“Justice is what love looks like in public”

Cornel West
University of Alberta

The politics of the face:
Manifestations of Che Guevara’s image and its collage of renderings and agency

By

Maria-Carolina Cambre

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Theoretical, Cultural and International Studies in Education

Educational Policy Studies

©Maria-Carolina Cambre
Summer 2011
Edmonton, Alberta

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Libraries to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only. Where the thesis is converted to, or otherwise made available in digital form, the University of Alberta will advise potential users of the thesis of these terms.
The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis and, except as herein before provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatsoever without the author's prior written permission.
Examing Committee

Dr. Jennifer R. Kelly (Supervisor)

Dr. Rob Shields (Supervisory Committee)

Dr. Marko Zivkovic (Supervisory Committee)

Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax

Dr. Miriam Cooley

Dr. Peter McLaren
Para el olvidado
Y
La recuperada
Abstract

The politics of the face:
Manifestations of Che Guevara’s image and its collage of renderings and agency

Che Guevara’s image, is seen as a global icon crossing all kinds of social and cultural boundaries, as exemplified in street protests and evidenced by multiple visual messages such as posters, logos, t-shirts and slogans. We are invited, demanded, expected to recount and memorialize. But what exactly are we being asked to remember? This study aims to create an analytical space for understanding this phenomenon as far as it can be observed through its analysis and to provide a starting point for a better perspective of the significance of visual events in public as well as their cultural resonance.

I was initially interested in this image of Guevara and how it worked because I perceived a performative capability to gather people and sanction action that was inherently productive and powerful at a grassroots level. I was curious about vernacular (non institutional) visual communication. Although I acknowledge mass-produced versions of the matrix (source) image, my primary interest is in those renderings acquiring some singularity either through their production or location or in how they have been appropriated and adapted.

This project is a series of encounters with the image and a look at the levels at which it operates and how it moves fluidly between them. I do not wish to locate this image or designate its “address.” Instead, I prefer to examine how it is a locating
how it is a verb as well as a noun. This project contributes to understandings of how images are working in the world and consequently to how people can produce and direct the visual space rather than be relegated to receiving and, more or less passively, consuming images. I hasten to add that though the consumption of images is never passive, the built-in impetus of advertising images encourages passive consumption. The implications of seeing the vernacular image as something that does not fit in established mass media methods of study gestures towards its being a somewhat different phenomenon and it’s worth a closer look at the action or performance of the image itself, what it allows people to do and how this happens.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank-you for participating in a journey, for influencing its direction and the colors of my experiences, for contributing a music to which I have tried to dance, for sharing and giving the gift of your example, your thoughts, your passions and your creativity.

But how do I thank-you when I don’t know your name: when your acts (and your life or death) have shown the pure generosity of expecting no return? Can I reduce you to a kind of Who’s Who list of inspiration moments and people? Should I conform to this “emblematic genre of the Homo academicus” (Waquet 2005, 371)¹ and compress the vast range of kinds of encouragement into a modest formula constrained by authorial strategies?

Yes, “research without indebtedness is suspect” (Waquet 2005, 385). But the knowledge that results from your presence on this journey (our informal community) cannot be measured, and thus cannot be bought, sold or exchanged: it is a gift.

Off screen, then, is where my thanks, a gesture, will have to take place. In keeping with the spirit of reciprocity as well as the performative and participative tone of this dissertation, I include the coupon below (which I dearly hope you will take full advantage of) for you to use in a future time and place. For you that can, please use this coupon in the full confidence that I will honor it, regardless of whether we have ever met before. For those that have left this world, I will do my best to honor you.

THE JULES MOUNTEER CERTIFICATE OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I, MARIA-CAROLINA CAMBRE (ALSO KNOWN AS CC), HEREWITHE NTITLE THE BEARER OF THIS COUPON TO ONE HOT/COLD BEVERAGE OF CHOICE ACCOMPANIED BY A SWEET/SAVORY SNACK AT THE TIME AND PLACE WE ARRANGE WHEN THIS COUPON IS REDEEMED.

I LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU!

# Table of Contents

Table of contents
List of Plates
Papers/pieces may be read in order of preference

## Introduction

Stealing or *steeling* the image?
The failed branding of the “Guerrillero Heroico” image of Che Guevara

“Conclusion”

Alchemy: Collage, ceremony and decolonizing methods for understanding the work of Che Guevara’s image

## Virtual Resurrections:

Che Guevara’s image as place of hope

The efficacy of the virtual: From Che as sign to Che as agent

Revolution Within the Revolution: A Caracas Collective and the Face of Che Guevara
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Table of contents design</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Collage fragment 1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Collage fragment 2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Collage fragment 3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Collage fragment 4</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Collage fragment 5</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Collage fragment 6</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Collage fragment 7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Collage fragment 8</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Collage fragment 9</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Collage fragment 10</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Collage fragment 11</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Collage fragment 12</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Collage fragment 13</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Collage fragment 14</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Collage fragment 15</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Collage fragment 16</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Collage fragment 17</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Collage fragment 18</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Collage fragment 19</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Collage fragment 20</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Collage fragment 21</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Collage fragment 22</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Collage fragment 23</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Collage fragment 24</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Collage fragment 25</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Collage fragment 26</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Collage fragment 27</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Collage fragment 28</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 30: Collage fragment 29</td>
<td>PDF pg.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 31: Collage fragment 30</td>
<td>PDF pg.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 32: Collage fragment 31</td>
<td>PDF pg.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 33: Collage fragment 32</td>
<td>PDF pg.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 34: Collage fragment 33</td>
<td>PDF pg.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 35: Collage fragment 34</td>
<td>PDF pg.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 36: Collage fragment 35</td>
<td>PDF pg.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 37: Collage fragment 36</td>
<td>PDF pg.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 38: Collage fragment 37</td>
<td>PDF pg.100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 39: Collage fragment 38</td>
<td>PDF pg.102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 40: Collage fragment 39</td>
<td>PDF pg.104</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 41: Collage fragment 40</td>
<td>PDF pg.106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 42: Collage fragment 41</td>
<td>PDF pg.108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 43: Collage fragment 42</td>
<td>PDF pg.110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 44: Collage fragment 43</td>
<td>PDF pg.112</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 45: Collage fragment 44</td>
<td>PDF pg.114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 46: Collage fragment 45</td>
<td>PDF pg.116</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 47: Collage fragment 46</td>
<td>PDF pg.118</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 48: Collage fragment 47</td>
<td>PDF pg.120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 49: Collage fragment 48</td>
<td>PDF pg.122</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 50: Collage fragment 49</td>
<td>PDF pg.124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 51: Collage fragment 50</td>
<td>PDF pg.126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 52: Collage fragment 51</td>
<td>PDF pg.128</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 53: Collage fragment 52</td>
<td>PDF pg.129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 54: Collage fragment 53</td>
<td>PDF pg.131</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 55: Collage fragment 54</td>
<td>PDF pg.133</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 56: Collage fragment 55</td>
<td>PDF pg.135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 57: Collage fragment 56</td>
<td>PDF pg.137</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 58: Collage fragment 57</td>
<td>PDF pg.139</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 59: Collage fragment 58</td>
<td>PDF pg.141</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate 60: Collage fragment 59</td>
<td>PDF pg.143</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The politics of the face  
*Manifestations of Che Guevara’s image and its collage of renderings and agency.*

To challenge the regimes of representation  
That govern a society is to conceive of how a  
Politics can transform reality. As this creative  
Struggle moves onward, it is bound to  
Recompose subjectivity and praxis. More  
Often than not, it requires that one leave the  
Realms of the known, and take oneself there  
Where one does not expect, is not expected to be.  
Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red*

This dissertation addresses what happens socially, culturally, and politically when the image of Che Guevara is put to physical use, allowed to work (on us). A rich description of the multiple roles that Guevara’s image plays, the broadly varied nature of his portrayals, from appropriated to inaesthetic, from ambivalent to antagonistic, and from material to virtual help reveal the workings of public non-institutional visual communication through this image. My research on/with/under the image/s of Che
Guevara derived from Alberto Korda’s famous 1960 photograph came to me in pieces. Since I know myself to be an oft-fragmented multiple also, the collage form became not only a method and methodology but also a theoretical lens.

Exploration and discovery were my primary investigatory modes during the project’s progression, and thus collage as a mode of visual and textual representation coinciding with those modes is more fitting than one modeled on control and prediction. “In this process ends shift; the work yields clues that one pursues. In a sense, one surrenders to what the work in process suggests” (Eisner, 2003, p. 378). A collage is made up of pieces and fragments in dialogue across space; sometimes they overlap, sometimes they echo, and sometimes they contradict one another. There is a productive tension in those spaces between pieces where the reader becomes the link between pieces bridging them differently at different times. I use the term “pieces” rather than “chapters” to signal that the series of writings I present as scrolls have no set hierarchy or order, and may be read as free-standing individual segments, though there is a mutual dynamic among them as they co-form a collage. As such, the form of this dissertation is dialectical where the thesis and antithesis are alternately presented, and the reader must negotiate and collaborate in creating his or her unique synthesis. It is a necessarily participative process. In their different ways the pieces in this dissertation all address the central questions: Why are people everywhere interpellated by this image? Does its commoditization matter? What kinds of capacities does it engender for them and how do they see themselves participating in them? Finally, what do this image’s stories indicate in terms of how we interact with images?

**Personal shift in progress**
My desire to work in the spirit embodied by Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s words is the very heart pulsing within this dissertation. Her expression of the transformational nature of human understanding, the risks, and rewards, has become my touchstone throughout the research and writing process, and has repeatedly guided me back from confusing mazes of “the realms of the known” Minh-Ha refers to above, in which I have so often been lost. The experience of undertaking a doctoral program and writing a thesis is an unending creative struggle where I occasionally gain traction enough to compose words and images reflecting the moment of praxis in the inquiry. One of the most difficult ongoing challenges is the repeated reassessment, and regaining of awareness, of the many ways my privileged-world masculine Western training informs my work. As a result, my process involves finding ways to interrupt myself, my privileged self as a holder of Canadian citizenship for example (and all the benefits associated with that alone), in order to open toward both, silenced selves and other ways of knowing. To do this I remember, and recompose my immigrant self, my non-English speaking self, my Argentine and my feminine self.

I also consciously direct myself to open to the narratives and discourses outside the academy and its territorialized disciplines. Listening to elders is vital for this process because the expert knowledge elders are responsible for is shared through modeling, storytelling, and innovation, and emphasizes praxis without ignoring context. Elders such as John Crier, and Dr. Weber-Pillwax impart a holistic yet application-focused knowledge that supports my efforts to “recompose subjectivity and knowledge” (as Minh-Ha writes in the epigraph). As a result this inquiry is informed not only through university-style research but also through an inward journey enabled by my participation
in ceremonies such as sweats and circles that, though they are not explicitly figured here, are part of the foundation.

To elaborate on how I am situating myself, equally vital is spirit work within myself that I embrace as a way to learn to see Minh-Ha’s “regimes of representation” that sometimes govern even my thoughts. “Spirit work” is the term I use to express my efforts to come to grips with the self that is always simultaneously colonizer, colonized and seeking liberation. If, when reading, you detect a split author in this thesis, then you have correctly identified the voice/s. I am fundamentally and irretrievably divided. I inhabit the gap because I am absolutely both/and (Canadian/Argentine; colonizer/colonized; inside/outside the Academy etc.) at the same time as being neither/nor. My positionality has become schizophrenic in the sense of “a splitting of the mind” in orientation. The trope of trickster is useful to describe my positioning as similar to that of one who looks creatively “backward and forward with the same glances” (King, 2008 p. 22). As Graeme Sullivan (2008) expresses it: “trickster is an insider and outsider, dependent and independent, instinctual and adaptable, always a predator and always preyed upon, always on the road and always at home.” (Weblog) While characterized by moments of traction, for the most part my movement is a wandering: not an aimless wandering, but a nomadic seeking that finds a home in homelessness itself. In the words attributed to Italo Calvino, “the ideal place for me is the one in which it is most natural to live as a foreigner.”

