

THESIS

READING CHÉ GUEVARA'S "NEW MAN" THROUGH THE PRAXIS OF MISFITTING: TOWARDS A
REVOLUTION FOR "PEOPLE LIKE US"

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2016

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ABSTRACT

READING CHÉ GUEVARA'S "NEW MAN" THROUGH THE PRAXIS OF MISFITTING: TOWARDS A REVOLUTION FOR "PEOPLE LIKE US"

This study incorporates reflections from five Cuban participants about the contemporary status of Ernesto Ché Guevara's "new man" in Cuba. Grounded in the Marxist tradition of praxis as philosophy, the thesis integrates Pan American articulations on the theme of Latin American liberation alongside interview data. In light of research findings pertaining to the "new man," I evoke Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's feminist materialist disability concepts of "fitting" and "misfitting" alongside Tobin Siebers' assertion that by way of "misfitting" one produces critical knowledge revealing the "blueprints of power" that have constructed exclusionary reality for some and a contingent fit for others. I argue that the state imposed ideal of the "new man" failed to create the proper channels within which everyday misfit knowledge could be elevated to the level of social theory. However, the "new man" as a set of embodied values and mechanisms for social integration did succeed at various levels, which are explored throughout, the chapters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you Dr. Karina Cespedes for all of the guidance and critical input you provided me with throughout this project. Thank you to the Ethnic Studies department and professors who helped cultivate within my work and being a rigorous qualitative methodology of love.

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CHAPTER ONE

“No doubt we had found meaning in life; we had a plan, a project, a future, beautiful friendships, great promises, a huge job to be done. We were noble, pure, young, and our conscience was clear” Reinaldo Arenas *Before Night Falls* (1993)

“I have left no material possessions to my wife and children, and I do not regret it; I am happy it is this way. I ask nothing for them, since the state will provide for their needs and their education.” Ernesto Ché Guevara *Letter to Fidel* (1965)

“What had the years of sacrifice—always for the sake of a messianic time not yet arrived—finally yielded? How had an island of utopian dreamers become so desperately vulnerable?” Ruth Behar *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996)

“Sé que dicen cosas muy buenas sobre la revolución, pero no se trata de gente como nosotras” Caridad (Resident of Havana, 2014)

The four quotes above foreshadow a disconnect between the ideals of the Cuban Revolution and the lived reality of some people on the island decades later. In the first quote, Reinaldo Arenas is reflecting upon the early years of the Revolution. Here, Arenas marks a

discrepancy between the new order, in which meaning in life has been found, and the old, stagnated state of affairs. For Arenas, the promises brought about by nobility and youth invigorated the will to reconstruct. However, as Arena's narrative in *Before Night Falls*ⁱ progresses he begins to question the ideological nature of the revolution, which reserves the right of being contradictory only for those who are in power. For instance, Arenas notes that by 1963, "the persecution of homosexuals was getting worse." Except for, the *royal gay*,ⁱⁱ "the one who, because of close contact with the Maximum Leader...can afford to be openly gay, to have a scandalous life, and at the same time to hold an important public office."ⁱⁱⁱ Protected by political connectedness, the royal gay never was persecuted and never had to face the consequences of their behavior, "while others had to pay such a high price."^{iv} Arenas' navigation through the contradictions of the revolution produced a kind of knowledge that was critical of the transition between the ideal promises and goals of the revolution and the material reality.

In the second quote, taken from Ché Guevara's last letter to Fidel Castro (where Guevara resigns from his administrative posts and announces his departure from Cuba), Guevara claims that he expects nothing more in terms of material goods for his kids than what the state will provide. Here, specifically as the statement pertains to the *needs* of his children, Guevara seems to imply that by way of material provisions, the state will also serve as the affective mediator not only for his children, but also for all children in Cuba

The third quote, by scholar Ruth Behar introduces the reality of everyday sacrifice, which has yet to be harvested into the dreams of yesterday. Behar's reference to a general

state of despair seems to indicate that the aforementioned sacrifices, which have not yielded anything substantial, have either been performed in vain or gone unrecognized.

Finally, the words of Caridad, a resident of Havana who takes care of her disabled daughter Ines, captures a condition of exclusion from the positive aspects of the revolution by way of their embodiment and socially persistent gender roles ascribed to care ethics.

Caridad's and Arenas' navigational knowledge is in part developed by their encounters with contradictions that would otherwise go unacknowledged by those who fit the ideal revolutionary subject.

This study seeks to address the tension found between the theory and practice of the Cuban Revolution, exemplified by the incommensurability of the ideal and the real, and implicit in the above quotations. I believe that the best way to give an account of this tension, given the peculiarities of Cuba's socio-historical development, is to ground the analysis in the Marxist tradition of praxis. In a general sense, the idea and language that informs praxis allows me to be contextually coherent with the aspirations of building socialism in Cuba after the Revolution. Specifically, the language of praxis includes the notions of subjective potentials and objective conditions in the struggle to create and achieve freedom. Further, the demands of praxis in Latin America—which have been articulated by numerous Latin American thinkers—allows me to thoroughly investigate and critique the idea of the “new man,” who is imagined to “be like Ché,” heteronormative, lacking vulnerabilities, male and able bodied; said to emerge alongside the material base of socialism.

I begin by contributing to the Ethnic Studies tradition of situating the researcher; I then discuss my interest in contemporary Cuban relations and my entry into the research process. As I introduce the reader to the first instances of the on the ground research in Cuba, I engage in an ethnographic account of my first day in Cuba, where in a personal communication with two women outside of a restaurant I come to have a fuller understanding of the ways in which the social definition of the “new man” makes certain people who fall outside of the prescriptive ideal, particularly vulnerable to the consequences of devaluation.

I close out the first chapter by outlining subsequent chapters and identifying the ways in which they contribute to the project as a whole.

Situating the Researcher

I was born in Curitiba, the capital of Paraná, Brazil. I remember growing up and for many years taking the same route on the bus to school. The route would pass by the capital building. During every day of my third year of grade school I saw the group known as the MST (*movimento sem terra*) occupying the lawn of the capital. The MST, which traces its history to Paraná, has a reputation for being radical, as they have since the early 1980's promoted agrarian land reformation by occupying large areas of land (public and private) and more recently by destroying genetically modified crop productions. I recall, on many occasions, gazing out of the school bus window on rainy and foggy mornings and on hot and sunny afternoons; I starkly remember one of their flags stretched across an encampment

wall adjacent to a gate; it featured a bearded man wearing a beret with a star on it superimposed onto a red background. I was curious as to who this representative was. It would be many years later before I understood the significance of that image and its political significances to the *MST*, Latin America, and the world.

I did not learn about the man on that flag until well after I had migrated to the United States of America in the year 2000, at the age of 11. I moved to a small town in Iowa and became immersed in a conservative environment that resisted my presence. After the tragedy of 2001, the US experienced an acute resurgence of hostility towards immigrants. My new Iowan home was no different. Looking back, I now reflect on the ways in which I consciously and subconsciously pursued ways to assimilate to my new surroundings, and minimize the signs of my old culture. Determined to shed my accent, which I found led to harsh a priori assumptions about my migration, my legal status, my intentions and my future in the United States, I attentively watched people's mouths as they spoke so that I could later practice the same movements in front of the mirror, desperately determined to learn diction.

Years later, I experienced a period of cultural grieving whereby I sought to reconnect with my lost origins. As I began my college career, I wanted to study international relations, most specifically focusing on Latin America. In the few times I was able to go back to Brazil in-between the time of my adoption and the beginning of my college career, I visited my family which lives in the rural part of Paraná and got to see the incremental gains that the *MST* had made since the days of the encampments in front of the *Palácio Iguaçú*. As an undergraduate, I choose as one of my primary focuses the history of social movements in Latin America on more specifically on the *MST*. As I explored the history, colonialism and

independence alongside of the issue of land reform in Brazil and Latin America, I came to make the first solid connections between the image of the scruffy man superimposed on the flag and the political platform of the MST.

In my research as an undergrad at the University of Wyoming, I began to realize how the issues of land reform prevalent in Brazil and throughout Latin America were intimately connected to the regions history of colonialism. Additionally, I came to have a cognitive dissonance with respect to ideas of post-colonialism in Latin American and *latifúndios*, operating under large land grants historically handed down by colonial monarchies in light of Brazil's so-called independence. Politically, to speak of land reform in Latin America is to become identified with socialism. Likewise, I learned how the Cuban revolution spawned the most successful and egalitarian systematic land reform so far in the Americas. It was then that I learned how the man with the starred beret, who I was then familiar with as Ché Guevara, was linked to the MST of my childhood bus route.

I was fortunate enough to be able to take my childhood curiosity and utilize it as my research bedrock in academia. As liberation theory in general became the locus of my studies, I critically engaged with various works by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire as well as the actual written journals of Ché Guevara. Finally, I was able to link the influence of Paulo Freire and Ché Guevara to a hemispheric movement that extended beyond Latin America yet had been observable in my childhood bus route. I also followed my natural interest in Latin American art, which lead me to a sea of Latin American poets, musicians, artists, writers, and revolutionaries. I have always been intrigued by a certain trend in Latin American art, those artists who exhibited political consciousness. This led me

to poets and musicians like Pablo Neruda, Nicolás Guillén, Jorge Cafrune, Mercedes Sosa, Victor Jara, Atahualpa Yupanqui, Oswaldo Guayasamin, Gabriel García Márquez and countless others. Although I read Nicolás Guillén's *West Indies, Ltd.*, José Martí's *Nuestra América* and Ché Guevara's *El Socialismo y el Hombre en Cuba* as a personal pastime, their insights into Cuban culture and history proved to be essential in my ability to identify with the Cuban people I would come to meet.

In 2014, as a graduate student in Ethnic Studies at Colorado State University, I found myself surrounded by a community of professors who were from Cuba. They encouraged my work and suggested I look into various programs for visiting the still embargoed Cuba. Given Cuba's status as the socialist vanguard of Latin America with the most successful and well-documented land reform program in the region, I wanted to explore how socialism is embodied in everyday life. In my readings of Latin American liberation theory I had come across the themes of rebirth through the emergence and building of a "new man". The idea of a "new man" or what might be paralleled with the idea of a "transvaluation of values" — away from colonial and colonized ways of acting and reflecting — is, during the 20th century, not exclusive to Cuba. Philosophers in Mexico, Peru, Brazil, and all over Latin America had been analyzing similar themes of rebirth pertaining to their specific contexts. However, after the Cuban Revolution and the emergence of the first self-proclaimed socialist state in Latin America, Cuba began to implement the ideal of the "new man" into legal, economic, and moral structures, so as to accelerate the emergence of the "new man". Ernesto Ché Guevara's (1965) *Man and Socialism in Cuba* is nowadays the primary text which is associated with the idea of the "new man" in Cuba; in it, Guevara makes it explicitly clear

from the beginning that the scope of the text is not to directly address the perceived extinction of the individual for the sake of the state under socialism. For Guevara, the book is an account of, “our experience, not a recipe.”^V

In the beginning, this project sought to identify how everyday Cubans value, transform, and embody the virtues associated with the “new man” ideology. After going through the research process, much has changed, especially in terms of understanding which types of bodies the ideal of the “new man” applies to. Yet, the initial research question remains central to understanding the data that was acquired and to the findings of this study. However, a much more complicated entanglement of sponsored ideal and lived reality has come to inform my previous readings of the historical texts and as such becomes undoubtedly reflected in the analysis of the coming chapters.

