unlike Savio who presents such link. However, the film favors a seductive tragical narrative of Shakespearean dimensions instead of a more subtle approach, such as Savio's. Although innovative, the use of a tragical plot in a biographical documentary about Che Guevara ends up reinforcing

the already existent myth of Che Guevara, instead of challenging it. In addition, the epic tone and authoritarian voice-over narration create the effect of voice of god, entrapping Che Guevara in his own story; furthermore, they center responsibility in Che's actions, something we know erases historical context and contributes to the mythologizing process, contradicting the documentary's objective. Finally, the emphasis given to the video footage and photographs of Che's corpse plus the absence of the remains in the beginning and at the end of the film – a phantasmagorical frame – reinforce the myth's ubiquity and the idea of martyrdom.

Regarding suggestions for further research, a comparative study between *El Che: investigating a legend* (Dugowson 1998) and *Che Guevara: Investigating a Myth* (Savio 1972) would be relevant to investigate differences regarding how interviews are conducted, the role of voice-over, and how the different testimonies are organized and woven together. Furthermore, because of contrasting versions regarding Debray and Bustos, it would be interesting to compare *El Che: Investigating a Legend* (Dugowson 1998) and *Sacrificio: Who Betrayed Che Guevara* (Erik Gandini and Tarik Saleh 2001).

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