Consequently, my goal has been to speak to and with the image of Che Guevara rather than secure a position of mastery over the object of study by speaking about it and ignoring “systems of binary opposition (subject/object; I/It; We/They)” (Minh-Ha, 1991, p. 12). Mastery implies domination, a kind of completion, closure, fixity, and a reduction
in the need to attend to changes or gaps that may have been missed. For this image of Guevara, the Guerrillero Heroico, whose work is never finished and is repeatedly in a process of metamorphosis, there is no place for the either/or of a binary based on control/chaos. Instead there is a process of mutual becoming that this dissertation develops into a snapshot of. Thus the work of displacement (praxis vis-à-vis dialectical space) is necessary to destabilize the “other” from the sphere of acquisition and my self from the appropriating and demarcating sphere of mastery. Part of this involves closely attending to language as something that can be easily “reduced to the status of instrument and/or fine style” and thus “either ignores the “beauty” of language or fetishizes it (as an end point)…” (Minh-Ha, 1991, p. 12).

Overview of the composition

Given that we live in a society saturated with visual images, we have all become accustomed to using and producing images. While we navigate the image-scape successfully, we may not necessarily understand how images work on/with us and what becomes of reality when it is understood as a function of the image’s perspective. Remarkably, insights into the pedagogical function, the power and effect of visual images have not kept pace with this paradigm shift as the continued identification of knowledge with language shows. Images represent an other mode of thinking. They bring new possibilities for imagining social and political change. As a result, I have come to understand these images as not just visual documentation but also as cultural labour. Correspondingly, this dissertation has a parallel structure of text and image where readers are invited to participate in a visual interaction with images of Che Guevara on every
The pieces (parts) of the dissertation/textual collage are as follows:

A journey through the stories about the original photograph, its reproduction and its dissemination juxtaposed with collages that also tell stories about the image. Here, I consider salient literature regarding the photograph’s “biography” to examine the visual climate, accounts and stories of how people respond to the image, and the current debates surrounding the politicization of this image. These discourses around the photo criss-cross it repeatedly providing a rich contextual layer. Primarily I focus on the key debate surround the commoditization of the image and its supposed emptying of power or meaning that has been the point of division around which those who admire Guevara the historical figure confront those who decry him as an assassin. I find the virulence of the debate to be a commanding indicator of the saliency of this image today.

In another piece, I introduce a semiotic conceptual orientation with a substantial review of the literature that also stretches beyond and is probed by accompanying images. I apply theoretical concepts at the core of several debates in image theory, and the politics of aesthetics, while adding philosophical and theoretical analysis and my own questions. In this piece, I explore the limits of C. S. Peirce’s doctrine of signs and follow up on Donald Preziosi’s (2003) elaboration of Roman Jakobson’s addition of a fourth sign type, namely artifice. The inclusion of artifice is underwritten by an understanding of A. J.
Greimas’ (1987) semiotic square as a way to introduce complexity into binary or dual forms. I posit the square is as a dynamic, fractal-like construction. One that “structurates”, to employ Julia Kristeva’s (1991) useful neologism, but is fluid in the sense that it is continually multiplying and contingent, like a fractal. Building on this foundation, I articulate possible connections between “artifice” and the notion of the “virtual” as described by a philosophers and academicians from C.S. Peirce to Rob Shields (2003), as a contribution to this theorizing and explore its relevance to the Che image phenomenon. Overall, it is the desire to find ways to speak about the Guerrillero Heroico activity and resonance that drives the theoretical contributions in this piece.

In another piece attending to lived understanding, I explore the personal experiences of people who have encountered or been impacted by the image in some way through a phenomenological approach where participants share anecdotes about their experiences with this image. In this piece, phenomenologists such as Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Levinas and Roland Barthes provide theoretical lenses for reflection and analysis. Because participants frequently connect hope to their experiences of the image, I expand on this concept as an animating motif, and as a contribution to understandings of the acting/being of the Guerrillero Heroico. This piece also has a separate life as a chapter in an edited volume called: Ecologies of affect: Placing nostalgia, desire and hope (2011).

The phenomenological piece is complemented by another piece resulting from a four-month case study I undertook in Venezuela. Here, I share the results of an ethnographic case study exploring the use of Che Guevara’s image in a well-known Caracas barrio called 23 de enero. A group of youths in urban Caracas, Venezuela have taken up this image as their banner and decorated their entire neighbourhood with it.
Through their words, and the images in their neighbourhood, they teach me about how they come to an understanding of praxis and action with reference to the Che Guevara’s face in their neighbourhood. I draw on Hannah Arendt’s (1959) theory of action as a parallel to what these youth call “actioning.” Their profound concept of “actioning” brings to the fore the performative aspects of the image in a way that scholarly work in the area of the visual has yet to reach. “Actioning” through their use of imagery becomes the codes by which these youth resist, rage, cry and hope in the possibility of throwing off the imperial yoke and all its colonial weight. This piece has also been published in the Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies’ special issue entitled: “Youth, cultural politics and new social spaces in an era of globalization” (September 2009).

Finally, I include a piece underpinned by Indigenous Research Methodologies and principles and manifests itself with an arts-led approach of visual collage. The first layer of this visual piece is a reflection on my own journey in coming to know Che Guevara through his image and becoming someone who can express that knowledge by learning through materially interacting with hundreds of examples of variations on that one picture. Drawing heavily on T. P. Brockelman’s (2001) work, I move towards a theory of collage as brought forward through my experiences with the image. A collaborative composition that I photographed at each stage of the creative process also appears as part of the overall parallel structure of the dissertation as visual research. Hence, these photographs have a double function, they provide a visual discourse juxtaposed with the textual one and they embody the understandings of a number of people manifested through collage. The multivocal and heterotopic result suits for such an image and its divergent legacies. In addition it is a result that works through productive ambiguities to
enable the reader participate in creating meanings in those openings between text and image.

Collage as discursive strategy

Presenting this dissertation as a visual and textual collage mirroring the global collage of Che images has specific and concrete implications for my decisions regarding its overall form and format, as well as for the various foci and ways I move to, from, and between these pieces. I elaborate on possible criteria for the epistemology and ontology of collage in the visually oriented piece functioning as a foundation for the methods I have used. Instead of repeating that explanation here, it is sufficient to broadly outline what I understand the collage form to embody, and why it is the most appropriate discursive strategy for this dissertation.

I am acutely aware that the very idea of writing implies a sequence, and a fairly rational and linear one at that, as a result, writing alone cannot represent the work of this thesis. Additionally, I am motivated by a desire to challenge conventions in academic writing that hide the artifice and artistry of the means of representation. Instead, I prefer to contribute toward opening a space of representation that allows alternative forms. The image is the threshold of that space, creating it, a way out, and offering new knowings and a way to speak my truths. It is altogether too easy and comfortable to forget that what appears as a seamless flow of information following a sequential pattern, be it chronological, thematic, or otherwise, is manipulated and constructed for the reader “to accept a particular version of reality as ‘real’” (cited in Ellsworth 1997 p. 86). To adapt
Elizabeth Ellsworth’s (1997) pedagogic example, we can say that when the reader accepts this construct, he or she “becomes witness to a complete world, a world which seems even to exceed the bounds of the film [or in this case dissertation] frame.” (p. 86) By contrast, the discursive strategy of collage is rooted in ambiguity about any sense of completeness. Instead, it is a form of representation whose hallmarks are its calling of attention to its own construction, and its refusal to bridge the gaps between its pieces. Collage is a form never certain of being whole, always broken but held together. In many ways, collage epitomizes how I feel about the traditional dissertation form itself.

In Spectacle Pedagogy, Charles R. Garoian and Yvonne M. Gaudelius (2008) depict storytelling’s complexity through a verbal image created by Walter Benjamin. His words create an image that I believe accurately depicts how a collage can make a truth claim. Benjamin describes storytelling as:

A piling on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings (cited in Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008 p. 108).

For Benjamin, the actual story, or “perfect narrative” is a virtual entity reached by the listener after listening to the many versions that pile on top of each other. This kind of approach describes the overall discursive strategy I employ in this thesis as evidenced through the various tactics I have already described. Thus, each telling varies slightly in this or that detail, and adapts to its particular time, place, and participants. Each telling is the story and something else, or other that informs it. In taking up the tale, the teller
speaks to his or her understanding of the story and simultaneously merges with it. No one version can constitute the story: they call for each other and are in continual dialogue. Similarly the millions of Che images produced everywhere are layered over time to provide the “perfect” image, one that can only be seen in all the layers that do not show it. The glue that binds these versions, be they of narrative or image, is the imagination of the reader/viewer. The most appropriate form to represent a study on such a phenomenon I contend is collage. Collage is etymologically rooted in the French to glue, or glued together (colle) and evoking the idea of bringing together (co-lect) a variety of things. However, collage needs someone to receive (witness) the “variety of retellings’ and become the place where they are brought together, we can say that the collage pre-exists the viewer in the same way as a story pre-exists the teller.

**Pedagogy of collage**

Juxtaposition and fragmentation are at once destructive and productive: this is the paradox of collage (and, I might add, the trickster nature). Not only can the pieces be understood in any order but they also overlap. A collage approach reveals a process of extraction and reinsertion, or in Deleuzian terms deterritorialization and reterritorialization: so what priorities does that embody? It underlined the processual and unfinished nature of my becoming, as a researcher, helping me find moments of traction in my research and calling me out to new ways of being in the world. It revealed sensitivity to the particular rather than the substitutive. The emphasis on making judgments and experiencing relationships is integral to collage which then allows things to find a place, and rigorously, but without necessarily following set rules: an act/ing of
critique. In the concept of collage I find the challenging of regimes of representation that Minh-Ha writes of and interrogation of rules in general as part of a greater challenge to formulaic and standardizing approaches to research both on the level of approaches and methods, as well as the level of demonstration of results and “findings.” In other words, conventional boundaries are questioned and often blurred. With respect to the reader/viewer, the collage form encourages us to act otherwise in the face of rules: it invites us to emancipate ourselves because for collage the only cage is the one you bring with you.

In keeping with the ontology of collage, conditions of undecidability and impossibility are in play as part of this dissertation’s tactics, thus the pedagogical challenge is not one of transgression, but rather of transformation like finding harmony in a junkyard. In the same sense that a piece of newsprint can be transformed from daily press to a glass beside a bottle of Suze in Picasso’s collage, murmuring about its past life while embracing the new one. And, depending on how you view it, it can again be that piece of newsprint, the “imperfect fit” as educator Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) terms it, providing a dialogical space, or a slippage and mutability constituting an “enunciative space.” (Foucault, M. 1972, p. 115) This enunciative space is neither the space of the newsprints identity as documentary media nor the new form of the glass it resembles in the collage: rather it is the between one and the other, being both yet neither; a flickering moving space. It is a pedagogical space of play between one’s “socially and historically constructed assumptions, one’s rationality, and the forces of uncertainty, indeterminacy, and undecidability” (cited in Garoian, & Gaudelius, 2008, p. 130). Elsewhere:
Gadamer (1986) argues that this to and fro displays a ‘phenomenon of excess,’ the presence of absences that constitutes the object of play and art (p. 12). For example, this excess of undecidability is immanent interstitially in collage narrative by way of shuttling in-between its disparate [pieces] (Garoian, & Gaudelius, 2008, p. 130).

**Shall we dance?**

In sum, this interdisciplinary dissertation mixes and crosses the approaches within phenomenology, semiotics, and ethnography with a collage\(^1\) approach centered in Indigenous Research Methodologies. With reference to university guidelines, I follow the paper format to some extent because some of the pieces in the textual collage are works prepared for publication in the area of Cultural Studies. Yet, it can also be considered an art/ifact thus, I present the dissertation as hybrid because form and content are only artificially extricable, and propositional form is not always able to articulate what is knowable.