This research predominantly focuses on the research process and not a singular problem. The objective of a process based research is to become aware of historical, social, and economic conditions and contradictions that exist deeply entrenched within the fabrics of self and society. Whereas a problem based research works from a singular angle, to first prove that a problem exists and then to justify possible solutions, a process based research embraces degrees of ambiguity, fragmentation, and opacity for the sake of maintaining open channels whereby new information influences the alteration of thought. That is not to say that in a process based research one does not problematize contradictions, on the contrary, in a process based research problems arise organically and are responded to dynamically.

However, solving a problem is not the end goal of a process based research. That is to say, a process based research must begin as a thematic investigation expressed as an

educational pursuit; a process based research demands constant vigilance over ourselves as researchers to avoid being simplistic, reductive, or incoherent; a process based research cannot fail to take into consideration the importance of the lived experience and the knowledge created within it; a process based research is thus, an ethical engagement whereby thinking and studying, critically reflecting on our practice as researchers, we begin to perceive our previous perceptions, we gain knowledge over our previous knowledge, thereby co-creating new knowledge which never is but always becomes.

In light of my research goals, I chose to accompany the Global Exchange program to the biannual CubaSolar conference on sustainable energy practices throughout Cuba. The conference took place in the tourist city of Varadero in the province of Matanzas. Given the strict travel restrictions, which were in place before the beginning of normalizing relations between the United States and Cuba, deciding to join Global Exchange made sense logistically and bureaucratically. Traveling with a tour group provides the advantages of having a cultural liaison who in my case answered countless questions which deepened my understanding of everyday relations in Cuba and who also became familiar with my study and suggested people for me to speak with. However, traveling with a tour group also brings certain disadvantages, specifically as they pertain to the forfeit of autonomy and short duration in most locations.

Given the limitations of this project, it is not the scope of the thesis to extensively articulate a feminist critique of the performances of and idealizations of masculinity in the Cuban Revolution, or the “new man” in the process of building socialism in Cuba. Although, gender will be incorporated as a topic of analysis in sections of the thesis, I find that given

Latin America and Cuba's peculiar entanglement with patriarchy,^{vi} a study which focuses on everyday theory and practice naturally gives rise to various possible discussions which could not be pursued fully in this project. For related works, I direct readers to Ofelia Schutte's (1993) "Cultural Identity, Liberation, and Feminist Theory,"^{vii} Margaret Randall's (1981) *Women in Cuba, Twenty Years Later*^{viii} as well as Randall's (1992) book *Gathering Rage: The Failure of Twentieth Century Revolutions to Develop a Feminist Agenda*;^{ix} Ileana Rodríguez's (1996) *Women, Guerrillas, and Love: Understanding War in Central America*;^x Vilma Espín et al. (2012) in *Women in Cuba the Making of a Revolution within the Revolution*;^{xi} and finally Tamara Vidaurrázaga Aránguiz's (2012) work "¿The new man?: Moral revolutionary guevarista and female militancy. The case of the MIR."^{xii}

First Day in Cuba

We arrive in Havana off the plane in a midst of a torrential downpour. On the bus ride from the airport to the hotel, I gaze out of the window and notice many billboards and signs addressed to both Cuban citizens and tourists. I immediately notice that the billboard images revolved around themes of politics, socialism, and particular individuals associated with the Cuban revolution. They had nothing to do with commodities or products. They aimed at instilling a sense of pride in the uniqueness of Cuban history. The same values and pride I felt when studying the Cuban revolution thousands of miles away. The messages were everywhere, from ordinary billboards, to murals that had almost been chipped away enough to make the previous message intelligible. Some of the messages read:

Viva el 26 de Julio

Amo Esta Isla

Hasta La Victoria Siempre

5 ¡Volverán!

Revolución es modestia, desinterés, altruismo, solidaridad y heroísmo

¡La Revolución sigue igual, sin compromisos, con nadie en absoluto, solo con el pueblo!

¡Patria o Muerte!

In light of my natural curiosity and knowledge regarding the history and values of Cuba, I could not help but feel romantic about finally being in “la patria.” Not only am I physically located in Cuba, I am witnessing the mass promotion of the ideals of the revolution, the same ones I researched and wrote about from my tiny office in Colorado. Up to that point, I had only been theoretically critical of the revolution. I was now given the opportunity to go beyond the words and immerse myself in the Cuban world.

The rain ceased and the tour group headed out on the town for our first dinner at a state-sponsored restaurant. I was somewhat shocked to discover the state-run restaurant was upscale. The waiter pouring wine was speaking various different languages. I come to realize that this is a state-run restaurant geared towards tourists.

In my heightened state of awareness, I begin to notice how the restaurant contains many feral-looking cats that are lounging under and around the tables. The cats seemed to be very relaxed and full, being offered various scraps from the restaurant connoisseurs. They did not approach the tables unless they were enticed by an exceptionally aromatic offer. Suddenly, there was a loud cannon explosion. My fellow tour companions were fairly startled

by the noise. They began to ask out loud what had caused the sound. I asked what time it was and when I learned it was a little before 9pm I was able to explain La *Ceremonia del Cañonazo* or, 'the Ceremony of the Canon Shot' which takes place at the colonial fortress San Carlos de la Cabaña. Due to my personal studies I knew that during Spanish colonialism, Havana was surrounded by a gate that was closed off every night at 9pm in defense of pirate attacks. They now commemorate that period with the Ceremony of the Canon Shot every night before 9. This is the first point that I naively come to see myself as an insider. Somehow I felt as if the coalescence of time, space, and background knowledge granted me a degree of insider status.

As I am looking out of the plastic windows that keep the wind from blowing on our three-course, four-star meal, I see two women pass by clearly looking into the restaurant. An older woman is hastily pushing a younger woman in a wheelchair— moving over colonial cobbled streets. I feel the urge to talk to these women about their everyday life, but internally debate its appropriateness. A few minutes later, they pass by again, still looking into the restaurant. I make eye contact once more with the elderly woman. I can no longer suppress my desire to go speak with them. I excuse myself from the table to go outside and approach them.

I speak in intermediate Spanish and introduce myself as a Brazilian native who studies in the United States. The elderly woman introduced herself as Caridad, the caretaker of Ines, her daughter. I tell them that I study Cuban history and that I am interested in the everyday life of Cuban citizens. Caridad asked me to follow them around the restaurant to a more secluded area. She proceeds to tell me that her daughter has a disability but can understand

everything we say; Caridad tells me, “her muscles don’t work correctly.” Caridad tells me many things, and describes some of the common difficulties both her and her daughter encounter daily, but that what is most difficult to her is the fact that she and her daughter Ines receive only \$8 pesos a month on their ration card for food and that the reserves last a week or two at most. Caridad tells me, while she repeatedly rubbed her belly, “*Aunque tenemos mucho amor, el amor no va a llenar la barriga*” (“though we have lots of love, love is not going to fill the belly.” Caridad tells me this over and over as if to make sure I understood her message. Caridad’s revelation initially puzzled me, I remembered Guevara’s remarks about the primary duty of the revolution, “to see that no one goes without food in Cuba.”^{xiii} I wondered if Ines’s disability and Caridad’s role as her caretaker placed the both of them on the peripheries of Cuban society to such a degree that the prescriptive ideal of the “new man” had turned oppressive.

I then asked about accessible transportation, how far away she lived from our current location in colonial Old Havana, and how she moved about the city. Caridad told me she and Ines had taken two buses to get to our location and that she required assistance from other people to get Ines in and out of the buses. Caridad then tells me she wanted to speak in a more secluded area because if the police saw a Cuban *pordiosera* (beggar) speaking to a tourist, the police would watch from a distance, wait until I left, and then harass her. Caridad points out that Ines’s hair is beautifully braided as she tells me that she does not like having to illicit pity from anyone but that it has become part of the necessity of everyday life. Before we part, Caridad tells me, “*Sé que dicen cosas muy buenas sobre la*

revolución, pero no se trata de gente como nosotras (“I know they say very nice things about the Revolution, but it is not about people like us”).

This interaction with Caridad and Ines informed and influenced the ways I navigated Cuba from that moment on. We said goodbye and I boarded my bus back to Hotel Victoria. On my relatively short and fully accommodated ride back to the hotel, I reflected on the day. On whose behalf were the patriotic murals and billboards painted for? Did Caridad mean that she and Ines did not fit with “the nice things” said about the revolution? Or did Caridad mean that she and Ines did not fit the revolution as a whole? Was the “new man” ever imagined as having a disability, or necessitating a caretaker? Was the police going to harass Caridad and Ines because it is an embarrassment to the ideals of the revolution that anyone would have to beg? In what ways and why did the “new man” fail to recognize people with disabilities and their caretakers as integral parts of the Revolution? In what ways did the ubiquitous rhetoric of “independence” help shape Caridad and Ines’s exclusion from “the good things that are said about the revolution?”

Fitting and Misfitting: Revealing Blueprints of Power

Disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011) coins the terms fitting and misfitting to, “denote an encounter in which two things come together in either harmony or disjunction.”^{xiv} For Garland-Thomson, bodies come into contact with built and arranged spaces in dynamic ways that render a fit for most and a misfit for some. When one has the privilege of fitting into a space, they are able to forget their contingency and the underlying power structures that have afforded fluid movement. Conversely, those who

misfit are made aware of the ways in which material environments assume that certain bodies will be navigating the spaces. Material environments are informed through discursive environments and those who misfit are often made aware of the contradictions that would otherwise go unacknowledged. The significance of materially misfitting reveals what fellow disability studies scholar, Tobin Siebers, calls “blueprints of power”. As Siebers (2008) states, “When a disabled body enters any construction, social or physical, a deconstruction occurs, a deconstruction that reveals the lines of force, the blueprint, of the social rendering of the building as surely as its physical rendering.”^{xv} These insights help to articulate the fluid and dynamic ways in which dominant discourses materially manifest as inclusion for some bodies and exclusion for others. Consequently, these epistemological sites of misfitting function to unveil the “blueprints of power.”

Accordingly, Renaldo Arenas in *Before Night Falls*, expresses sentiments of misfitting and the push back to contingency that misplaced bodies experience. He states, “Not many can escape that wild, all-embracing evil which destroys those who are not part of it.”^{xvi} Connecting Arenas’ assertion of an “all-embracing evil” with Siebers’ notion to “blueprints of power” illuminates the inescapability of these material power structures. Arenas was originally quite enthusiastic about the revolution until he began to see that the freedoms which mattered most to him^{xvii} and his friends were being taken away by the libratory revolution. Arenas comes to view the revolution and its implementation as akin to dogmatic religious indoctrination,

We had been indoctrinated in a new religion and after graduation we were to spread that new religion all over the island. We were the ideological guides of a new kind of

repression, we were the missionaries who would spread the new official ideology among all the state farms in the Island.^{xviii}

Arenas expresses alienation and a critical perspective of Cuban ideology and implementation. Arenas was in the belly of the tension between the ideal promises of the revolution and the reality that it brought about.

So, material environments afford insight into the interaction between ideology and reality insofar as the ideal bodies will fit and fail to recognize the power structures that minimize their contingency. However, those who misfit gain insights into the limitations and assumptions that underlie material and discursive environments.

Applying these insights to the case of Caridad and Ines insofar as they pertain to the ideals of the Cuban Revolution, some of the “blueprints of power” that constrain Caridad and Ines, thus rendering them misfits to the, “good things that are said of the Revolution,” reveal that disability embodiment and care ethics were inconsequential to the project of the “new man”. In other words, what made Ines and Caridad particularly vulnerable to “misfitting” not only had to do with their embodiment, but also the stigmatization and devaluation of the care-giving relationship in a social imaginary guided by ideals of independent rebirth.

Chapter Overview

The second chapter is presented by way of two simultaneously occurring acts, tracing the history of praxis as philosophy as well as its breakaway from traditional philosophy. I then chart the etymology of practice and its historical resistance to praxis — which calls for the embodiment of transformative, theoretically guided actions. I trace the

teleological evolution of praxis between the works of Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx with the intention of historicizing praxis in ways that are meaningful for understanding the strains of liberatory praxis that emerge in Latin America. I follow the migration of continental philosophy and revolutionary praxis into Latin American modes of reflection through the works of Samuel Ramos, Frantz Fanon, Leopoldo Zea, and Augusto Salazar Bondy. These Latin American thinkers are considered for their being influenced by the Cuban Revolution and for their diverse approaches to locating and overcoming the colonial difference of Latin America.

I also locate the theory and embodiment of the “new man” as necessarily falling within the scope of praxis. In other words, I do not believe it is possible to speak of the ideals, goals, and embodiment of the “new man” without locating this project within a larger discussion of theory and action that seeks to transform the oppressive elements of Latin American reality. I locate general themes that encompass the project of the “new man” in Cuba; I then proceed to identifying different approaches to liberation and rebirth that have been articulated by Latin American thinkers in the 20th century.

In the third chapter, I go deeper into my research methods, which involved semi-structured interviews, personal communications, attending lectures, collecting newspapers, reflexive journaling, as well as discursive and material analysis. In this chapter I present the findings of my research, interview participants answer questions about the “new man,” philosophy in Latin America, Ché Guevara, medical internationalism, the blockade of Cuba, the structure and function of the *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (CDR), as well as aspects of everyday life for a rural Cuban farmer. In personal communications, which were recorded

through reflective journaling, I learned more about the everyday struggles of people: from transportation, to shortages of milk and food, and the appeal to work in the tourist industry.

The fourth chapter evolves in the direction of a methodology of praxis. In this chapter my goal is to place Paulo Freire's theory of epistemology (reading the world and reading the word) and *conscientização*—which culminate in praxis—in conversation with the intercultural theory of Édouard Glissant. Insofar as Glissant's theory of relationship is based on an alternation of consciousness, which is established by a self-distancing from norms (reflection) and through actions upon the material world, Glissant's theory advances in the logic of praxis. This chapter becomes particularly important in order to revisit previous concerns regarding the devaluation of care-giving relationships. The chapter is strategically placed in the latter part of the study in order to draw from understandings, concepts, and findings elaborated in earlier chapters.

I conclude by bringing praxis back to the forefront and tying up loose ends. I determine that the "new man," as a political project, has failed to incorporate everyday praxis into overall structural transformation. In other words, the "new man" did, as Guevara predicted, evolve alongside the discursive and material bases. However, the discursive and material bases, in many ways, did not evolve alongside the "new man" as embodied reality. For Foucault, the local character of critique is characterized by "autonomous, non-centralized kind of theoretical production, one that is to say whose alidity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought."^{xix} The project of "new man" failed to take into account the local character of critique and thus transform itself. People who

misfit the “new man” and fall outside of the established regime of thought saw no significant changes to the discursive and material base as their sacrifices went unacknowledged.

CHAPTER TWO

PRAXIS AS PHILOSOPHY IN LATIN AMERICA: OVERCOMING THE COLONIAL DIFFERENCE

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”

Karl Marx *Theses On Feuerbach* XI (1886)

“Philosophy must be involved in the struggle, for otherwise it only constructs an abstract thought, and then, on the pretext that we are going to liberate ourselves as philosophers, we do not liberate anyone, not even ourselves.”

Augusto Salazar Bondy *América Latina: Filosofía y Liberación* (1974)

The cited quotes point towards a bifurcation in the philosophical cannon, from one point of view the role of philosophy is to abstract, contemplate, and disconnect from the material world. Antithetically, Marx and Bondy ground the very purpose of philosophy in enacting real, significant changes to the material and social world. This chapter follows the latter tradition and critically examines the embodiment of praxis as philosophy in Latin America. Initially, I am particularly interested in the ways praxis has been historically

discussed in the realm of theory, and also how it has been adapted to the Latin American context both generally and specifically. Generally, prominent traditions of Latin American scholars and artists have utilized a framework of praxis to reflect and act against coloniality and its material and psychological remnants. Specifically, after the Cuban Revolution of 1959—which strongly influenced Latin American critical thinking—the Cuban government promoted a top down embodiment of praxis as the “new man”; the “new man” both as abstract theory and as imposed social identity to be performed, offers a range of new perspectives and insights from which to analyze praxis and its limitations. After having followed the socio-historical development of praxis and the imposed and embodied praxis of the Cuban Revolution, I conclude that if the “new man” is indeed a project of liberation, then it necessitates a critical praxis that values and incorporates the everyday sacrifices of those who are not directly aligned with the projects of the “new man.”

I begin by introducing Ernesto Ché Guevara’s *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, which has come to be the primary reference point to discussions regarding the “new man” in Cuba. In it, Guevara’s aim is not to resolve the concern of man’s individual resignation to the collective under socialism, but to give an account of Cuba’s unique engagement with and hopes for socialism. Although *Man and Socialism in Cuba* offers us only an introduction to the context and concept of “new man” it is enough to make the case that the “new man” emerges from a philosophy of praxis and necessitates creative praxis.

I conclude by bringing the discussion back to the imagined praxis of the “new man” in Cuba. Having fleshed out the socio-historical developments of philosophy as praxis and

the specificities of the Latin American strains of praxis, the objective conditions under which the praxis of the “new man” must operate become more salient and ubiquitous. Also, since the praxis of the “new man” in Cuba was imposed via top down state power, I find that the “new man” takes on tendencies of an apparatus of social control under which certain bodies necessarily do not fit the idealized paradigm. I pursue the thesis that the embodied reality of “misfitting” constitutes a political subversion from which localized critiques emerge and strengthen praxis.

Section I. The “New Man” in Cuba

Ernesto Ché Guevara’s (1965) *Man and Socialism in Cuba* comes at the six-year post war mark; it is initially written as a letter to Carlos Quijano, an editor for the Uruguayan weekly, *Marcha*, intended to update Latin America on the development of socialism and consciousness in Cuba. The text is situated during a time in which Cuba had already expropriated U.S. landed estates, announced its Marxist-Leninist economy, undergone the great literacy campaign, defended itself at *Playa Girón*, and frantically sought to industrialize, while pursuing an increase in sugarcane production to the goal of ten million tons for the coming years. For these projects and countless others, the idea of the “new man” became a motto around which mass mobilization was made possible.

Man and Socialism in Cuba is a much more theoretical undertaking when compared to other speeches and writings by Ché Guevara in the previous years that also reference the “new man”. Guevara claims that his aim is not to address the nexus between the collective and the individual under socialism altogether, but instead he seeks to give an account of the

Cuban experience of building socialism. Guevara's claim is that, "in spite of the apparent standardization of man in socialism, he is more complete; his possibilities for expressing himself and making himself heard in the social apparatus are infinitely greater, in spite of the lack of a perfect mechanism to do so."^{xx} At the core of Guevara's claim is a critique of the capitalist morality, which rewards competition based individualistic and manipulative endeavors. Ultimately, in constant pursuit of the commodity, man becomes alienated from his work, his compatriots, and ultimately himself.

Conversely, under socialism, man is given a chance to "achieve total awareness of his social being."^{xxi} In order to fulfill the goal of social self-awareness, man must acquire a new relationship to labor, which must take root in the consciousness of man. Man must begin to, "see himself portrayed in his work and to understand its human magnitude through the created object, through the work carried out."^{xxii} For Guevara, capitalist alienation is such that, man fails to grasp the *reasons for being* of his labor; he does not see himself reflected in the products of his labor; man, seems himself as a commodity and not as a producer of goods and knowledge.

In 1961, after his second visit to Cuba, French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, wrote, "the diabetic island, ravaged by the proliferation of a single vegetable, lost all hope for self-sufficiency."^{xxiii} Sartre's reference to Cuba's monocrop economic base does not originate with the Revolution, but is a burden that has to be taken up by the new government. Guevara argued that Cuba's "diabetic" status and concurrent underdevelopment, were the result of centuries in which the island of Cuba and its abundant sunshine was used as a

means to generate wealth, which was then siphoned to imperialist countries. Guevara argued that the material conditions of underdevelopment, made it impossible to bring about rapid change without making sacrifices.^{xxiv}

It is from the conflict between underdevelopment and rapid change that emerged the concepts of volunteered work and moral incentives. In a 1964 speech delivered to a workers rally, Guevara stated, “fundamentally, voluntary work is the factor that develops the conscience of the workers more than any other; and still more so when those workers carry out their work in places that are not habitual for them.”^{xxv} There are two important conclusions to draw from this statement, especially as they relate to praxis; the first involves Guevara’s claim that voluntary work is the most determinant factor for revolutionizing consciousness. This first conclusion begs the question, what kinds of work are considered to be “voluntary” or “unpaid”? The second point made by Guevara is of particular importance to understanding the role of praxis in the building of socialism in Cuba. Here, Guevara notes that voluntary work, which takes place somewhere other than where one is already accustomed to work, is still more fundamental to a transformation of consciousness. In theory, the “new man’s” consciousness is gradually transformed—alongside the development of material base—which is itself dependent on the establishment of a new relationship to labor, and heightened when volunteer work ceases to be reiterative and takes on creative aspects.