As noted, rather than striving for finite understandings, or to achieve “mastery,” I aim to create a space for play, a structural possibility for understanding something about the image of Che Guevara’s face, an image that so many feel they understand and resonate with powerfully, and yet so few are able to account for. And thus we move from guerrilla

---

\(^1\) Both the textual and visual collages are allegorical (from Greek \(\alphaλλος\), allos, “other”, and \(\αγορευειν\), agoreuein, “to speak in public”) in the sense that meaning is multilevel and not always evoked through text.
warfare, to guerrilla artfare, while recognizing that the same processes and forms I use to open spaces can be used equally by others wishing to close them (part of the disturbing ambivalence of popular culture formats). Still my focus is on art as something that can create and critique “or ironicize manifestations or expressions of hegemonic political or religious power” (Preziosi, 2009, p.12). As an end to the opening, I follow Eliot Eisner (2003) when he posits that:

The limits of our cognition are not defined by the limits of our language. We have a long philosophic tradition in the West that promotes the view that knowing anything requires some formulation of what we know in words; we need to have warrants for our assertions. But is it really the case that what we cannot assert we cannot know? (p. 379-380)

Clearly my answer to Eisner’s query would be no.
References

http://artpracticeasresearch.com/tag/william-grant/
Stealing or stealing the image?
The failed branding of the *Guerrillero Heroico* image of Che Guevara

So join the struggle while you may
The revolution is just a t-shirt away

*Waiting For The Great Leap Forwards*
Billy Bragg

*El derecho de autor realmente no tiene razón de ser.*
*Yo no tengo derechos. Al contrario, tengo deberes*¹

Jean-Luc Godard

BACKGROUND

Since the first publication of the *Guerrillero Heroico*, the famous Che Guevara photograph taken in March 1960 by Alberto Diaz Gutierrez (familiarly known as Korda), the picture has inspired artists around the world to modify and render it in a myriad of media and styles². However when Smirnoff’s UK advertising agency wanted to use the image to sell vodka in 1999, Korda, a gifted and unassuming photographer, sued them. “The ads depicted Che’s face adorned with a pattern of hammers and chilli-pepper sickles, not to foster communist consciousness in a creative redeployment of commodity fetishism, but simply to promote a new spice line of Smirnoff vodka.” (Hernandez-Reguant, A. 2008 p. 257) The company settled out of court and gave Korda a significant sum that he promptly

¹ Translated as, “copyright really has no reason to exist. I don’t have rights. On the contrary, I have obligations.”
donated to a hospital in Cuba. It is worth remembering that regardless of the fame, and accompanying profit potential from this photograph, Korda refused to endorse its commercialization and certainly did not gain financially. Korda said that the use of Che’s image for selling vodka was a “slur on his [Guevara’s] name.” He pointed out that Che “never drank himself, was not a drunk, and [that] drink should not be associated with his immortal memory.” (Sridhar, 2002, online)

After the international lawsuit Korda’s rights as the author were recognized publicly and spokespeople for many media conglomerates in Europe and the United States saw it as an unprecedented, unacknowledged move on the part of the Cuban government towards capitalism. The debate that had been bubbling under the surface for decades finally spilled onto mainstream headlines:

The Times of London wryly recast this development as if it were the Argentine revolutionary’s own long and hard fought victory… ‘After 40 Years, Che Beats Forces of Capitalism’ (Bird 2000). CNN.com likewise dramatized the event, but with a slightly less ironic, and more-to-the-point headline: ‘Social Justice, Sf. Vodka Advertisements, No.’ (Hernandez-Reguain, A. 2008, p. 256)

While the Times of London and CNN saw the use of copyright in this case as distinctly non-commercial, Wall Street Journal correspondent Michael Casey (2009) on the other hand, equates all copyright use to commercialism; “Che had not beaten capitalism; he had joined it” (p. 313) and that the photograph was emptied of all significance, “copyright number VA-1-276-975” was no more than “a nine-character alphanumeric code” (p. 337). In a more bizarre twist Larson and Lizardo (2007) cite Vargas Llosa in 2005 as saying that the image of Guevara is the "quintessential brand of capitalism” (p. 426 my emphasis). Needless to say, no evidence is available on how many people purchase Guevara products merely in order to champion capitalism.

Pundits’ beliefs aside, a historical perspective reveals that portraits of Guevara have tended to surface at key political moments. The New York Times of May 02, 1961 runs the headline “Castro Rules Out Elections in Cuba,” (p. A2) on the first page with a large feature image. Apparently for May Day celebrations in 1961, before Guevara’s death, “portraits of Karl Marx, Raul Castro, the Minister of Armed Forces, and Maj. Ernesto Guevara...[were] being carried by athletes in parade in Havana”. (New York Times, 1961, also noted in Larson and Lizardo 2007) This was not the Guerrillero Heroico but an official portrait, of the sort often trotted out for political marches and marking Guevara’s face as part of the official visual equipment of the new government, but was not made to stand out in any special way.

With respect to the Guerrillero Heroico, the Cuban context is unique. After the news of Guevara’s death, on Monday the 16th of October 1967³, the Granma newspaper, official organ of

³ Simultaneously in October 1968, Antonio Pérez “NIKO” designed a poster for the Comisión de Orientación Revolucionaria (COR), it was not printed that year because its composition contained surrealist and allusive elements that were rejected in a historical juncture where the testimonial photograph was preferred as the way to reveal the energetic and vigorous image of Che. In 1968, the design was reformulated and the offset printed poster had a communicative effect and symbolic meaning that later became representative of Cuban graphic art (Caminos, personal communication). Ese cartel se diseñó en octubre de 1967, cuando ya se confirmó su muerte y no se
the Communist Party in Cuba printed a special edition dedicated to Che Guevara. The cover was a full-page image of the Korda photograph. It was so well received that it was printed again the very next day (Campos, R.M., personal communication). On the night of the 18th, in the Plaza de la Revolución that image was hung as the background for the public stage from which Fidel Castro would say the eulogy, and recount Guevara’s contribution to Cuba’s revolution leading up to his assassination. According to Cuban historian Reinaldo Morales Campos, the impact of Castro’s eulogy extolling Guevara’s profound intelligence, courage, and human sensibility as model revolutionary figure fused with the photograph by Korda and “led to the image being taken up as an effigy of the Guerrillero Heroico to highlight his image worldwide” (Personal communication 2010).

After Feltrinelli’s publication of Guevara’s Bolivian Diaries in early 1968 with the Guerrillero Heroico on the cover and about a million posters to promote the book, there was a global explosion of reproductions, often in the form of protest posters. According to Larson and Lizardo (2007), "the New York Times repeatedly connected Che to Marxist social movements in Europe and the Americas" (p. 428) around this time. In the 1960s, a bedroom “without a poster of Che Guevara was hardly furnished at all” (cited in Larson & Lizardo 2007 p. 428). Jorge R Bermudez (2006) refers to the global transcendence of the Guerrillero Heroico signaling its use in the memorable days of the Parisian barricades in May 1968; in the slaughter of Mexican students in Tlatelolco; in clashes in Milan, during the Prague Spring uprising; and in youth protest against the Vietnam war in the USA.

Larson and Lizardo note a significant peak of visibility in the USA at the time Guevara’s remains were revealed in Bolivia in 1997. They also observe a shift in tone in the New York Times’ headlines such as “From Rebel to Pop Icon” in the Arts Pages towards emphasizing the commercial quality of the image, and a focus on its accompaniment by a wave of products sporting the image (p. 428). In this article, Doreen Carvajal interviews Jim Fleischer, representing Fischer Skis who, as Larson and Lizardo (2007) also note, explained they were reproducing Che’s image on their promotional materials even while dissociating themselves from the man himself: “We felt that the Che image - just the icon and not the man’s doings - represented what we wanted: revolution, extreme change” (New York Times, C11). Yet Carvajal also cites José Borges, a spokesman for the Cuban Mission to the United Nations: “We have always been against any commercial use of his image...one thing is to promote his image and his example, and another thing is to use it as a way to get more money” (New York Times, C11).

Oddly, and erroneously, Larson and Lizardo (2007) immediately follow the ski example with the words: “In light of this mountain of damning evidence, the New York Times concluded, In Europe and the United States, Che’s image owes its commercial appeal to the absence of political content” (1997b, Tina Rosenberg) Inserting this sentence where they do is misleading because first, it is not in the same article, and second, it is not a conclusion. Rather it is one of the opening paragraphs in Tina Rosenberg’s article “The World Resurrects Che” written months later on July 20, (p. E14) and was followed by a letter to the editor, written in response on that
very day, from a reader named David Silver entitled “Would Che have Turned Capitalist? Never!” (New York Times, A20) Ironically, in the face of this “mountain of damning evidence” Silver, an ordinary reader, is moved to make a written complaint to the effect that “Tina Rosenberg jumps to an unwarranted conclusion” and backs his claim by citing Che Guevara himself:

Che wrote to the editor of Marcha, a weekly newspaper in Montevideo, Uruguay. He stressed the danger of bourgeois ideology and its seductive appeal to oppressed and exploited people: “In capitalist society man is controlled by a pitiless law usually beyond his comprehension. The alienated human specimen is tied to society as a whole by an individual umbilical cord: the law of value.” (New York Times, p. A20).

Epitomized in this snapshot of exchanges published in the New York Times, we can see the contest for the meaning, memory and value of Che Guevara’s image is all but concluded.

THE POLITICS OF BRANDING

Does copyrighting this image mean it is automatically pressed into commercial service? Can recent developments in legalities allow its meaning, value, and usage to be summed up so simply? What about the multitudinous artistic and vernacular renderings of the Guerrillero Heroico that Korda or his estate (managed by his daughter Diana Diaz) do not prosecute or pursue? Evidently, “what it [the image] has come to mean has been the subject of much speculation.” (Poyner 2006 p. 34) Perhaps copyright laws are being applied in an unconventional way, a way that exceeds the frames and models of analysis usually applied. More often than not, copyright law’s purpose is to protect the author’s right to obtain commercial benefit from work, but we know this was not a goal for Korda. By having potential users of the image ask permission before availing themselves of it, copyright laws also safeguard an author’s general right to control how a work is utilized. Thus, we can examine the problematics of how different people take up the image, as well as how the image itself invokes and provokes action, to better understand the dynamics of appropriation.

The notions of brand, trademark and logo are often bandied about interchangeably with respect to the Guerrillero Heroico by those who would see its copyrighting as an appropriation of the image as a ‘mark’ of something. For the purposes of this article, I refer to logo as a graphic, and logotype as the lettering/words: together logo and logotype form a trademark following the legal discourse. The brand then is the entire package of graphics, name, messaging and communications, visual identity, marketing strategies, and individual experiences with the business, product or service. Robert E. Moore provides some definitional guidelines for understanding exactly what a brand, or what the essential ingredients for considering something a brand might be. According to Moore, (2003) “brands are often defined as a form of protection: they protect the consumer from counterfeit goods, and they protect the producer from unfair competition.” (p. 332) Additionally, he observes that in an era where branding processes seem to encompass far more than products and services, and that all sorts of experiences, events, leaders,
nations and even wars are being branded: “the absence from the academic literature of any semiotically sophisticated and ethnographically rich understanding of brands is downright shocking.” (2003, p. 332) His article robustly addresses this lack, and provides a thoughtful sounding board to which I periodically return to address some of the confusion around the *Guerrillero Heroico*.

According to one strategist, “if brand names did not exist there would be no trustworthy marketplace.” (Moore, 2003, p. 338) One of the key elements of a brand has to do with its trustworthiness or credibility. To elaborate, Moore (2003) turns to David Aaker, one of the most heavily cited authors in the brand strategy literature, who tells us that a brand is:

*A distinguished name and/or symbol ... intended to identify the goods or services ... and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors. A brand thus signals to the customer the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical* (Aaker, 1991, p. 7 in Moore 2003, p. 338).

Refining the definition of ‘brand,’ Moore (2003) calls it “a name and a logo, joined to a set of regimented associations, with source-identifying indexicals” (p. 339) and concludes: “a brand is a promise.” (p. 339). Accordingly, for the Coca-Cola company, we can understand the Polar Bear, Santa Claus, the wavy font type, the specific tone of red, team sponsorships, prizes and contests, songs like “I’d like to teach the world to sing” and slogans such as; “The real thing,” “Always,” “Open happiness,” and “Enjoy” and even the traditional shape of the bottle to all be part of the brand designed to connect individuals to one company. The collection of elements is calculated by branding experts, with the product and tradition of the one company in mind, aiming to make clear links in consumers’ minds.