Since capitalism teaches people to have a commodity centered relationship to labor, volunteer work, under socialism, seeks to unite the aspirations of individuals and the

collective in such a way as to deconstruct man as commodity and reconstruct man as an integral part of the social body. For Guevara, man's new morality comes into being through a two-fold process: "on the one hand society acts upon the individual by means of direct and indirect education, which on the other hand, the individual undergoes a conscious phase of self-education."^{xxvi} In other words, the morality of the "new man" is a socialist morality, but it is not one where the population acts as a domesticated herd. In contrast, under Guevara's proposed social and autodidactic pedagogical framework, the individual's critical awareness is heightened. Guevara was aware of the fact that in shifting the economic and conscious base from capitalism to socialism, some people will fail to identify with the aims of the state. As such, consciousness will not be revolutionized, in this case the state will merely become the "new boss". In response to this concern, Guevara writes, "the instrument of mass mobilization must be fundamentally of a moral character, without forgetting the correct use of material incentives, especially those of asocial nature."^{xxvii}

The ambiguity characteristic to this claim surrounds the nature of "correctness" in the use of material incentives, especially as they pertain to rewards of a "social nature." Historically, we find clues that help explain the implicit meaning behind this statement. For example, during the years leading up to the *ten million ton sugar harvest* Ché and Fidel encouraged people in administrative posts to travel to the countryside and work in the sugarcane fields; in fact, they themselves cut sugarcane in the countryside as a political maneuver. On several occasions, Ché gave speeches to union members and leaders awarding the hardest working and most altruistic laborers with material goods such as washing machines, sowing machines, refrigerators and vacations. Importantly, the volunteer work was added in

addition to regular working hours and these moral incentives and volunteer work would be restituted with gifts, prizes, and considered secondary source of goods.

Marifeli Pérez-Stable in *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, course, and Legacy*, gives a historical account of the emergence and development of the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (FMC) in the 1960's that helps identify the gendered aspects of volunteer work. Pérez-Stable writes, "in 1962, over 4,000 delegates attended the FMC congress...the seamstress programs had trained 7,400 rural women to use sewing machines; in turn, these women were training 29,000 young peasant women to sew with machines. The FMC gave first-aid training to a thousand women, mobilizing 62,000 for volunteer work, and managed over 100 day-care centers."^{xxviii} Interestingly, the FMC was given tasks within the new government considered to be traditionally and appropriately gendered. In this way, the government attempted to provide incentives for women to expand their actions beyond the private realm, while not challenging, nor threatening work traditionally done in the home.

Yet, volunteer work was accomplished under the auspice that the un-commoditized labor transformed consciousness and that furthermore, consciousness would be elevated to a higher degree if the labor was done in areas that one was not habituated to performing. Due to the objective conditions that Cuba faced in the time directly following the revolution, these subjective potentials needed to be harvested. As the post-revolution conditions required immediate action, the government called upon consciousness that was already predisposed to the tasks, under the promise that in the future, once goals (e.g. the

eradication of illiteracy and development of skills) were achieved, then real consciousness transforming work could be done.

We can now return to the first question raised about the kinds of volunteer work which were valued as transforming consciousness: what kinds of work were considered to be “voluntary”? From whose perspective were these categories delineated? Was unpaid, emotional, affective, and care labor, traditionally casted off as women’s roles and moral duties, included in the rhetoric of volunteer labor for the collective future of Cuba? Discussions connecting volunteer work and moral incentives with unpaid care labor are not discussed throughout *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, which potentially indicates that such labor was taken for granted, devalued and not part of the national imaginary as an honorable role of the “new man.” And, hence the at best “extension” of the concept of the “new man” towards Cuban women, and at worst the exclusion of women from the concept of “the new revolutionary individual” except as bearers of national sacrifice both at home and outside of the home. The ideal of breaking the “new man” was unilaterally imposed upon the individual by the state but not vice versa. If the hypothesis above is true, it unveils the implicit capitalist framework underlying the conception of volunteer work, and gives ample reason to question the beneficiaries of moral incentives. However, as Pérez-Stable states, “...moral incentives moves vanguard workers to heroism, sacrifice, and dedication. They had a 'class-for-itself consciousness' and a 'social perspective.'”^{xxix} Although the moral incentives legitimized the "commodity as reward" ideology, it did so in order to promote collective cohesiveness. In other words, the carrot at the end of the stick functions to lead the donkey similarly to capitalism, however, it arguably leads the donkey to a better place.

Conveniently, in 2012 the Latin American publisher, Ocean Sur, compiled and released a publication entitled, *Apuntes filosóficos*, by Ernesto Ché Guevara, which is comprised of Guevaras's personal philosophical diaries and notes. From it, I extract Guevara's reflections on praxis, which helps me trace the influences that guided his revolutionary thought and political implementations while working as the director of the Banco Central and later as the head of the Ministry of Industry. In the next section, I trace the evolution of praxis and limits to praxis in general and the adaptation of praxis to the Latin American and Cuban context more specifically.

Section II: a Foundation for Praxis as Methodology

At the core of the modern concept of praxis is the inseparable and insoluble relationship between theory and practice in the project of transforming the world. Within Africana philosophy, praxis has been articulated as: "guiding thoughtfulness;"^{xxx} Paulo Freire wrote that praxis was "reflection and action which truly transforms reality;"^{xxxi} Vazquez described it as "practical transforming activity."^{xxxii} The relatively simple definition of praxis has been the grounds under which contestations as well as vindications have been expressed. As such, an initial sidestepping away from the emergence of praxis and into the forms of praxis that have been identified to date becomes useful for a more well informed reading of the following chapters.

Praxis: Creative and Reiterative

In *The Philosophy of Praxis*, Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez starts out by noting that linguistically, the concept of praxis strategically takes distance from the pejorative connotation of practice as economic utility; Vazquez makes the distinction, “[a]ction which generates an object external to the subject or his acts is called *poiesis*—literally the act of production or manufacture. In this sense, the artisan’s work is poetic rather than practical.”^{xxxiii} The materialization of creative foresight— *poiesis*— aligns in two acts, one in which the creative impulse imagines and another in which it creates a real product in the world. The gap between idea and the form involves the intentional act of harvesting the creative impulse. Vazquez writes, “[t]he relation between thought and action therefore requires the purposive mediation of men.”^{xxxiv} Conscious, reflective, creative, socially transformative and artistic projects involve a quality that is essentially human. Importantly, these same values and ideas were in the forefront of Cuban thought when instigating the revolution. The New Man put emphasis on purposeful volunteer work, but the purpose of the volunteer work was not to merely gain material goods. The goal of volunteer work in post-revolution Cuba was to bring the worker to a higher plain of consciousness regarding their position as creators of culture. Consequently, these workers gain a self-efficacy in their ability to transform the oppressive elements of the material environment.

Philosophers of praxis ground the power of reflection and action in the human condition in order to argue against a fatalistic resignation to reality, whereby praxis is impotent. Also, by asserting that socially constructed meanings of reality can be

deconstructed and reconstructed, philosophers of praxis pose the theme of oppression and its manifestations as objects of transformation; thus, seeking to give birth to liberation and a new consciousness. Action aimed at liberation seeks to change a complicated and power driven world and as such, requires a theory of liberation informing it with a particular aim and articulated components.

There are certain objective conditions under which praxis operates. First, praxis is a human activity; yet, not all human activity is praxis. Second, any migrating theory of praxis needs to be re-evaluated in light of the material conditions of the context under which it operates. The implications of these objective conditions are the source from which the subjective aspect of praxis must operate in the project of transforming oppressive reality through liberatory action.

Marx: human activity takes center stage

The two most cited works by Marx in relationship to praxis are *Theses On Feuerbach* and *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. In the *Theses*, Marx outlines eleven disagreements and conclusions he draws from the work of Feuerbach; this work has come to be associated with Marx's material dialectics. For Marx, philosophical predecessors that discussed praxis over-emphasized the role of reflection and had failed to appreciate the significance of "revolutionary," or "practical-critical," activity.^{xxxv} From this point forward, Marx sets out to establish a theoretical conception of praxis that for the first time does not privilege contemplation over action. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx contributes to the demystification of the Hegelian dialectical synthesis, all the while keeping his dialectic

framework. Indeed by the time of *The Communist Manifesto* Marx had united Hegel's dialectics with Feuerbach's materialism to reign in a new era of critical thought and action.

Adolfo Vazquez states, "The Marxist conception of praxis, then, does not represent a return to the past, but an advance, an overcoming, the negation and assimilation in a dialectic senses of traditional materialism and of idealism."^{xxxvi} The basic tenants of Marx's praxis was that without action, abstract thought does not have the power to liberate anybody, in other words, abstract thoughts cannot change reality. Yet, not all activity is praxis; theory must nurture, inform, evaluate, modify, and guide action. Therefore, In order to liberate humanity from situations of oppression—the theme of our epoch^{xxxvii}—man needs to foster a *revolutionary* praxis.

Feenberg notes, "the methodological approach they [Marx and Lukács] employ is a reflective one, focused on the hidden connection of theory to a background of involvements from which one cannot successfully abstract, but which one can change."^{xxxviii} Vasquez defines praxis for Marx as, "a radical critique that passes from the theoretical to the practical plane in response to radical human needs."^{xxxix} To put it simply, praxis for Marx is The Revolution.

However, mere action without a theoretical understanding brought about by the objective conditions of human activity and the material conditions of labor exhausts passion and do not comprise a true praxis. The premise that theory is not objective, starkly contrasted with the theoretical assumptions of speculative philosophy, and therefore required a wholly new conceptual framework in regards to being and understanding. Marx instigated a change

from doing a philosophy of praxis to engaging in praxis as philosophy. In other words, Marx, and consequently the New Man ideology, was not simply studying the importance of reflection for action. The double movement that must be performed for praxis under Marxism requires that theory and action exist in “unity, but not identity.”^{xl}

Marx’s first step in prompting a theory for revolutionary praxis begins with an analysis of labor under capitalism in the *1844 manuscripts*. As Vazquez notes, Marx explains labor as, “the productive, material activity whereby the worker transforms nature and creates a world of objects.”^{xli} Marx explains,

The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.^{xlii}

A revolutionary praxis had to emerge out of a set of experiences that the workers shared, but had up to that point been unable to articulate; since material production *is* social production, when the proletariat controls the material production she and he also control social production. From a teleological perspective Marx’s praxis climaxed in the concrete actions of The Revolution which were to be driven by a set of theoretical articulations and assumptions, in constant process of evolution in light of action and reflection.