What then would be the characteristics by which one might recognize Korda’s Che photograph as a brand? More often than not the long hair, beard, star, beret, and eyes looking above and beyond the viewer, bomber jacket or a combination of all or some of these are featured by those who render the image to trigger recognition. One might say it is regularly linked to the notions of dissent, rebellion, revolution, youth, as well as non-conformity, anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism. But these notions lead us to no one place or group or even agreement on the meaning of an idea. Since many people, especially in Canada and the United States do not know who Guevara is or where he is from, or where or when the original photograph was taken, we have situations where an image is unmoored often from its human and historical source. However, a key characteristic of a brand is precisely a credible and trustworthy connection to one source. Perhaps one might imagine all these variant renderings and interpretations as endless iterations of the original photograph, which could take the position of a source. However, a photograph is an index with a contiguous relationship to the source, the man himself.

Following this line of thinking then, the set of all these images would constitute the brand for the original source or photograph and so it might look like a ship whose anchor has lodged itself at the base of its own hull, in a self-referential circuit. But this is not the case because the image does not exist in a hermetically sealed closed sign system. Rather, it is part of some..."collective equipment that everyone is in a position to use, not in order to be subjected to their authority but as tools to probe the contemporary world” (Bourriaud, 2005, p. 9). Every
iteration of the image also simultaneously bears the marks of the artist or producer and thus references the specific time, place, event or person that has intersected with the image in that rendering. This would seem to make the Guerrillero Heroico the actual antithesis of a brand if we accept Michael Casey’s (2009) account of the logic of brand protection where: “Large companies are sticklers for the integrity of their brands. They worry about the size, colour, dimensions, and appropriate uses of their corporate logo, ... No McDonald’s franchisee would ever be allowed to put up a blue Golden Arches sign.” (p. 334) Since “the most important characteristic of a brand is its credibility” (Erđem, T. & J. Swait. 2004, p. 192), the protection of brands is serious business.

Another aspect of branding to consider is the manner in which a group or corporation enacts their branding strategy. Invariably, they orchestrate the time and place of the “launch” in a hierarchical mass-produced fashion. Moore (2003) explains:

In the process of producing brands, branding professionals attempt to capture, and turn to their advantage, a set of fairly recondite—even, inefatable—facts about how brands circulate in society, even as they try to create the conditions that allow brands to circulate. So circulation is fundamentally part of the production process, even if not quantifiably so. The use of ethnographic methods represents an effort to uncover and understand likely patterns of circulation and consumption, in advance of production, every bit as much as efforts to develop the ‘brand personality’ are attempts further to define them. (p. 352)

Because a company's products combine both tangible and intangible features, "value no longer inheres in the commodity itself as a tangible thing; rather, value inheres in something else, something less tangible: the aura, the simulacrum, the reproduction (as opposed to the original), the brand". (Moore 2003 p. 331) The immaterial aspects are unstable: they are open to interpretation and can shift with time and circumstance. Therefore, corporations go to great pains to protect the integrity of their brand names with complicated policy architectures because brands are inherently vulnerable. For example, when golf professional Tiger Woods was caught in an adultery scandal in 2009, Gatorade and other private enterprises stopped endorsing him and distanced themselves because as one branding expert noted, the Woods brand “was founded upon prestige, mystique…and an aura of elusive untouchability,” but now “we all suddenly know more about his bottom-feeding behavior than we ever cared to.” (Elliott, 2010, NYT) We learn, in fact, that he was actually excessively touchable. Woods had been an image of prowess based on precision, integrity, and a clarity of focus that (some might imply) reflected a clear conscience. Woods had compromised that image with contradictory behaviour. In this scenario, those who attribute the amount of an enterprise's private market value in part to its name reevaluated the choice to endorse an athlete that might negatively impact the name, or more crucially, its market value.

The need to protect and control the perception of a brand’s “name” shows not only the existence of inherent vulnerability to undesirable interpretations, but also that branding strategy is actually about deciding on a limited set of predetermined meanings deemed acceptable for a brand. In other words a branded product is:

---

5 A question to be raised here is whether it is appropriate or possible to brand political art in the first place.
6 “Accenture Plc and AT&T dropped him as their pitch man after he became engulfed in allegations of multiple extramarital affairs following a minor car accident outside his Florida home on Nov. 27”
... partly a thing, and partly language. The brand name functions as a ‘rigid designator’ in their terminology of Kripke (1972): it communicates information about the source, producer, and/or type of thing, and can provide quite rich sociocultural and ideological ‘captioning’ for the object (including by ‘keying’ it to definable activities) through the radical use of ‘condensation symbolism’ (Sapir, 1949 [1929]). (Moore, R. E. 2003 p. 334)

Simply put, terminologies like: rigid designator, ideological caption, or condensation symbolism describe the process of linking an object to a fiction designed to create a desire to consume them both, as J. B. Twitchell (2004) acknowledges in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, “a brand is simply a story attached to a manufactured object.” (p. 484) With its ultimate goal of selling products and augmenting commercial value, branding is a kind of planning, control, and action requires a centralized and concerted effort that is nonexistent in the case of the *Guerrillero Heroico*.

This image emerged somewhat organically outside of Cuba and more intentionally within Cuba. The effervescing of the image here and there through different media and created by different hands almost simultaneously challenges the establishment of a clear line tracing its provenance, and perhaps that is part of its appeal. Still, this image has a very different history within Cuba than it does outside of Cuba; consequently I examine them separately.

**WITHIN CUBA**

One of the most relentlessly strident critiques of the *Guerrillero Heroico*’s uses in Cuba is contained in Michael Casey’s 2009 book, *Che’s Afterlife: The legacy of an image*. Marshalling a motley assortment of opinions, anecdotes and interviews for support, Casey’s overriding thrust is that the *Guerrillero Heroico* is the “quintessential capitalist brand” (p. 30). But historian Maurice Isserman (2009) observes however that Casey’s “book would have benefited greatly from a sturdier historical frame” (online).

From the beginning Casey positions the Cuban revolution as “a top-selling cultural product, an international brand, and... its ultimate expression: the Che-T shirt.” (p. 88) In a puzzling shift however he also writes: “Che was already available in 1968 in a wide variety of political brands” (129.) Together these statements seem nonsensical: that the Cuban revolution is a brand represented by a Che T-shirt but that Che is simultaneously a variety of different political brands. If we make note of the brand literature alone, this would be at odds with the very raison d’être of branding. The representing of “different political brands” clouds our understanding of what Che represents, thus compromising clarity and credibility. Erdem and Swait’s (1998) study establishes that, “the clarity (i.e., lack of ambiguity) of the product information contained in a brand is an antecedent to brand credibility” (p. 192). It would seem the image is behaving in a way that is difficult to commercialize according to a brand strategy, and therefore difficult to categorize simplistically as a brand.

---

3 “But at the very core of it all is the manipulation of cultural sensibilities. Branding isn’t just the unloading of stories on manufactured products but actually the systematic suturing of cultural texts into commercial products. Patronising those products becomes a vicarious way of being part of the cherished universe of approved social values” (Ugor, P. June, 2011, personal communication)
Intent on pushing the brand thesis, Casey’s book neglects historical data. Maurice Isserman (2009) sighs:

Casey’s determination to pinpoint the moment of the "brand launch" of "Guerrillero Heroico" is simply irrelevant to the actual political history of the 1960s. Even though the image had gone unpublished outside obscure Cuban newspapers, the mainstream American media, as well as the radical press, had kept Che’s name and face in the public eye for years: (http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090629/isserman)

Casey’s ahistoricism begs the question of history’s relevance, and consequently politics’ relevance for the so-called brand of the Guerrillero Heroico making it problematic for him to claim historical and political grounds for the image’s prominence in the Cuban public’s imaginary. Casey (2009) claims that the "Korda image launched into public consciousness in Cuba, where it was in effect employed as a logo or brand for Castro’s PR campaign" (p. 93). Likewise, he assumes that the "general public, which had not seen a single photograph of Che since his mysterious disappearance in April 1965, was now shown an image [Freddy Alborta’s photograph of the dead Guevara] begging for a myth to be built around it...a crucified Che” (p. 186). Isserman (2009) swiftly debunks both assumptions:

Mainstream American media, as well as the radical press, had kept Che’s name and face in the public eye for years: from his days as Castro's sidekick, to his disappearance from view in Cuba in 1965, to his life as an international man of mystery until October 9, 1967 (online).

So how did this myth of the Guerrillero Heroico as brand for Castro and Cuba arise? What happened in Cuba in the decades prior to the copyright lawsuit? First, the year 1968 was officially declared the year of the Guerrillero Heroico in Cuba to memorialize Guevara. Artists and designers in Cuba generated numerous works representing Che and the revolution to commemorate the first anniversary of Guevara’s assassination. At the same time, artists were developing techniques and styles for poster art and evolving the unique genre of Cuban poster art. In those years Cuban designers were moving away from influences of advertising and realism and towards creative interpretation as an artistic vanguard influenced by pop art, art deco and other Japanese and North American art movements.

The international political context included large movements mobilizing against the Vietnam War, dictatorships in Latin America and Africa, colonialism and the accompanying assassinations of important leftist leaders around the world. All of these movements against imperialist power and people fighting for social progress flowed into each other. This context created a creative environment where Korda’s image became a malleable tool to be contextualized artistically in order to comment on history or current events, and produce salient political observations.

The Guerrillero Heroico quickly became a glyph in the exploration of collective memory by Cuban artists. Larson & Lizardo (2007) describe collective memories as “traces of the past remembered and reenacted in the present, periodically reinvigorated in commemorations, celebrations, poetry, images, and other symbolic displays” (p. 431). In their study, they analyze
how memories of Che Guevara are produced after interviewing 3000 Spaniards across social, economic and generational lines between 1991 and 1993. Larson & Lizardo (2007) conclude that; “Instead of his memory falling victim to trivialization by commodification… remembering Che Guevara has become a highly structured collective act of distinction” (p. 431).

The artistic and political use of the image run counter to a branding effort by their very nature as non-commoditized and favorable to appropriation for further artistic comment. Billboards, signs and all kinds of advertising had gradually disappeared from the Cuban public sphere under Castro’s government from 1961 onwards. The focus in post-revolution Cuba shifted from celebrating the qualities of products and their consumption, to political state-run messaging explicitly designated as informative and educational. As part of the political signage, Che’s image appears representing the Communist party, announcements regarding social works, and on the occasions of the anniversary of his death or other commemorative events. His face thus became a representation of the revolution accruing meanings on a specific register congruent with Guevara’s own stance and prior governmental position. Additionally Cuban institutions (like the health system) with relations abroad used it to express messages of solidarity with what they perceived as similar revolutionary causes (Campos, 2010). That is, an institutional use of the image for certain kinds of communication is politically but not commercially motivated. In Castro’s Cuba, the image behaved in a metonymic, rather than metaphoric manner. Its relationship to the prototype was factually similar (icon) and contiguous (index), rather than imputed (symbol)\(^8\).

According to Cuban historian Campos, (2010 personal communication) 1985 onward saw a resurgence of limited advertising activities in Cuba. In an effort to manage foreign firms and entities accustomed to publicity campaigns and advertising norms authorized to operate in Cuba, and Cuba established protective paternal policies to regulate the iconography of women and children, and policies prohibiting the use of national symbols, revolutionary martyrs and heroes. Campos (2010) provides this background to show that the Cuban government’s use of the graphic image of Che was devoid of commercial interests. Political signage used by organizations are not sold, Campos confirms, but distributed through internal structures to fulfill social functions. However much one might push this as a branding effort, the image use in this case does not fulfill the requirements.

After 1992, following the USSR’s dissolution which caused an economic crisis that annihilated 85% of Cuba’s trade, the Cuban graphic industry was paralyzed due to lack of funds, and the sale of political posters to tourists and foreigners was initiated (Campos, 2010). The sales included Korda’s image of Guevara primarily as a cost recovery effort to keep people employed. Interestingly, that commercialization and sale was not extended to the Cuban public. In 1994, many people that thought the Cuban revolution had come to its end took advantage of the crisis, to publish and profit from reproductions of signs and posters with emblematic images of Che and of the revolution without crediting artists or the authorizing institutions. These historical events can be seen as forerunners to the copyright lawsuit that Korda eventually launched.