The next step then is to bring the conversation back to the role of theory in informing and guiding practice. If the ultimate goal of praxis is to act against the oppressive elements of reality such that a new reality can come into being, it is apparent that without a transformative theory there can be no praxis.^{xliii} In the third phase of the first chapter, I become particularly interested in the ways in which Latin American philosophy and philosophers have embraced and reinterpreted praxis for the specific socio-historical context of Latin America. In doing so, they engage in the theoretical foundations that are to guide the transformative action initiated by the Cuban revolution.

Part III. Convergence of Praxis and the “New Man” in Latin American Philosophy:

Influenced by the Cuban Revolution, Latin American philosophers in the 1960's and 70's contemplated the very notion of philosophy. In light of this historical convergence, philosophy and its most basic questions of ontology and epistemology were redefined in light of praxis, in order to better reflect the historical and material conditions of Latin America for the sake of transformation. Although the following practitioners did not have direct influence upon the politics of Cuba, these Latin American thinkers were heavily influenced by the Marxist turn of philosophy that placed strong emphasis on action. An outspoken cohort of the most prolific critical thinkers in Latin America adopted a philosophy of praxis that adheres to and divulges from the above outlined socio-historical forms of praxis. In this section, I will utilize the theoretico-historical framework delivered by Cuban feminist philosopher Ofelia Schutte^{xliv} in order to think about the stages of praxis thought in Latin America. For Schutte, the most significant debate over Latin American philosophy

can be categorized into three approaches to praxis: a) a psychological approach associated with an inferiority complex, b) an idealist approach that seeks to reclaim Latin American culture, and c) a materialist and militant desire to overcome colonialism.

Samuel Ramos and Frantz Fanon: Addressing the Inferiority Complex

The psychological approach is spearheaded by Mexican philosopher Samuel Ramos,^{xlv} who believed that Latin America's depreciated status is the result of an inferiority complex intimately tied to colonialism. Schutte places the inferiority complex as a result, "from the unequal status between two different cultures."^{xlvi} For Walter Mignolo,^{xlvii} the inferiority complex emerges out of the "colonial difference," which "came into being during the so-called conquest of America."^{xlviii} Whereby European thought in general and Greek philosophy specifically, became the reference point from which other forms of thinking and acting deviate. However, the colonial difference subjugates via a double movement: on the one hand, it asserts, rewards, and perpetually reinstates the norm; on the other, it claims that the credentials of what is different ought to always be doubted as authentic.

For Ramos, praxis in Latin America must act towards overcoming the objective conditions of the colonial difference, which roots Latin American ontology and leaves the Latin American psyche in a perpetual state of escapism. Schutte notes for Ramos, the lack of courage to become self-aware is "contrasted with the false bravery (*valentia*) associated with chauvinistic and macho attitudes."^{xlix} The kind of praxis Ramos calls for a contemplative destruction of the false, of that which is created by man but turns against

him. And so Ramos calls for a return to contemplations of the significance of being (ontology) for the purpose of reformulating Latin American understanding (epistemology).

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Frantz Fanon also addressed the inferiority complex that emerges from the colonial difference specifically as it relates to race and racism. For Fanon, in every colonized people, the inferiority complex, “has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality.”^l One of the primary examples used by Fanon is language. In one sense the ongoing erasure of native languages serves to reinstate the supremacy of European languages in the Americas. In another sense, Fanon notes that the various dialects of European languages that have risen in the Americas continue to serve as a difference maker, especially when the Latin American travels to Europe. The inferiority complex oftentimes leads one to reject their own culture and compatriots in favor of seeming more European.

For Fanon, decolonization produces a “new person” which would theoretically connect with the Cuban formation of the “new man” (see Fanon’s chapter “on violence” in *Wretched of the Earth*). However, in practice, the centrality of race for Fanon complicates the project of the “new man” and liberatory praxis in significant ways. First, it indicates that different histories have resulted in different embodied and collective knowledges and complexes that necessarily call for a different praxis. Fanon writes, “what I want to do is help the black man to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment.”^{li} That is, Fanon wants to build a theory based on lived experience

and theoretical articulations, that will help guide the black Antillean towards liberatory praxis, the primary goal being addressing and overcoming the inferiority complex.

Leopoldo Zea: Taking back what is ours

In contrast with Ramos's and Fanon's theory of psychological inferiority, Zea argued that inferiority for the Latin American is not located in the psyche but in history and politics. That is, history and self-consciousness are inseparable. As Schutte puts it, "not the soul of the Mexican but the history of ideas in Mexico becomes the target of Zea's analysis."^{lii} Having extracted inferiority from the psyche, Zea believed that authentic identification with national values would help locate and mitigate the effects of the colonial difference. In *Positivism in Mexico*^{liii} Zea argued that the power relation inherent to the colonial system have succeeded in establishing a paradigm of reason that has been shaped by power and not morality. As such, praxis for Zea reemphasizes contemplation as taking preference over action given that the first step towards cultural liberation is to contemplate, and formulate a moral system that corresponds to the objective conditions of Latin America.

Santiago Castro-Gomez (2003) writes, "for Zea, today's Latin America is the result of a series of historical continuities that can be reconstructed through thought and, concretely, by a 'philosophy of history.' The mission of philosophy would be, then, to indicate the way in which Latin Americans have been becoming conscious of their own cultural identity, their own specificity as human beings."^{liv} Zea, like other "new man" theorists, argued for a reevaluation of values that would take the Latin American away from the perception that her or his culture was naturally inferior. The role of philosophy for Zea was essential to the

process of self-realization, however, an entirely new method for philosophy had to be developed, one that reflected the context and aspirations of Latin America and its people.

Enrique Dussel (2003) identifies Zea as belonging to a cohort of Latin American philosophers that initiated a Pan-American reflection of the significance and consequences of being colonized. This movement would come to be coined as *Latinoamericanismo*; the praxis of *Latinoamericanismo* demanded creative reflection and action, because the goal was to reaffirm an identity that had been denied while simultaneously negating the alleged superiority of European identity. Dussel writes, “this humanist integration of humanity and its history is, today, the horizon from which unfold the theories of cultures of dependence and in which philosophy of liberation has many roots.”^{lv}

I take it to be the case that Dussel’s statement, relating to *Latinoamericanismo* and the works of Leopoldo Zea, merges with the Marxist conception of praxis since the goal of a philosophy of liberation is to liberate through actions. A philosophy of liberation is a philosophy of praxis. The approach taken by Zea and other writers who identified with *Latinoamericanismo*, was one that viewed history as ontology and the future as a creative endeavor towards liberation.

Augusto Salazar Bondy and the Rise of the Militant Desire for Change

Bondy and Zea both disagreed with Samuel Ramos’ early conclusion that the inferiority of the Latin American manifested as a complex, grounded in the very psychology of the Latin American. However, Bondy disagreed with Zea insofar as Bondy did not see Latin America as having an authentic philosophy that merely had to be identified. For Bondy, part

of the project of articulating a Latin American philosophy meant having to defend Latin American's right to be. As Schutte puts it, "the dominant question is not so much whether the Latin American individual feels inferior to the European, but how the Latin American people can defend their own cultural heritage in a situation of economic dependence and underdevelopment."^{lvi} From this perspective, the material conditions of underdevelopment are such that the kinds of consciousness it gives rise to remain weak and lacking a conceptual apparatus from which self-articulation can emerge. In other words, as long as Latin America remains economically subjugated to North America and Europe there will be no authentic philosophy. Bondy's militant desire towards liberation gave precedence to action over contemplation. For Bondy no authentic contemplation could exist without radical systemic change.

In *¿Existe una Filosofía de Nuestra América?*^{lvii} (1968), Bondy argued that the problem with Latin American philosophy was its inauthenticity, resulting directly from the historical conditions of underdevelopment and exploitation. The only way to remedy this situation is to destroy in order to create. Philosophical rebirth for Bondy is found in the life world of the community. Because each community experiences underdevelopment and exploitation differently, a transvaluation of values had to be birthed from the bottom up and could not be mechanistically prescribed.

The Praxis of the "New Man" in Cuba

How does Ernesto Ché Guevara's ideal of the "new man" address concerns of psychological inferiority, cultural dispossession and underdevelopment? For Peter McLaren

in *Pedagogy of Revolution* “the new socialist being is both critically self-reflexive and self-critical— in other words, is an agent of self- and social transformation.”^{lviii} That is, the self-critical component of the “new man” embodies a praxis that seeks to eliminate components of psychological inferiority associated with colonialism. Although some authors claim that the “new man” in Cuba necessitated a complete dissociation from individualism,^{lix} Guevara himself hailed various components of individualism as essential to developing the overall project of the “new man”.

For example, the two-fold existence of the “new man” meant that on the one hand the triumph of the revolution ought to lead to a social restructuring that promoted critical thinking. On the other hand, Guevara also insisted that intrinsically, a transvaluation of values necessitates a component of self-education. As such, the “new man” is not one who fatalistically resigns her or his individuality for the sake of the collective. Instead, the praxis of the “new man” required that while being educated in a culture of liberation, the individual also self-educates for the sake of contributing to the collective consciousness. In reevaluating values, an individual does not simply appeal to the values of the dominant system. Conversely, individuals reflect upon the social prescriptions and problematize them in order to embody those values that speak to their subjectivity. Consequently, the individual appreciates and expresses his or her sovereignty through the pursuit of creative action. In this perspective the “new society” is only possible as long as its constitutive components, individuals, create it.

CHAPTER THREE

DETERMINING THE ELEMENTS THAT DEFINE THE “NEW MAN”

There are determining characteristics, determining elements that define something; is the Cuban solidary? Yes. Was he before? Yes. Is he also now? Yes. Is he more conscious now than solidary? Yes. Is the Cuban internationalist? Yes, for determinate reasons that take longer to explain, but he is; At least he goes as a doctor to Brazil, where Brazilian doctors don't go, is this the new Guevarian man? I don't know.

Oscar Primelles (Resident of Havana, 2014)

The bulk of the collected data presented in this chapter was amassed during a two-week period in April of 2014, a year before the announcement by the Obama administration that relations with Cuba would begin to normalize. The statement made by participants in 2014 regarding the embargo and travel restriction in this chapter have begun to change. However, this only leads to new questions about what the normalizing of U.S./Cuba relations mean for the “new man.” But, that would be a forthcoming research project. The voices of the participants in this chapter serve to gauge the evolution of the “new man” on the eve of the U.S. normalizing relations with the island. The data was gathered in the Cuban provinces of Havana, Pinar Del Rio and Matanzas. During these two weeks, I conducted four semi-structured interviews with Cuban citizens and residents. I primarily focused on asking questions about how the identity of the “new man” is contemporarily perceived in Cuba. All

interviews were conducted in Spanish, I have done my best to translate the responses into English.

The responses by participants yielded three significant themes: The character and legacy of Ché Guevara, especially as his character and legacy relates to the internationalism of Cuban doctors and the ideals of the “new man”, concrete and discursive environments for praxis, and the theme of the “new man” as everyday praxis.

The sections detailing the second and third themes mentioned above begins with a contextual analysis of pre-revolutionary Cuba, then moves to the task of Ché Guevara’s *Man and Socialism in Cuba* and the “new man”; from there, the chapter shifts into the impacts of the U.S. blockade of Cuba in everyday life. The third and final section of the chapter offers an investigation of the political structure and social role of the Committee in Defense of the Revolution (CDR), and concludes with a reflection on the everyday life of a farmer in rural Cuba.

The Character and Legacy of Ché Guevara

Throughout various conversations I had with Cuban citizens I came to realize that in Cuba the term, the “new man,” is synonymous with Ché Guevara. In fact, some Cubans referred to the “new man” as the “new *guevarian* man”. Naturally, from this assimilation emerged the theme of *the character and legacy of Ché Guevara* as directly influencing the idealized character of the “new man”.

Anier Moret, a Cuban doctor also in her mid-forties who was born in Santiago de Cuba and living in Varadero, told me in a brief interview before she had to attend a patient that,

Ché was who invented volunteer work, internationalist, all of these things.

Internationalism which characterizes Cuban doctors is exercised throughout the entire world. The Cuban people altruistically help many countries that need it, that is, we share what we have and give what is left.

During the brief moments I got to speak with Monet, after explaining to her what the purpose of my coming to Cuba was, she immediately identified the “new man” and character of Ché Guevara as belonging to the same category. Her remarks about the altruistic position of Cuban doctor’s abroad fits seamlessly with the internationalist praxis promoted by Ché Guevara.

In a 2014 article by Time magazine entitled, “Why Cuba is So Good at Fighting Ebola,”^{lxi} Time indicates that currently there are over “50,000 health care workers from Cuba working in 66 countries around the world.” The Latin American Medical School (ELAM) which was founded in order to provide low income students throughout Latin America with an opportunity to go to school and become doctors, claims that since 1961 the school has trained 130,000 thousand health professionals from around the world and many of those who trained in Cuba have participated in internationalist ventures to 104 countries.^{lxi}

However, as Julie Feinsilver (2010) points out in “Fifty Years of Cuba’s Medical Diplomacy: From Idealism to Pragmatism,”^{lxii} Cuba’s medical diplomacy has shifted from

purely altruistic to becoming an important source of revenue for the Cuban government and doctors themselves. As medical internationalism has emerged as a commodity, particular risks have emerged that threaten Cuba's superior achievements in the field of health. Of the potential dangers Feinsilver highlights three major risks: first, is the fact that a majority of Cuban doctors abroad are marketed as willing to work in remote areas where local doctors themselves will not work, this has caused political tension that has resulted in strikes by local health providers.

Feinsilver reports that local doctors feel insecure about their own jobs and their efficacy to bring about change through strikes, because as in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, striking doctors were replaced by Cuban doctors. Feinsilver adds, "local medical associations have protested the different registration or accreditation standards applied to them and those applied or not applied to the Cuban Doctors."^{lxiii} Second, Cuban doctors working abroad earn about six times more than doctors working in Cuba. As such, there is a significant incentive for Cuban doctors to leave the island, and these missions abroad have led to numerous defections—some incentivized by the U.S. through the Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program.^{lxiv} Third, is the "increased dissatisfaction on the part of its own population as medical staff goes abroad, leaving some local health facilities and programs with insufficient staff despite the impressive ratio of doctors to population."^{lxv} I believe that Anier Moret's and Julie Feinsilver insights are not incommensurable; altruism and pragmatism can be reconciled through the notion of the "new man." In a constant process of becoming, the "new man" has had to make ideological sacrifices in order to be,

that which has been sacrificed does not take away from the achievements the Cuban health care system has realized domestically and abroad.

For Marta Abreu, a doctor from Santa Clara, Ché embodied the very definition of internationalism,

Ché has many good things, we was one of the creators of internationalism. Because he was the first who—he was Argentinian and fought in Cuba, later in the Congo and in Bolivia is where he died. I worked in Bolivia, two years. In Bolivia, they killed him because the Bolivians betrayed him.

Abreu makes an interesting connection between Ché Guevara and internationalism that is not bound to the “new man” as a prescribed idea, but instead as grounded in the lived international efforts and migrations of Ché Guevara himself- an Argentinian, who fought in Cuba and later in the Congo, eventually dying in Bolivia. Guevara’s own international ventures serve as a concrete example for the embodiment of the “new man.”

When I asked Abreu if she thought that the “new man” was contemporarily embodied by Cuban doctors who risk their lives in international missions she replied,

I believe that the “new man” does not exist, I believe that there must exist that man who is capable or respecting other humans, who is solidary, honest, altruistic, a brother and a father, eternally in solidarity with what is needed.

Although Abreu does not believe that the “new man” exists, she states that “...there must exist that man who is capable of respecting other humans...” and thereby holds the same virtues associated with the “new man” as an imperative that ought to be followed in order

to advance. This dialectic perception of both identifying with the goals of the new man, and misidentifying with the prescribed and idealized form of the “new man” emerged again in following themes.

Another development that Dr. Abreu mentioned regarding the altruistic character and legacy of Ché Guevara had to directly do with the man who killed Ché,

The man who killed Ché, no longer had a public life, because he killed a man who was very valuable. So Cuban doctors, in Bolivia, [working with] “operation miracle”—“operation miracle” has to do with optometry, optometric surgery for cataracts,—and so a Cuban doctors operated on this man for cataracts. The one who killed Ché. He was killing a person who he did not know.

In the 1990’s the National Security Agency (NSA) declassified cables detailing the capture and execution of Ché Guevara. Ryan Butterfield’s *The Fall of Ché Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats* as well as Jorge Castañeda’s *Compañero: The Life and Death of Ché Guevara*, cite the following passage from the documents, “Sgt. Terran told Guevara to be seated but he refused to sit down and stated, “I will remain standing for this.” The Sgt. began to get angry and told him to be seated again, but Guevara would say nothing. Finally Guevara told him, “know this now, you are killing a man.” Terran then fired a burst from his M2 Carbine, knocking Guevara back into the wall of the small house.”^{lxvi} According to the Spanish news outlet *El Mundo*^{lxvii} the man who killed Ché Guevara went into self-imposed social exile because he feared for his own life. During “Operation Miracle,” which is an

international Cuban health initiative that has provided over 1.8 million ophthalmologic surgeries throughout Latin America,^{lxviii} Cuban doctors working for Operation Miracle in Bolivia happened to operate on, Mario Terán, the man who killed Ché. Initially, doctors did not know this man was the one who had carried out the assassination of Ché Guevara. However, several days after, Mario Terán had been operated, his son approached the clinic and shared his father's story and his own personal gratitude. After the story broke, several newspaper outlets including Cuba's very own *El Granma* and Spain's *El Mundo* sought to interview Terán. Although he declined to be interviewed, he did confirm his role in the assassination of Ché Guevara as well as the surgery he had received by Cuba doctors working in Bolivia.

This story illuminates the interconnectedness between the character and legacy of Ché Guevara, the internationalism of Cuban doctors, and the embodiment of the "new man" as capable of respecting his fellow men, and of being in solidarity with that which is needed.

Cuban doctors working under a program which was embodied and initiated by Ché Guevara himself, restored the vision of the very same man who took the life of a person who many Cubans consider as the "new man" himself.

Section II: Culturally Entrenched Historical Background on the project of "New Man"

In this section I will continue to extract and analyze direct quotes that emerge out of the semi-structured interviews, specifically as they relate to the historical and contemporary contexts of the "new man."



FIGURE 1- FIDEL'S REVOLUCIÓN (Havana)

“Revolution: is to sense the historical moment, it is changing everything that must be changed, it is full equality and freedom, it is to be treated and to treat others as human beings, it is emancipating ourselves by our own and with our very own efforts... FIDEL

Through the two-week period I visited Cuba, as I traveled across the western provinces and attended lectures put on by CubaSolar, this very same quotation by Fidel emerged on several occasion. As a mural beside an agricultural market in Havana (figure 3.1), as a billboard by the side of the road in the outskirts of Varadero, as well as in a PowerPoint lecture during a conference on the Cuban economy and the energy revolution. Besides the fact that it is widely recognized among Cuban citizens and residents, this statement—although utopian and incomplete—merges with praxis as philosophy in significant ways. First, the idea of “sensing the historical moment” to the degree that everything that needs to be changed will be changed, necessarily rests on the idea that the Revolution is incomplete and not without flaws. Such flaws however, must be addressed through concrete actions by those who are familiar with the historical moment. As such, if the historical moment changes, so ought the approaches to addressing and mitigating the flaws of the Revolution. Furthermore, the quote

promotes transforming the oppressive elements of reality as an end goal, insofar as it advocates for full equality and freedom, which is to be reached by the efforts of Cuban citizens themselves.

On the one hand, Fidel's definition of revolution constructs a theory of revolution insofar as it abstractly speaks to the practices that bring about Revolution; broken down into four segments: a) sense the moment, b) change everything that needs to be changed. Fidel's remarks are also theoretical seeing that they project outwards into a future that has yet to materialize, leading towards c) full equality and freedom, and d) humanization. On the other hand, Fidel's remarks provide an ambiguous, yet, practical blueprint for revolutionary action. In this respect, the goal is not merely to create theory but also to enact real, significant change upon the world through concrete actions.

Concrete and Discursive Environments for Praxis

I met Oscar Primelles after his lecture on Cuban solar energy. As a specialist in the contemporary direction of solar culture in Cuba, during Primelles's lecture, he made a parallel between the goals of the "new man" and ongoing work towards a paradigm shift in relationship to development and sources of energy in Cuba. Primelles's argument was that traditionally, energy development has been thought of as an ability to produce more than can be consumed. But, if a renewable paradigm of development is to succeed, it must begin with transformation in the material base, with incremental changes to the energy infrastructure. For Primelles, environmental education for all children is a fundamental component for a paradigm shift in consciousness regarding energy production and

consumption. Primelles invoked Ché's assertion that, the "new man" and the material base must be created simultaneously^{lxix} in order to fortify his argument for updating the energy infrastructure and placing a greater emphasis on environmental education from primary school onward. After Primelles's lecture, I waited to speak with him about my project and the possibility of interviewing him. I was surprised to discover that he had been expecting me, and waiting to speak with me, and that he had heard a little bit about my project from one of the tour guides. Primelles asked me a series of questions about my personal and academic background as well as how I got interested doing research in Cuba.