To make matters worse for the island, the US government saw the crisis as an opportunity to finish off the Cuban economy and bring down President Castro. On an initiative by Robert Torricelli, member of the US House of Representatives, The Torricelli Act was enacted in 1992. This act intensified the harshness of the economic blockade on Cuba by preventing food and

---

\(^8\) Following CS Peirce’s three principal semiotic classifications for signs; icon, index, and symbol.
medicine from being shipped to Cuba. An intense global solidarity movement from communities supporting Cuba emerged in response. As Cuba moved to establish ways to protect items it defined as crucial to Cuban national heritage, it installed copyright regulations for books and documents authorized to leave the country. Under these conditions, Guevara’s widow Aleida Más created the Che Guevara Studies Centre, to house photos and documents salient to Guevara’s historical legacy. According to Campos (2010) the Centre sees the prevention of the “improper use” or “for commercial ends” of the photos and posters as part of its task. Since the Guerrillero Heroico is considered by Cubans to be part of their national heritage, they exercise some control over its use. The Guevara children are involved in the Centre and on occasion publicly criticize what they consider unscrupulous uses of the image of their father. As recently as 2008, The Guardian correspondent Rory Carroll wrote a piece called, “Guevara children denounce Che branding” (Saturday June 27) where Aleida Guevara “denounced the commercialization [sic] of her father’s image ... ‘Something that bothers me now is the appropriation of the figure of Che that has been used to make enemies from different classes. It’s embarrassing.” She added, “We don’t want money, we demand respect” (online). But Carroll (2008) is also compelled to comment on the image itself writing, “If you want to shift more products or give your corporate image a bit of edge, the Argentine revolutionary’s face and name are there to be used, like commercial gold dust” and on Cuba, “Cuba’s government has used the image to promote its revolution and to rake in tourist dollars through state-run stores which sell Che paraphernalia” (online). The appeal of any image based on Korda’s Guerrillero Heroico is indisputable; and so far, it seems inexhaustible. But Carroll’s assumption regarding the state-run stores is inaccurate unless considered within the context of a specific reaction to a historical event. Additionally the copyrighting moves, and the way different actors are involved and influencing the image’s use, are not a convincing indication that the Cuban state is moving toward a wholesale commercialization of the Guerrillero Heroico.

According to the historian Campos, Korda’s daughter Diana Diaz, as the inheritor of her father Korda’s work, also has the right to protect that photograph. However even her rights are within a specific framework. Cuban copyright policy holds that when an institution pays a salary for someone to occupy a post that permits their production of a work, he or she is recognized as the creator or author but the work is property of the institution. And when a work becomes iconic or emblematic, it grows to be part of the national heritage. Campos (2010) insists Che’s image retains its original symbolism in Cuba, and does not function within the nation as a commercial logo on a souvenir. Considering the context, Hernandez-Reguant (2008) might want to rethink his hyperbolic comment that “Che Guevara has been the object of state worship since his death in 1967” (p. 254).

FROM CUBA WITH LOVE

9 The Torricelli act designed to paralyze the Cuban economy and cause the fall of the president forbids American companies, and subsidiaries abroad, from engaging in any trade with Cuba. Foreign ships using American ports were forbidden from Cuban ports for a period of 180 days and foreign ships returning from Cuba were also detained. Cuban families living in the U. S. were barred from sending any cash remittances to Cuba--Torricelli corruption - http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/congress/july-dec02/bkrgdtorricelli_09-30.html http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/24/us/region/24torricelli.html?_r=1
Cuban institutions use the *Guerrillero Heroico* in relations abroad to express messages of solidarity in that they are acting *in the image of Che*. For example doctors sent to aid Haitians after the 2010 earthquake wore Che Guevara T-shirts. This kind of official Cuban usage is exploited by Michael Casey (2009) to situate interest not along ideological grounds but “economic factors” (p. 153). If we suppose someone just discovering that Cuba sends doctors and educators to developing nations might mistakenly call it a branding attempt, what kind of branding would they see it as? The presence of Cuban doctors in Bolivia in 2006 is described by Casey as a “re-brand[ing]” effort to portray Cuba “as a source of medicine and education services worldwide” (p. 189). Yet the Cuban practice of sending doctors to hardship zones has been in place for decades (the first medical brigade of 58 doctors was sent to Algeria in 1963) and certainly does not receive sufficient press to warrant it a re-branding attempt. In fact, when Hurricane Katrina ripped through the southern United States in 2005, the Cuban government responded to the governor of Louisiana’s call for aid offering:

...within 48 hours 1,600 doctors, trained to deal with such catastrophies, would arrive with all the necessary equipment plus 36 tonnes of medical supplies. This offer, and another made directly to President George Bush, went unanswered. In the catastrophe at least 1,800 people, most of them poor, died for lack of aid and treatment (Ospina (2006) http://mondediplo.com/2006/08/11cuba).

Casey misses the fact that in 2007, “Cuban doctors volunteering in Bolivia performed free cataract surgery for Mario Teran, the Bolivian army sergeant who killed the legendary guerrilla leader Ernesto “Che” Guevara in captivity” (AAP Brisbane Times, 2007). While Casey observed Cuban doctors wearing Che t-shirts in Bolivia, he failed to ask them why they did so. After all, Che Guevara was also a doctor. While Casey worries about the doctors’ Che T-shirts, he ignores President Bush’s criminal negligence with regards to Katrina. With all the focus on the image, it may benefit us to observe the anti-capitalist force of Cuba’s 25,000 volunteer doctors that by March 2006 were working in 68 nations. “This is more than even the World Health Organisation can deploy, while Médecins Sans Frontières sent only 2,040 doctors and nurses abroad in 2003, and 2,290 in 2004” (Ospina, H. 2006 *Le Monde*). It is for good reason that: “the medical associations are afraid that if the Cuban medics bring down prices or even offer some services free, medical treatment will cease to be a profitable, elitist service” (Ospina, H. 2006 *Le Monde*). Thus, if this is a branding effort then it undermines capitalism itself, of which perhaps Guevara would approve. The barefoot doctors’ practice has been sustained long term quietly saving many lives\(^\text{10}\). I have belaboured many details to show clearly how “branding” language fails to accurately depict the social and cultural impact of this image.

It is misleading to conflate Cuban use of the image in Bolivia with Bolivian appropriations but the way the discourse is mobilized is nevertheless useful to examine. For example, Bolivian salesmen such as Fernando Porras uses the Guevara image on all kinds of paraphernalia to target his market of 16-20 year olds (Casey, 2009 p. 211). In Bolivia, President Evo Morales’ government uses this Guevara image politically to link with notions of Cuban

---

\(^{10}\) In 2005 alone the barefoot doctors program helped the most poverty-stricken of six Latin American countries and 20 in Africa. The staff delivered more than half a million babies, carried out 1,657,857 operations and gave almost 9 million vaccinations. In Haiti, Cuba has been providing 2,500 doctors and as much medicine as its economy permits since 1998.
independence but also to remind its citizens of Guevara’s death in Bolivia and the reasons behind it. For Casey, (2009) Porras’ “shameless commercial exploitation” is tantamount to the Bolivian government’s image use: “Porras might have been exploiting Che to sell rum and cola, but Morales and his supporters were using him to sell ideas” (p. 213). He concludes, “what we find is the same symbol representing contradicting brands” (p. 213). In this statement we see the image no longer being considered a brand and instead being reduced to an ingredient, like the logo or symbol. But we know that the same symbol cannot represent contradicting brands and still be viable. Thus, a reader of Casey is presented with a false analogy, that is, two cases not sufficiently parallel for readers to accept a claim of connection between them. The situation is obfuscated by the mutual use of the image, albeit differently, yet is pressed into service in a simplified and misleading parallel. We can learn from how confusing such narratives might be that part of what we require in image saturated societies is a more nuanced language to describe what is happening on the visual level, in other words we need more sophisticated visual literacies.

For understanding image use, Larson and Lizardo (2007) provide three options. They state that the malleability of a memory (or an image) can be reduced in 3 ways (Olik and Robbins 1998 in L. & L.) First actors using the memory of Che as instrumental symbol, second a canonical or institutional use of the image, and finally the routines marking consumer goods that keep the image visible on products such as T-shirts and posters (p. 438). All three reductions have come into play for the Guerrillero Heroico’s use inside and outside Cuba so far, but do not indicate a convincing shift in signifying practices of authorship because the photograph and its derivatives as cultural products of artistic labour did not translate into copyright directed commodities for individual profit and corporate speculation. The Guerrillero Heroico is more elusive than that, no one disputes its ownership rather the contest is over how it is used.

OUTSIDE CUBA IT’S A DIFFERENT GAME: A BRAND WITHOUT A PRODUCT?

Outside of Cuba, the use of the Guerrillero Heroico was hardly regulated, regimented or controlled except for its banning in some nations (i.e. in Kenya possession of the image was punishable by imprisonment or death). For the most part, artists and movements focused on overtly and broadly political uses: “Most commentators agree that Che has become a general symbol of various causes and political movements, but here exists wide disagreement and confusion in the literature as to what exactly his image has become a symbol of” (Larson & Lizardo 2007, 433). It has been widely established that:

As early as the student movements of 1968, the image of Che Guevara had already acquired a measure of status as a symbol for the student movement (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991:90; Jasper, 1997; Zolov, 1999). Furthermore, given the continued presence of posters and T-shirts bearing his image at contemporary global justice rallies (Lechner and Boli, 2005: 153), it appears that Che Guevara continues to stand for the same complex set of values and causes usually associated with the ‘new social movements’ (NSMs) that emerged in the 1960s (Larson & Lizardo 2007 433-434).
Yet, in 1999, just before the copyright suit against Smirnoff, the flamboyant fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier ran an ad with an artistic rendering of the Guerrillero Heroico sporting his brand of sunglasses. Accordingly British writer/curator Rick Poyner (2006) could glibly write: “Since the 1990s, the Korda Che has been adopted as a style icon. Madonna strikes a Che pose in a beret for the cover of her American Life album (created by trendy Paris design team M/M)...No one seriously imagines they are attempting to bring about the downfall of capitalism. (V & A Magazine: p. 39 my emphasis.)

Style icon or not, the news about trying to bring down capitalism does not seem to have reached the FARC\(^{11}\) in Colombia, nor the less violent but also armed Zapatistas\(^{12}\) in Mexico. Again, Larson and Lizardo’s (2007) research tells us, “Che Guevara, in stark contrast to most other major twentieth-century revolutionary figures of the left (e.g., Mao, Lenin, Trotsky) continues to be a vibrant symbol and galvanizing figure for contemporary antisystemic movements, from the Zapatista rebels in Mexico and Basque separatists in Spain to Palestinian nationalists in the Middle East” (p. 426). They emphasize, “The Zapatistas in Mexico have flaunted images of Che on their clothes, banners, flags, and posters since 1994 (p. 429).

---

\(^{11}\) In the Colombian region of Cauca. Al Jazeera correspondent Teresa Bo (2010) writes, “Colombia is still at war. You find trenches in every corner, tanks, Blackhawk helicopters and lots of soldiers. Fighting takes place here almost every day ... But we managed to find the left-wing FARC rebels, who are still fighting the Colombian government. ... They were coming out from the mountains, from the sewage canals, from everywhere. They said that a fight with the military was coming. ... Commander Duber ... gave us an exclusive interview: 'Our main enemy is President Uribe and the armed forces. ... There are elections in Colombia. People can vote for whom they want. But we will continue fighting. The ideology of the FARC is to win or die, that's what Che Guevara said,'” Duber told us. In Cauca the fighting is still ongoing. Duber adds: “President Uribe offers money [and] cars to those guerrillas who turn themselves in. Those who sell themselves are not guerrillas. They should give that money to those who are still starving in this country. We don't need it.” (One might ask where exactly the FARC obtains their funding)


\(^{12}\) Indymedia photograph under copyleft license.
Still the simultaneous phenomenon of the Korda inspired image of Che Guevara on all kinds of kitschy products like refrigerator magnets and coffee mugs, create an ironic juxtaposition to the figure of someone who fought to the death against, among other things “the hegemony of American-style consumer capitalism” (Larson & Lizardo 2007 p. 426). If the image were to be considered a brand, it would be demonstrating instability, if not utter unreliability.

The professional literature on brand strategy examines different brand behaviours that might lead to some hypotheses regarding the behaviour and uses of this image. Moore (2003) examines three “insider phenomena of branding: genericide, ingredient branding, and so-called ‘viral marketing’” (p. 336) to probe the troubled relationship between a word (brand name) and an object (product). Viral marketing focuses on branding services and communications through email attachments where “the sender of the email message lends an involuntary ‘personal endorsement’ to the brand” (Moore, p. 352). Thus, genericide and ingredient branding are more salient.