After assessing my answers, Primelles agreed to be interviewed and so we walked to a quieter spot on the other side of the hotel. At first, the topic of the originality of Latin American philosophy and theory emerged and naturally shifted towards praxis. Oscar Primelles then stated,

In fact, in Latin America, there is not much economic or social theory, such theories are adapted from the North Americans or Europeans, they are adapted to fit circumstances that are historical, socio-economic, etcetera.

Primelles, who is in his mid-forties, sees that Latin America has adopted various theories that govern society from Europeans, however, the manifested actions are adapted to the particular circumstances of Latin America. In other words, although Latin America adopts theory, such as Marxism-Leninism in the case of Cuba, the application of such theories take on an entirely new reality and socio-historical circumstance to the degree that a new theory is born from the synthesis.

When I asked Primelles how European theories have been adopted, and adapted, to the Cuban context Primelles replied:

There is a text by Ché which is vital to understanding his thought, it is “Man and Socialism in Cuba.” It takes on some of the practices of Marxist Leninist theory, and trans-culturally incorporates it to the Cuban revolutionary process.

What is the individual going to do in a socialist society? Or at least in Cuban socialism, because he does not theorize about man in socialism. He says, man and socialism in Cuba; that is, there is a thought, there is not—there was a—I believe, a conviction that the task was not to create theory, but the task was to create a thought for concrete action.

For Primelles, Ernesto Ché Guevara’s *Man and Socialism In Cuba* is the primary example which grounds the claim that in Latin America, economic and social theories are adapted from European articulations although manifested in particular ways that reflect the socio-historic processes of Latin America. The socio-historic process generates locally entrenched forms of material and discursive representations. That is, the discursive environment and the material environment begin to reflect each other in ways that the general articulation of the European theory could not have anticipated, therefore necessitating wholly new theoretical apparatuses to address such peculiarities not only in language but also in action.

I then proceeded to ask Primelles if he could share his reflections of the context that Ernesto Ché Guevara is addressing of socialism *In Cuba*. Primelles replied:

To say “communism” in Cuba in 1956 was to lose almost 80% of the possibilities to bring people together, to unite, to guide processes; and so there, in this context there is Ché...and [Ché] undoubtedly was revolutionary, in the sense of revolutionizing, of changing, of transforming; and he had to give a theoretical foundation to all of that.

In Primelles's view, the task of *Man and Socialism In Cuba* and the practical apparatus of the "new man," sought to transform the discursive environment of Cuban politics. We have seen in the previous chapter that Guevara himself identified prevailing characteristics of capitalism deeply entrenched in the consciousness of men even after the triumph of the Revolution. So, the task undertaken by Guevara in the project of the "new man" simultaneously laid a foundation for reevaluating dogmatic assumptions of communism and socialism, while at the same time, advocating for new ways of relating to and transforming social and material reality. Primelles goes on reflection of the discursive context in which Guevara wrote,

Synonym of socialism, you can search any dictionary, "Socialism: a society which groups all goods as social", and that's it, that is what is in the dictionaries man, look at the dictionaries for you to see. So, if that is what is said by the Royal Spanish Academy, if that is what the philosophical dictionary says, if that is what the dictionary says, the social—the individual is lost, it's gone to shit, it's a— it's over, the finger prints are over, do you understand me? This about the fingerprints... I had never thought of this before; but, yes, the fingerprints are over.

Primelles reflection that in the pre-revolution context, Cubans assimilated socialism with the erasure of the individual by concluding that the "the finger prints are over" is significant in several respects. When considering that the reference to fingerprints relates to a material representation of identity, the task of transforming the discursive in order to transform the material is illuminated. That is, fingerprints are unique to each individual and they exist in the material world, if fingerprints are thought to be lost under socialism then so is the uniqueness of each individual erased. As such, the function of *Man and Socialism in Cuba* is

to counteract the discourse of socialism that is promoted by structures and representations of power such as the Royal Spanish Academy and dictionaries. To infuse socialism with the presence of an individual that acts upon society.

I proceeded to ask Primelles how he thought the “new man” played into the project of reconstructing the discursive and material context,

It is, so attractive the idea of the new man, a man who has his own personality, and who finds his interests in the interests of his society, it is so attractive, is it not? Because it allows the contradiction to be eliminated, which then shifts the concentration—away from eliminating the contradiction, and this to me seems essential. What is focused on instead are the contradictions of development, it raises them to the social level, and they are the same contradictions of my personal and social interests.

Primelles response pointed out that the project of the “new man” embodies the adaption of Marxism into the specific context of Cuba, in a way that seeks to address the discursive and material concerns and conditions of its people. Being that one of the primary concerns for him was the “erasure of fingerprints,” the “new man” is one who neither forsakes his individuality nor loses his fingerprints. Instead, the “new man” merely realigns his interests by identifying with the interests of his society, thus eliminating the contradiction between the individual and the collective, prevalent under the existing discourse of socialism. The elimination of this contradiction, although idealistic in nature, allows both individuals and society to identify and transform the contradictions of development.

Primelles then discussed a personal belief regarding the “new man” as a subject of research,

I believe that the “new man” has been studied more outside of Cuba than inside, I cannot prove this to you scientifically...but I have the perception that the Latin American left has studied the “new man” more than [within] Cuba.

Interestingly, although the “new man” as a concept travels internationally, the everyday Cuban cannot physically travel outside of Cuba without first receiving extensive clearance from the Cuban government and the country of visit. Furthermore, as Primelles pointed out, the Cuban who travels abroad is likely to face barriers with international banks that no other national even considers,

We go to Madrid and you take out money from the bank, I go to take out money and I cannot, why? Because I am a Cuban. You probably do not know that the majority of banks on this planet, I do not know about Mars, but on planet earth a majority of banks have interests with the United States, and in your country there is a law that does not allow any bank with North American interests to hold money for a Cuban. If the bank does have money that belongs to a Cuban, they are obligated to freeze the assets...until Castro falls.

As Primelles began to discuss the Cuban embargo, referring to it as the “blockade” I asked him why he thought the use of terminology was different,

We say “blockade” and they say “embargo”. Why? Because the Americans have a very well defined system of laws and concepts, they are a people—a people with a very strong legal culture, which is truly worth admiring, right? And so, “embargo” for their laws has no complication, and “blockade” does, the blockade itself must be discussed with the Americans;

but the Americans consider themselves to have an opinion about everything, well, the Cubans also but in another dimension.

That is, the problem is not only with Castro, the problem is against me, who is sharing the burden when I am a good person.

It seems to me that Primelles's example of the distinction between the terms "embargo" and "blockade" fits the idea that the contradiction between the individual and the collective in Cuban socialism is dissolved, insofar as the ideal of the "new man" is concerned. Since the material reality which comes about due to the blockade rests upon a discursive distinction of blame and punishment. On the one hand, the same contradiction that impacts the wellbeing of the country grounds the everyday contradictions faced by individuals who come to lack certain basic goods as soap and medicine. On the other hand, Primelles points towards a certain dissonance in relationship to a discourse which justifies an embargo against Castro, or the Cuban political structure as whole, yet locally impacts the overall quality of life of each and every Cuban citizen.

Primelle's continues,

So, it is a country that was inserted in a system, in less than two years it lost 73% of its economic and commercial relations with the exterior, and the government did not fall; that is the truth, that is the reality; yes, but this had an ideological cost, it had an economic cost in everyday life.

As far as the theme of discursive and material environments for praxis is concerned, the statement above indicates that the material conditions brought about by the isolation of Cuba generated an undesirable discourse about socialism within Cuba. The material effects of this undesirable discourse has eroded the assimilation of individual and collective identities, with the goal of returning to the more primitive contradiction and dissociation

between the individual and the collective. In other words, the “ideological costs” incurred by isolation directly contributed to the erosion of the identity and project of the “new man”.

In light of this revelation, I asked Primelles to share his thoughts on how the “new man” is perceived in the social imaginary nowadays. Primelles stated,

It is very complex in the current historic socio-economic moment of Cuban society, to return to a serious contemplation of the “new man”. We know that we have to insert ourselves in the contemporary world. What there is, I believe, is an understanding, the we have to resolve things ourselves, that nobody can come here and tell us what to do, that we are the Cubans, with a political culture, which I believe is more solid than the political culture of many societies.

Interestingly, although Primelles recognizes that the “new man” is an outdated concept with historical baggage, his statement about resolving things “ourselves,” fits with the aspirations for revolution promoted by Fidel and presented in the beginning of the section.

Primelles concludes:

I believe that here we do not discuss it so much, [the new man] I do not recall it being on the agenda, that is as an element of aspiration—right? One must be like Ché, like one must be like Martí, or the Martí spirit; this does exist, that one must be like Ché. But I do not believe this is being the new man in concept, rather it is a motive for jokes, it is a joke, Cubans laugh at everything

It is puzzling why Primelles would dismiss the contemporary relevancy of the “new man” in a private interview with me after having invoked it for his presentation on ecotourism and sustainable development. Perhaps Primelles’s statement made part of a larger inside

joke about ideology and practicality. That is, Ché Guevara's legacy draws tourism to Cuba and further still putting it out on display keeps the presentation ideologically grounded; yet the "new man" is not imagined as having to working in the tourist industry.

Another way to read Primelles's contradiction is to focus on the role of education for his project on sustainable development. If his evocation of the "new man" was referring to the power of education in transforming consciousness, then he could have been saying that as a government program the "new man" is outdated, but that the consciousness transforming processes that bring about the "new man" remain useful in modernity.

As far as the material and discursive conditions for praxis are concerned, Primelles outlines the pre-revolution imaginary as it related to the praxis of socialism, he then cited the impacts of the "blockade" or "embargo" upon the ideological nature of the revolutionary government, and lastly he reflected upon the contemporary discourse of the "new man". These insights offer a complex web of relations that have shaped and continue to shape the praxis of the Cuban Revolution.