When a brand name becomes synonymous with a product regardless of who produces it, it becomes generic; so that the trademark is unable to carry the message producers want to communicate. Moore (2003) tells us, “Brand enters upon phenomenal reality as a mode of connection, of communication, between two parties” (p. 335) when this fails it is called “genericide” because the loss of the identifying power of the name essentially kills the brand. Kleenex for example was once a brand, but since the word became so ubiquitous that it was used for any tissue, the trademark became insignificant.
Those clamouring for the *Guerrillero Heroico* to be considered a brand push for the image to be understood as the brand for intangible or virtual thing like the notion of rebellion. Leaving aside contradictions with the professional literature, let’s think through the genericide scenario. The image has been used widely as some designer-cool type look and at the same time adapted to so many different kinds of anti-something struggles that Robert Massari “Italian publisher, wine merchant, and head of his country’s Che Guevara Foundation” can say, “There are probably forty million in the world who have that image. And if you ask them what it means to them, they’d all have a different answer” (Casey 2009, p. 336). Not only would we have a genericide in the register of historical and political events with the delinking of the image from its context (and source meaning), and genericide commercially where it cannot bring to mind any one product, but we would also have genericide in terms of its inability to consistently link to one idea.

Erdem & Swait (2004) follow Kottler (1997) in the basic understanding of a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Erdem & Swait 2004 p. 191). As a result, they see the roles of brands to be “their effect on consumer brand choice and consideration” (Erdem & Swait 2004 p. 191). No *Guerrillero Heroico* brand of any particular product for a consumer to even be able to consider and choose between exists. Since the product is virtually irrelevant, can we consider this a classic case of genericide in the way branding strategists would classify it? Not really, it is on another register and does not make one product generic. If we consider that people do not buy products, but brands, anything with Che’s face on it will sell regardless of its inability to communicate the goals of a seller, so it sells but not as a brand.

In ingredient branding, the product rather than the name is vulnerable, “one branded product is absorbed or incorporated into another (think NutraSweet, as a branded ingredient of Diet Pepsi, or ‘Intel Inside’)” (Moore, 2003 p. 337). Because consumers can tune in to the ingredient and consume the “host product” almost as an effect rather than a cause of their choice, the branded ingredient can lift off and adhere to other hosts thereby making the product vulnerable. Within the ingredient branding phenomenon, there is a possibility of “image transfer” (Moore, 2003, p. 349). In other words, when paired with a leading manufacturer, “the ingredient brand takes advantage of their premium image... [and] signals that the ingredient is of a high quality” (Moore, 2003, p. 349). Additionally, the branded ingredient can absorb the status of the host brand by association, and can subsequently pass it on to other possible host brands. Ingredient branding makes a product vulnerable because the ingredient can just as easily attach to a competing product thus making the host product marginal and weakening its inherent perceived value in the marketplace. If the branded ingredient is transferred elsewhere, the original product could easily disappear.

Uniquely in the case of the *Guerrillero Heroico*, the ingredient is a virtual and fluid one in that it is whatever the image may represent to a given individual. The commercial rhetorical gesture of putting Che Guevara’s face on a pot of lip-gloss thus shares meaning with (and gains cultural capital and power from) a broad social movement, however illegitimately. The product is more or less irrelevant, in the way we have seen for objects attached to branded ingredients and is clearly a case of unsuccessful branding. Furthermore, in this case the ingredient can behave in unpredictable ways. Kopytoff (1986) reminds us that commoditization is “best looked at as a process of becoming rather than an all-or-none state of being” (p. 73). He adds, “extensive commoditization is not a feature of commoditization per se, but of the exchange
technology…associated with it…” (p. 73) so that the way this image of Che is mobilized has a great deal to do with its immediate context.

We know from Durkheim (1912) that societies need to set aside a certain portion of their environment marking it as “sacred”. Things marked by societal singularity include monuments, and other symbolic inventory of a society. Commodities can be singularized by being pulled out of commodity sphere (diamond to ‘crown jewel’). They can also be singularized through restriction of numbers. Non-commodity, however, is not equal to sacred. Something can be priceless by being above level or below (e.g. Manioc is not tradable). Commodities can be de-activated (personalized), or terminal (e.g. Food, service, mattresses?), or non-terminal (cars). “Everyone” is against commoditizing what has publicly been marked as singular and made sacred…Lincoln Memorial…African art, becomes “collectible” to mask the feeling from before where it was immoral to sell it for money. Kopytoff (1986) also tells us people have a yearning for singularization (stamp-collecting). The paradox is: “as one makes things more singular and worthy of being collected, thus more valuable and if valuable they acquire a price and become a commodity and their singularity is to that extent undermined” (p. 81).

The singularity of something is confirmed by its periodic appearance in commodity sphere (a Picasso), where it shows its ‘priceless-ness’ by the feeling it’s worth more than the money…people feel need to ‘defend’ themselves against ‘charge’ of ‘merchandising art’ (Kopytoff, 1986 p. 83). The status of a thing is ambiguous except at actual point of sale. We know from Marx that commodity ‘worth’ is determined by social relations, and it is allowed to be socially endowed with a fetishlike ‘power’ unrelated to its ‘true worth’.

If Moore (2003) is correct in saying, “Successful branding, then, is successful communication, successful in the sense that it ‘secures uptake’ from its interlocutors in the market” (p. 335), then the Guerrillero Heroico cannot be considered successful as a brand. Some individuals may have just as many reasons not to buy a product with this image on it as others do who do buy the product; culture, class and ethnic identity of course come into play. Perhaps the contested terrain of this image and its progeny can be illuminated by tracing its activities as art and by looking at how artists appropriate and manipulate the image?

ART OF APPROPRIATION- APPROPRIATION OF ART

Copyright laws are part and parcel of institutional use of the Guerrillero Heroico by states and organizations for ideological purposes, and commercial use by corporations as radical chic bereft of historical memory. In a different way, these laws also bear on uses by groups such as left-wing soccer supporters (think South Winners of Olympique de Marseille and their a passionate north-south rivalry with Paris) landless workers in Brazil (1997), striking university students in Mexico City (1999), peace activists in Italy (2002)” (Larson & Lizardo 2007 p. 429) as a marker of group solidarity are usually seen using a mass produced version of the Guerrillero Heroico. Part of the confusion stems from claims that this image became famous, was widely reproduced and freely distributed simply because it was not copyrighted: confusion that is partly due to an overlooking of its status as fodder for artists who may not be concerned whether something is copyrighted or not. These kinds of claims also ignore the historical fact that before 1976, the term of copyright was only 28 years after which the license would have to be renewed otherwise the work would become part of the public domain. Had the US Congress not changed
copyright law, *Guerrillero Heroico*, along with a multitude of other works, would likely be in the public domain today.\(^{13}\)

The unique situation of this photograph as the most reproduced image in the history of photography, and its copious derivatives, reveals how the creation of value in Western society is inextricable from the cultural context of a particular object. Additionally, collective memory research indicates “that the culture industry that sells his image and the antisystemic movements that revere him are emblematic of a contest over his memory” (Larson & Lizardo 2007 p. 447). It is important to recall that even *Time* magazine recognizes Ernesto Guevara as one of the top 100 most influential people of the 20th century; this is not a photograph of just anyone. Tension exists in every economy between forces driving toward commoditization, countered by those of cultures and individuals who discriminate, classify, compare and sacralise: they are intertwined in multiple and subtle ways, and are constantly in flux. Che Guevara’s image has not been domesticated by capitalism or the tension around it would not exist: so far it has refused to settle. Can we learn from what happens with the *Guerrillero Heroico* in the hands of artists and individual hand-made vernacular appropriations and figurations, borrowings or extractions, and inspirations bestowed by this image?

Artists have always appropriated or quoted ideas, techniques, approaches, colours, shapes, or a combination of these. Whether borrowing from a master to whom they were apprenticed or from a combination of inspiring images or even from a natural, environmental, or object surrounding, the appropriation of material for artistic purposes has been widely acknowledged as standard practice. However, with the blurring of the boundaries between material and virtual objects, and shifting notions of ownership, more and more artists are being accused of stealing images and ideas. Correspondingly, the policing of the image-scape is also increasing. Nevertheless, thanks in part to digital media, proliferation of derivative arts continues unabated. Part of this spread could be due to the unprecedented growth of “postproduction art”\(^{14}\) as French art historian Nicolas Bourriaud (2005) calls it. In Romana Cohen’s (2007) online interview with for *PLAZM magazine*, Cushing states, “creative appropriation is the lingua franca of activists, and there is no shame in artful reinterpretation of powerful imagery.”

In a fascinating interview with legendary French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, Lañamme and Kaganiski (2010) ask him whether he claims any rights to the images in his movies. Godard responds, “of course not, in fact many artists are already appropriating my images and posting them on the Internet. But I don’t have the sensation that I am being robbed” (On-line, my translation). He explains:

... Norman Mailer’s book on Henry Miller, is 80% Miller and 20% Mailer. In the sciences, no scientist pays copyright fees to use the formula developed by a colleague... in my film there is another kind of borrowing not citations simply

---

\(^{13}\) In 1976, Congress decided that the term of copyright protection should be life of the author plus 50 years. See also illegal-art, an organization devoted to collecting artworks that challenge current conventions of intellectual property law, or that have been involved in litigation for infringing on someone’s copyright. Launched by the *Stay Free!* magazine, a publication that critically analyses mass culture commercialization, .... Their work proves that in the remix and “copy & paste” age, the right to criticism, parody and freedom of speech is easily repressed through the demands of culture mega-corporations using the current restrictive regime to their advantage.

\(^{14}\) Postproduction art is art that uses other ready-mades following the notion originated by the brilliant surrealist artist Marcel Duchamp, and builds a piece on or with those already circulating. A handy example would be the DJ music scene where music is “sampled” or quoted in innovative ways. People recognize the citation and understand how the DJ is playing with it; they are in on the joke.
extractions. Like an injection that takes a blood sample for analysis, ... for example, the scene of trapeze artists’ from Les Plages d’Agnès...it is an extract that I grab and incorporate in a very concrete moment that symbolizes peace between Israel and Palestine. I have not paid for that scene. But if Agnès asked me for money I would calculate what I owed her.

Thus Godard’s explicit appropriation of Varda’s scene for artistic commentary is not seen as a violation in any way nor does he pretend to have authored it. Asked why he did not simply create images of his own, he further clarifies saying:

I thought the metaphor in Varda’s film was very good.

*But she didn’t give it that signification.*

No of course not. I am the one that constructed the recontextualization of those images. At no point did I think of being faithful to the original. Simply, those images seemed perfect for what I wanted to do...It was exactly what I wanted to express. So I grabbed the images because they already existed.

For Godard then, the Varda scene was simply viewed as pre-existing material that he was free to use artistically. His philosophy is instructive: “I do not believe in the concept of “work.” There are works, there are some new, but the work as a whole, the great work, is something that does not interest me. I prefer to talk of a road. In my career there are ups and downs, there have been attempts ... I put a lot of bullshit” (online). The processual, unfinished nature of Godard’s view of his art leads him to view his experiences of the *works* of others as part of a living mental, spiritual or emotional nourishment through his incorporating, consuming, digesting and changing others’ creations in order to come up with a layered, nuanced and allusive piece that participates in additional conversations, a polyphonic approach. Perhaps this kind of “stealing” is behind the long misunderstood phrase by Pablo Picasso, “*Good artists copy, great artists steal.*” In other words, it is not simply about adopting ideas from others, or even of appropriating aesthetic flourishes and stylings practiced by master artists. Rather, the zone of activity is one where the *Guerrillero Heroico* in this case, inhabits different renderings and works as part of the artists’ visual vocabulary and commentary through artifice on a political or social idea. The “stealing” of this image, allows it to both participate in salient conversations, and add its own layer of meaning.

However there is a code of behavior amongst artists, particularly those working in political ways. Part of the concern artists such as Mark Vallen (2010) voice, is that with the soaring use, reuse and expropriation of images, the “relentless mining and distortion of history will turn out to be detrimental for art, leaving it hollowed-out and meaningless in the process” (online) As we have noted, this is part of the debate around the *Guerrillero Heroico*. Vallen and other artist/activists such as Lincoln Cushing, Josh MacPhee, and Favianna Rodriguez have publicly discussed the nature of plagiarism vis-à-vis subadvertisement and parody. Cushing (2007) expresses the complex unwritten understanding between artists as follows:

...IF it’s noncommercial, and IF one isn’t claiming personal credit, and IF it’s helping a progressive cause, it’s pretty much OK to grab other art and use it. This was more dominant during the “long 1960s” than it is now, but it’s still a valid working model. Current formulations such as CopyLeft and Creative Commons
have a similar approach. The above guidelines are just the beginning, however.
I’m particularly concerned with the erosion of our own art history with the
mashing and appropriation of artwork without credit (online).

The issue for Cushing and others is on the register of a moral economy where an artist
who intentionally copies artworks must not pretend to have been the originator of it, or attempt
to deceive viewers. Not only do Cushing and Vallen advocate for a transparent process, but they
also support the appropriation of existing art to maintain the spirit in which it was created. For
example, if an image was created for political and nonprofit purposes, then its derivatives must
remain free of copyright restrictions. Artists who would profit from an exploitation of images
such as the Guerrillero Heroico are seen as sellouts that ally with those very forces that the
image was seen to protest against. MacPhee notes: “... Posters and graphics made in the heat of
political struggles are often made by anonymous individuals or groups that want to keep the
images in the public domain for use in further struggle” and decries those who would “personally
capitalize on the generosity of others and privatize and enclose the visual commons” (Vallen, M.
2010 online). In the debate on attribution and recognition, this kind of “stealing” is seen as a
copywrong, to adopt a neologism of Siva Vaidhyanathan’s, contributing to historical amnesia
and cultural imperialism. The metamorphosis of corporatizing a work shifts it from being
considered art to the realm of brands. The difference does not merely reside in the articulation
but in the nexus of social and cultural circumstances. Acknowledging that the language of
branding “is a product of modern U.S. capitalism” Casey (2009) claims, “it is really just a
commercially practical way to describe how symbols and images are used in many forms of
communication” (p. 340). We have seen, however, that not all communication is commercial,
nor is all adoption or use of symbolic representation.

A CASE IN POINT: THE EXAMPLES OF TWO ARTISTS

Carlos Latuff is a Brazilian freelance political cartoonist, while Allan McDonald is a
political cartoonist born and living in Honduras. Both are among the many artists inspired by the
image of Che Guevara based on the Guerrillero Heroico. Their work characterizes them as
“seminauts” (Bourriaud, 2005 p. 18) in that they invent paths through visual culture by using
pre-existing forms and imagining links and relations between a network of signs. Skillfully and
eloquently they navigate a vast sea of images cartographically following ephemeral and
temporary lines in order to reveal alternative meanings, while at the same time fusing moments
of production and consumption. Thus, “the culture of use implies a profound transformation of
the status of the work of art: going beyond its traditional role as a receptacle of the artist’s vision,
it now functions as an active agent, a musical score, an unfolding scenario, a framework that
possesses autonomy and materiality to varying degrees” (Bourriaud, 2005 p. 20).

Latuff is particularly famous for his provocative work on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict
that has been seen as controversial in its challenge to mainstream versions of the conflict. Latuff
explicitly takes the side of the oppressed. Correspondingly, he places his work in the Creative
Commons. The kaffiyeh, an Arab-Palestinian scarf and Che are brought together as two global
symbols of resistance against oppression, bringing into alliance the struggles in Latin America
with those in the Middle East. This particular image was also reincarnated as a t-shirt and worn in protest marches in England and elsewhere.

In a personal communication, Latuff (2009) comments, “my intention is to associate an universal, established and popular icon of resistance with the Palestinian struggle for independence. Using well-known symbols and giving them a new dimension and meaning is part of my job as a political cartoonist and image-maker” (personal communication). Likewise, McDonald, who has dedicated a great deal of his life to anticapitalist struggle and social and political criticism, find inspiration in the image. In his articulation, the Korda image becomes the “sacred” heart of Jesus, another anti-imperialist rebel himself, and explicitly allies their spirits but places Che as the inspiration, or source at the centre of Christ in an odd thought-provoking alliance.

I see these images as being beyond the art of appropriation, inhabiting instead “...a culture of the use of forms, a culture of constant activity of signs based on a collective ideal of sharing” (Bourriaud, 2005, p. 17). For artists involved in programming forms rather than producing them Che’s face has become a tool to manipulate and interrogate in order to produce different results. Interestingly this image manifesting from the original photograph is also acting in its own right by acting upon the artist affectively being “independently capable of stirring the forces of human imagination and of tapping into deep-seated longings for a better world” (Casey, 2009, p. 342). The continuing motivation of these and other artists to use this image, confirms its persistent resonance in the visual public sphere; it continues to speak, and both artists and their intended audiences are listening.
CONCLUSION

In Hernandez-Reguant’s (2008) wrap-up where he states, “However, at the end of the affair, it was still unclear whether the now copyrighted Che - and his legacy to Cuban late socialism - had really beaten the forces of capitalism or rather surreptitiously joined them” (p. 256) is really just the beginning. True, many would like to dismiss this image as having been incorporated into the market logic of the culture industry, and consequently losing its power as a political symbol. Most would agree that the Guerrillero Heroico lives a “...strange and by now unstoppable afterlife since his murder in Bolivia in 1967, at the age of 39” (Poyner 2006 p. 34). Despite having strong characteristics of a material commodity in its ability to be a repository for added value, it also resists the force of iconographic commercialization and continues to be a viable political banner. In part, this may be because of its material iterations. “Webb Keane (2003) ...observes that part of the power of material objects in society consists of their openness to ‘external’ events and their resulting potential for mediating the introduction of ‘contingency’ into even the most hegemonic of social orders” (Moore, R. E. 2003, p. 334).

The exceptional case of Che Guevara, embodies the contest visibly being waged between the culture industry and anti-systemic movements that some scholars contend “is shaped and manipulated by elites in order to establish dominant, hegemonic meanings and interpretations of the past, while others argue that groups can reconstruct and recover memories in order to imbue them with new counterhegemonic interpretations (cited in Larson & Lizardo 2007. p. 427). Either way, the presumption that Guevara’s image is little more than a fashionable accessory sapped of all political meaning, or that processes of commoditization have undermined its power to signify and activate political or ideological action is countered by Larson and Lizardo’s (2007) conclusion that “it is by no means clear that Che Guevara has been de-politicized in the face of unbridled commercialism” (p. 429).

The reality is far more complex, as artists have shown through their adoption and appropriation of this image:

In the contemporary context, it is possible to have both processes of commoditization and radicalization of the memory of historical figures at the same time. In fact, the collective consumption of material culture objects might be associated with a renewed radicalization of political struggles and a strengthening of collective identities and ideological commitments (Larson & Lizardo 2007 p. 449).

As a result of their extensive work Larson and Lizardo advise us to consider that the material consumption of Che Guevara’s image can actually coexist with commitments to political resistance: “In contrast to the dire predictions of mass culture theorists, commoditization does not result in the irrevocable termination of the power of political images and symbols” (p. 450).

Branding attempts to insert stories between us and objects in a way that foster desire of the object in order to participate in a specific story. In this way, branding is geared to interrupt our own processes of singularization (Kopytoff) so that a more homogenous story can become a source of profit. These shallow “brand sagas” (Twitchell, 2004, p. 489) are discussed by James Twitchell (2004) in Brand Nation in looking at the commercial strategies adopted by museums, universities, and churches and so on as if they constitute proof that everything is a brand. Further, Twitchell (2004) notes, “Transient materialism. Secular epiphany. Yes, brand owners talk about
the soul of their brands, brand aura, and of their brands as icons, to be sure. By this they mean that their brands have a symbolic, almost a religious significance, which goes way beyond their worth as products" (p. 488-489). These discourses of “brand soul” and “brand icon” (p. 488) and the “process of spiritualizing commercial brands” (p. 488) are supported by Douglas Atkin, in The Culting of Brands as a way for brand owners to copy churches and cults in turning their brands into some kind of source of community (Casey, 2009, p. 306) in order to promote goodwill and broaden the meaning of branding to make it all-encompassing of any symbolic representation under which people can group together. To some extent this strategy succeeds. “How else to explain something so irrational as Evian water, a Dior purse, or a Martha Stewart rolling pin?” (Twitchell, 2004, p. 488). Nevertheless, this tactic does not succeed in all cases, particularly in such politically charged and contested cases such as that of the Guerrillero Heroico.

While the “intrinsic logic of brand protection” follows the notion that the brand’s intangibility makes “brand owners worry about the fragility of their vital piece of property,” since its value can vanish overnight if it is somehow given a bad reputation. Casey (2009) believes the Korda estate lawyers are doing something similar since they are demarcating acceptable and non-acceptable usage of the image (p. 335). In spite of this, it is likely that the usage of the Guerrillero Heroico as governed by the Cuban Government, Guevara’s family, and Korda’s daughter Diana Diaz represents an awareness of and compatibility with the meaning of Guevara’s own death and life. Just as there was a perfect emotional correspondence between Guevara’s death as a result of his attempt to change the world because “anything less would have meant that he found the ‘intolerable’ tolerable” (Berger 1975, p. 207). For John Berger (1975), Guevara “represented a decision, a conclusion” (p. 207).

In a letter to his parents when he left Cuba, Guevara wrote: “Now a will-power that I have polished with an artist’s attention will support my feeble legs and tired-out lungs. I will make it” [p. 113 (translation by Berger)] (1975, p. 208). Certain of his own death in the fight against imperialism, Guevara called for those who would embrace the same ideals to welcome death as long as “our battle-cry, may have reached some receptive ear and another hand may be extended to wield our weapons...” (cited in Berger 1975, p. 204). Responding to his call, millions interpellated by the Guerrillero Heroico around the World take up the image as a way of noting the intolerable state of the world, the need to change it, and the commitment (to varying degrees) to participate in that change. To those who re-render this image on the streets, (in the vernacular handmade sense such as that of a graffiti artist on the street in Guatemala), attempts to brand products with this image of Che fall absolutely and its copyrighting is irrelevant. Thus, the image continues to function as a virtual prosthetic of the man himself, and of his ideas. Both continue to be politically charged and salient.
Works Cited


Revolution Within the Revolution: A Caracas Collective and the Face of Che Guevara

Carolina Cambre

We are living in a topsy-turvy world, a world where we cannot find our way by abiding by the rules of what once was common sense

—Hannah Arendt

In this case, the struggle itself is the great teacher

—Ernesto “Che” Guevara

Caracas, Venezuela, is a city of stark contrasts and extreme inequality. Space is at a premium in this densely built city squeezed into a valley between two mountain ranges so that buildings rise higher and higher. Entire neighborhoods are vertical communities located in bloques, buildings unique to Caracas designed in the late 1950s specifically to house large numbers of the urban poor. By contrast, the middle classes live in a variety of condo-like securitized edificios. In this crowded and stratified context, and between the cracks of a nation divided and struggling in a battle of media and images, I began my field work.¹

In the ongoing image war, the role of one image in particular (and the subject of my research) drew me to a neighborhood called the 23 de enero. The image, Alberto Korda’s photograph of Ernesto “Che” Guevara known as the Guerrillero Heroico, visually occupies a central place in the community. After weeks of communications and negotiations, I met with the youth-led grassroots collective in charge of the 23 de enero, the Colectivo Alexis Gonzáles Vive Carajo (C.A.G.V.C.). With them, I had the opportunity to explore the
significance and practice of this famous image. I found that the C.A.G.V.C. use and experience the image of Che Guevara in ways that creatively reconfigure spaces in a revolution within the socialist revolution trumpeted by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. As such, the question I explore in this article is to what extent and in what ways does the Collectivo’s use of the Che image suggest an operative sign system that continues to nurture dynamic forms of political and cultural change in Venezuela? To explore this question, I draw on research from a case study that is part of a larger project I have undertaken examining the Guerrillero Heroico.

IT BEGAN WITH A FACE

Peter McLaren (2000) writes about a bus ride he took in Latin America where he felt a sudden impulse to greet a young man who was walking down the street wearing a Che T-shirt. He distinguishes his sense of connection with the T-shirt wearer as a link with all people with a common resolve to fight injustice and free the world from cruelty and injustice (xix). Across the globe, other people resonate in similar ways with the Guerrillero Heroico (1960) (Figure 12). It appears and reappears, sometimes as a two-tone picture, occasionally as a drawing, but always evoking, if not reproducing, the unforgettable expression on Che Guevara’s face. Many times these reproductions are made simply to exploit the image as designer revolutionary-ism for trendy popular consumption. At the same time, it is crucial to remember that this image also emerges repeatedly in the midst of social protests and demonstrations happening around the world.3

On the streets where people claim to walk in the footsteps of Guevara, his face seems to function transtemporally and transnationally as a reminder of the connection between struggles near and far. Latin American intellectuals observe that Guerarismo is present as a resistance to the established order in certain social movements (Löwy 1997, 2). In these contexts, just as much as in the 23 de enero, the meaning of the image is explicitly linked with Guevara’s ethical and political stance. That is, people seem to be declaring that they will continue what he began. This sentiment surfaces in marches against NATO in Istanbul, in rallies against Bush in Berlin, in marches against the privatization of education in Australia, in marches for democratic rights in Sarajevo, and in rallies among illegal immigrants in the United States and elsewhere.
If rebellion and resistance are common themes in these instances, it of course remains problematic to assume that rebellion signifies the same thing to people regardless of time or place. Indeed, the moment when the photograph was taken was not in itself a rebellious instance, though it was within the greater context of the Cuban revolution. On March 5, 1960, Che Guevara was unaware and photographer Alberto Diaz Gutierrez, later known as Korda, took the shot by chance: “This photograph is not the product of knowledge or technique. It was really coincidence, pure luck,” commented Korda (Sridhar 2002, 5). The previous day, a bomb had killed sailors and stevedores on the French freighter La Coubre, carrying a Belgian arms shipment. Rescuers boarding the ship were killed by the detonation of a second bomb. As Fidel Castro eulogized the victims, Guevara was on the podium with others.
Panning across the figures on the dais, Korda saw Guevara's face come into view:

The look in Che's eyes startled Mr. Korda so much that he instinctively lurched backward, and immediately pressed the button: There appears to be a mystery in those eyes, but in reality it is just blind rage at the deaths of the day before (http://www.netssa.com/che.html).

At the time Korda was unaware of exactly how the image would materialize. "[I]t was only later, while developing the film, that he realized what his camera had captured" (Anon. 1999).

Professionally, Korda had taken more than 12,000 intimate portraits of Fidel and others (Sridhar 2002). Some of his photos had earned international acclaim; yet he chose to display this particular photo on his studio wall for years. Later, he chose this photograph to give to Italian publisher, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, who published it. Soon after, over two million posters featured Guevara's face as students demonstrated on the streets of Europe in the spring of 1968. In one form or another, this image has been on the streets ever since.

Scholars in the disciplines of art, design, and art history discuss the genesis and flourishing of this image with reference to the aesthetics of pop culture. Others participate in countless discusssions of Che's photo on Web logs and in magazines. Recognizing this, it is perhaps surprising to note that little analysis of how the image functions in its wider social, political, and cultural uses is available.

This said, David Kunzle's (1997) Che Guevara: Icon, Myth and Message provides a starting point. In the preface, Carol A. Wells remarks on "the omnipresent image of Che Guevara as a heroic figure, and the vitality of the protest poster as a weapon against injustice" (11). T-shirts, murals, and protest posters or prints are the most frequent canvases for vernacular versions of this image. Because of this, Wells observes that

Posters have transmitted and promoted Che's ideals, hopes, and dreams and those of millions of others who dare to challenge the status quo... Hastily slapped on walls "guerrilla-style" or carefully fashioned by recognized artists in well equipped studios, they communicate instantly and directly to both literate and non-literate audiences... [At the same time, the] visage of the hero who helped transform history has [also] to a degree become a commercial logo (Kunzle 1997, 11).

If this is so, Che Guevara's image most certainly has not become just another commodity. Rather, Kunzle (1997) points out that there
is a paradox to political posters: "obviously in the forefront of commercialization insofar as they are sold ... [they] themselves raise the cry against a process in which they are inevitably implicated" (21): a paradox that seems to echo the life of this particular image. The iconography emerging around Che's image is anything but universal: in fact "there are, it seems, as many ways of seeing Che as there are artists" (22). This seemingly endless proliferation, which shows no sign of slowing down, provokes Kunzle (1997) to ask: "Why do the artists return again and again to the face, and so often the same single 'matrix photograph' of the face" (24)?

For youth, this image appears to have a unique status generation after generation. Perceptively, García, Sola, and Sánchez (1997) suggest reasons why this is so:

While in Cuba the public dimension of his figure persists, in the capitalist world it endures above all as a central topic for youth counterculture. The poster marks the freed territory of an adolescent’s bedroom, where nonsense is charged with signification. Certainly, Guevara is not the sole source of this imaginary for youth but in his wake, some of his principle aspects converge: the nomadic impulse, the anti-systemic bent, the ideal of a heroic death, all provisions of a certain nocturnal appearance. A rebel look that has nothing trivial, given that the icons are thin only in guise... keeping above all, the spirit of egalitarian utopia, in a reference that persists mainly in youth militancy (209; author's own translation).⁵

Through their subtle understanding of a poster's role in a teenager’s bedroom, what these authors suggest, in other words, is that there is more to the choice of this image for many teenagers than a countercultural fashion sense. More is happening there than the "rebel look." The authors do not tell us what this something other might be. But they do explicitly recognize the orientation of youth toward this image and what it has to offer them. Similarly, among members of the Colectivo Alexis Vive, there is an implicit recognition that this image is actually more than an image.

CHAOTIC CARACAS

After the attempted coup of 2002, the polarization of Venezuelan society into pro- and anti-Chávez groups became extremely marked. During my stay in the city, for instance, the almost daily demonstrations and events staged by the right wing opposition to President Chávez' administration were answered in kind by his
supporters, also known as "Chavistas." Television stations that had taken critical positions concerning the government provided furious and intense media coverage of the recent controversy galvanized by the closing of Radio Caracas Television (RCTV). For a time, the nonrenewal of RCTV's concession became a lightning rod for mass protests and virtually all but the government-run television stations exploited, broadcasted, and analyzed every incident as criticism of the Chávez administration. The response to any public action was always immediate as both pro- and antigovernment supporters struggled for control of words such as "liberty," phrases like "freedom of the press," and television images partially representing what had transpired on the streets on any given day.

The Chávez administration's refusal to renew the concession for RCTV's public broadband, though legal, resulted in a series of organized mass protests on the streets that sometimes forced stores to close by noon. As momentum built and university students nationwide decided to march, classes around the country were suspended. Every day brought a new crisis and it seemed as though a virtually unending stream of contradicting stories were being televised. If it was difficult to understand what was happening in Venezuela from outside the nation, the view from inside was equally confusing.

In the midst of these events, I found it difficult to discern whether pro- or anti-Chávez groups were stronger at any given moment. Although Chávez' support was strong and stores would quickly run out of the red T-shirts representing socialism, the opposition regularly made itself heard. For example, during one two-week stretch, evenings were subject to deafening nightly cacerolazos from 8:00 to 8:30 pm as city dwellers stood in windows and doorways banging pots and pans, sounding sirens, and other noisemakers. Paradoxically, the streets themselves stood empty. Meanwhile, Chávez appeared nightly on television, voicing his response to the accusations of the opposition and their powerful media and middle-class allies. Interestingly, many grassroots movements still publicly expressed support for Chávez' presidency. They recognized his errors, but expressed forgiveness for them in the hopes that he could still create positive change in their daily lives.

Due to these events, one of these grassroots groups, the C.A.G.V.C., whom I had been trying to reach, had gone underground. Their safety was at risk because they had issued a public
declaration claiming responsibility for spray-painting graffiti (in red) on RCTV's office building. They accused those who were generating waves of unrest of attempting to destabilize the government, and of constricting life for youth with their "fascist-democratic bipartisanship." As a result, I had to wait some time before trying to gain permission to enter their barrio, which is famous for its murals of Che Guevara (see Figure 2). The C.A.G.V.C. had named themselves after a former member of the community, Alexis Gonzalez, who had been shot and killed during the countercoup upheavals of 2002. It was actually in response to these events that the Colectivo was officially formed. In daily use, the Colectivo typically call themselves "Alexis Vive," which translates as "Alexis lives." In songs they repeat their dedication of themselves and their works to those who have died in the struggle for what the Chávez' government calls, "Socialism of the Twenty-first Century." In this sense, the role of the dead is a constant presence; they are repeatedly and explicitly invoked.

The 23 de enero where members of the Colectivo Alexis Vive both live and operate, is a neighborhood historically famous for directing coups and anti-establishment activity. According to
Ciccariello-Maher (2008), these “young militants” are “one of the best organized of Venezuela’s revolutionary collectives, and one whose platform for struggle and everyday practice entails the construction of popular militias fused with organs of communal power” (11). But they are one of many:

Decades of rural and urban guerrilla struggle in the pre-Chávez years have given way not to a pacification and disarmament after his election, but rather to the proliferation of networks of armed, local self-defense units concentrated in the poorest parts of Venezuela… These groups have always existed in a sort of gray area vis-à-vis the revolutionary government, providing the backbone of militant support for Chávez and in the process, occasionally receiving logistical support from various levels of government (Ciccariello-Maher 2008, 6).

In their barrio, which is like other poor areas containing bloques overflowing into rickety self-built shanties, the C.A.G.V.C. work on developing their social justice face. Accordingly, the Colectivo protects and cares for their neighborhood, which is like a shrine to Che Guevara and is famous for its murals covering just about every available wall.

To make sense of how the image of Che is used and understood in this context, my field work relied extensively on a mutually respectful relationship with the youthful twelve to thirty-plus year-old members of the C.A.G.V.C., a self-described vanguard movement. To establish this relationship, I drew on the help of Professor María Victoria Canino, a colleague with a trusted record of activism supporting grassroots movements, who was able to coordinate a meeting between myself and a group of leaders from the Colectivo. We met at the Universidad Central de Venezuela in an empty classroom one late afternoon.

During the meeting, I presented a video montage to help explain my interest in the image of Che Guevara and how it operates in relation to cultural and political practices around the world. I also shared ideas about my interest in learning about how the C.A.G.V.C. create new social and cultural spaces using this image, how they bring the local to the global, the past to the present and transform it through their practice. They listened. A few days later, Professor Canino informed me that they had decided to grant me permission to enter the barrio. However, Manuel, an established member, cautioned me that if I wanted to understand what was going on, how socialism was being constructed in this part of
Caracas, I would have to be prepared to experience it first hand. To translate, he said

Sometimes foreigners, or others from outside are interested to learn about the reality here. And we take them to see all the areas of the barrio. Why? Because basically that is how we see socialism being forged. They must know what the socialist revolution is from within, and through experience. They [researchers] can’t bring people to stay in luxury hotels, they must learn from staying right in the barrio, learn from the base, from the people (field notes 2007).

Without doing this, he added, visitors, whether academic or otherwise, will simply have “discussions from and between the views of the elites, not discussions from the base, with the barrio…” (field notes 2007). Aware of my own privileged position, my response to these concerns has been to consult with the Colectivo members and to incorporate their suggestions throughout the research.

Manuel’s cautionary comment revealed to me that while the Colectivo members are open to cultivating outside contact and collaboration, they have a specific idea not only about what socialism is for them but also about how one should undertake the process of learning about it. Their explicit pedagogical stance is one of praxis so that having “discussions,” or simply theorizing is insufficient. On the contrary, they insist that those who wish to collaborate or learn from them must live in the barrio and learn directly “from experience” or practice. At the time I found this to be a surprisingly theoretical understanding from which to base their actions. It became much clearer through our interactions, however, that their theory is action, and their actions are in turn understood to be theory lived out.

At the outset, everyone I spoke with treated me with suspicion because of my university affiliations, because I was an outsider, and because I was explicit about doing research. On one occasion, for instance, Ana, another member of the Colectivo, forcefully reminded me of my position when she commented that my bandana, a significant symbol and mark of a specific membership status within the community, had come to me too easily. The bandana, which is worn only by full-fledged members who had undergone lengthy training and which represents the group to outsiders, had been given to me as a welcoming gift. Ana’s comment, however, was a way of saying that I had not earned my place in the