The "New Man" as Everyday Praxis

The theme of the "new man" as everyday praxis emerges from and adds to the theme of the discursive and material environments for praxis, however it also diverges from it in several key respects. The first point of divergence originates in the idea that everyday theory is not idealized theory. Next, everyday praxis is necessarily grounded in the lived experience, as such material and discursive environments influence theory and action, but they do not strictly comprise it. The material and discursive environments must be decoded by

individuals, who reflect upon such contexts by bringing forth their background knowledge, which is at the same time specific to their condition and general to the conditions of their country. In essence, everyday theory and action is first and foremost local and not universal, it is descriptive and not prescriptive.

I asked Primelles to share his thoughts about how the “new man” has become the everyday man, to which Primelles replied,

I believe that contemporarily there are more components, there are more elements that make up the new man into the everyday man...the everyday man, that is a precious thesis, the everyday man; nobody studies the everyday man, there is not a science that studies daily life, it does not exist.

Primelles’s response indicates that in-between Ché’s articulations of the “new man” and the contemporary status of things, the everyday man/ woman has found it complicated to relate to the “new man” in the everyday embodiment of theory and action. However, Primelles points out that the “everyday man is a precious thesis,” that is to say, social science research is customarily concerned with theories that do not emerge from the everyday lived experience of typical people enmeshed in diverse contexts. Instead, traditional positivist social science research tends to focus on the spectacular forms of embodied praxis as in the case of Marti and Ché. Such research has the unintended, or intended consequence of prescribing the spectacular onto the ordinary. Insofar as this claim is true, the “new man” acts as a disciplinary practice of social control that ceases to liberate and begins to oppress.

I proceeded to ask Primelles what he thought of the prescription of the “new man” upon the everyday man, to which Primelles replied,

You cannot place the “new man” right there, it is not a mannequin; the “new man” feels, loves, it can come to be unfaithful to certain things; that is not what Guevara said this man could do; it is that an individual is not a concept, there are concepts about the individual but they are two separate things.

There are determining characteristics, determining elements that define something; is the Cuban solidary? Yes. Was he before? Yes. Is he also now? Yes. Is he more conscious now than solidary? Yes. Is the Cuban internationalist? Yes, for determinate reasons that take longer to explain, but he is; At least he goes as a doctor to Brazil, where Brazilian doctors don’t go, is this the new Guevarian man? I don’t know.

The distinction between the individual and concepts about the individual is of utmost importance when analyzing the “new man” alongside the everyday man for various reasons. The “new man” as a disciplinary practice can and does on the one hand prescribe onto the everyday man a certain paradigm of being and acting in the world. On the other hand, no single individual, not even Ché, fully embodies the ideals of the “new man.” That is to say, there are characteristics of the “new man” found in everyday practices, but there are also resistances to the “new man” in everyday theory and practice. Primelles recalls a moment when Ché himself had to undermine the ideals of the “new man” for the sake of taking concrete action in the material world. Primelles stated,

They named him minister—that is, Director of the Central Bank, and after Minister of Industry; the most difficult things were given to him, they even had to change some elements of the Constitution so that he could be Minister, so that he could be declared a Cuban citizen, yes? Why do I tell you this? Because it comes directly with—what is it to be the “new man.”

I interpret Primelles remarks of the revolutionary government and Ché’s circumvention of the Constitution as an act of unbecoming the “new man,” in order to prevent the

mummification of the concept. Since the “new man” is in a constant process of becoming, new challenges and circumstances are going to arise that demand new, unspecified, context specific responses at the level of everyday action. In this light, if the “new man” did not perform acts of unbecoming, the idea itself would cease to have any transferability to present, emerging, and unforeseen circumstances. The dialectic and seemingly contradictory nature of the “new man” allows it, as an embodied concept and not as a prescribed ideal, to go on transforming and becoming new again through application, criticism, and reflection. Furthermore, given that during Ché’s tenure as Minister of Industry the revolutionary government still operated under the 1940 constitution it would not have been a cause of concern to circumvent it.

Primelles further problematizes the “new man” as ideal versus the “new man” as an embodied reality when he notes,

A little of the “new man”—the new Guevariano was Ché, but what happens? Ché is not born every day, that’s what has to be dealt with, right?

The last question I asked Primelles was if he himself identified with the “new man” to which he replied,

I, for myself am not interested in being the new man...but to a certain point I am the new Guevarian man. I, Oscar Primelles, with my identity card, to a certain point am this new man; although it does not matter to me if I am or if I am not. I am the new Guevarian man. I am a cultured person, I am a revolutionary person, caring, solidary; my interests are the interests of my country; my country looks a little like me, I look a little like my country; but this many people can tell you, but they are not interested in saying it.

Primelles identifies a constructive dialectic tension that exists between not being interested in being the “new man,” while at the same time identifying with certain aspects of the “new man”; whether through his personal identification card or through the dissolution of the contradiction between individual and national interests, Primelles somewhat identifies with the “new man” although that is not a subject of his concern.

Primelles closes out the interview by offering one last reflection,

Maybe it’s a concept [the “new man”] we should return to,
and give it contemporary content.

During my last days in Cuba our tour group was fortunate enough to visit a farm in Viñales which also serves as a meeting space for members of the Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR). I took this opportunity to interview both a farmer and the local representative of the CDR chapter. By this point in the field work the “new man” was no longer the focus of my questions; instead I had become interested in the everyday praxis of Cubans who, as Primelles pointed out, “are not interested in becoming the new man.” I present the findings of these interviews both as a supplement to contemporary reflections on the praxis of the “new man” but also as a steppingstone for future research focusing more exclusively on everyday praxis.

The interview with Marina (the head of the local CDR) and Eliseo (campesino/ farmer) was, for the sake of time, conducted with the both of them at the same time. This set up was helpful since their ideas bounced off of each other and they reminded one another of other things to say about the farm or the CDR chapter. I began by asking Marina to describe the role and function of the CDR in everyday Cuban life, to which she replied,

The CDRs make up a mass organization that occupies all of the Cuban people, or a large part of the Cuban people. Very few are not- CDR members, it is an organization founded by the commander in chief comrade Fidel to help control the manifestations that existed inside of the country seeking to rupture the Cuban Revolution. All Cuban citizens after fourteen years of age are in this organization. This organization realizes defense activities and supports revolutionary ideas, as well as the cause of the revolution.

From Marina's remarks, I understand that the CDRs serve as a mass organization from which political support is mobilized on behalf of the revolutionary government. One take is that the CDRs operate as an organizing body for collective praxis. I proceeded to ask Marina what kinds of political tasks the CDR gets involved with, to which she replied,

It is a mass organization created to safeguard the achievements of the revolution; it also supports the different tasks that must be completed by the Cuban people, it is found vaccinating kids, it is found doing tasks of hygiene and beautification, it is found in the collection of raw materials, voluntary blood donation, everything that can contribute to the betterment of the quality of life of the Cuba people.

In Marina's words the role of the CDR is one of promoting the wellbeing of all Cuban citizens and elevating the quality of life. However, upon returning to the United States and researching the CDR further, I came to find that the CDR's have been criticized for carrying out the homophobic attitudes of the Cuban Revolution up to the late 1990's. For example, both Allen Young in *Gays Under the Cuban Revolution*^{lxx} as well as Rafael Ocasio's article "Gays and the Cuban Revolution The Case of Reinaldo Arenas"^{lxxi} identify homosexuality as a reason to victimize people as anti-revolutionary and point to the CDR as an organization that surveilled Cubans for perceived social and political deviancy. Both poets,

Reinaldo Arenas and Jose Lezama Lima, were persecuted by the Cuban Government for the erotic character of their work. The persecution of these poets was said to have begun by their local CDR chapters.

Marina Gold (2014) in “Healing Practices and Revolution in Socialist Cuba”^{lxxii} documents a conceptual and practical shift that has taken place of CDR’s in recent decades. For Gold, CDR’s have followed other social welfare organizations such as the Ministry of Public Health insofar as they “are all involved in the revolutionary project of creating healthy bodies.”^{lxxiii} In recent years, CDR’s have partnered up with the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) in order to solicit training from the Center for Natural and Alternative Medicine on the benefits of alternative treatments to health related concerns.

I then asked Marina how tasks are prioritized and if consensus has to be reached before a task is carried out. Marina replied,

There is always consensus between the members of the CDR, there should be consensus on a particular task. Whatever task must have consensus.

We classify problems as internal or external. An example of an internal problem we attend to is when a person is sick. For the external problems, the bigger problems we need help, we speak with the delegate; who is the person responsible for the local district. If we have an external problem we speak with this person for help.

I now wonder if Reinaldo Arenas and Jose Lezama Lima’s identities, which rendered them misfits to the ideals of the Cuban Revolution and therefore to the overall project of the “new man,” was characterized as an internal or external problem. Anyhow, at the time of this interview I was unaware of the oppressive history of the CDR and instead I asked Marina

for an example of an external problem her chapter has dealt with in the past. To which she explained,

The last time we worked with the delegate involved our request to be connected to the central energy grid, because we are very close [to the grid]. The topic of electrifying the zone is our goal. The concern of the voters at this moment being voters but also being CDR members is to electrify the zone.

For Marina and the other 16 members from her neighborhood CDR chapter, advocating for being connected to the central power grid has been one of their goals. I proceeded to ask Marina why they are not already connected to the power grid and how is it that they can run an entire farm without central electricity, to which she and Eliseo replied,

Up until recently, they told us that Viñales is declared a landscape or human heritage center by UNESCO and so it is fragile. But later this was said not to be the impediment. The street was paved and so they began to say there was no funding for this—and that's where we are.

Marina, Eliseo and their local CDR chapter has traditionally reflected upon and exercised their political praxis in contention with the position of the government. Their long term commitment to the task of electrifying the zone has revealed to them a counterfactual stance taken up by the government. In this real, concrete political case, taken up an organization meant to serve as an outlet for political exercise, we see that the dissolution of the contradiction between the individual and the collective has not operated exactly as the

Guevara had anticipated. In this case, the government takes up a contradictory position that eliminates the personalized experience and demands of individuals.

As a tour group on behalf of CubaSolar the reason we visited this farm and meeting space was to get a sense of the contemporary use of solar panels in rural Cuba. In the introductory conversation we had as a tour group the topic of electrifying the zone did not emerge. During the semi-structured interview I had a more in-depth understanding of their situation in relationship to electricity. So I asked Eliseo and Marina about the utility and limitations of the solar panels and also if their fellow CDR members, who are also not connected to the central grid, had been provided with similar panels. Eliseo answered,

It helps power one or two lights and the television ... it is not a solution for everything but it helps with many things. We can watch television, we can also watch movies but it has to be one thing at a time. For example, we cannot watch television and make fruit juice in the blender. We are very appreciative of having this apparatus, which was a gift from the government, we did not pay anything. We have had our solar panels for 3 years. But there are many houses, close to 50 who also want it but do not have it ... we need to have more panels and more batteries to generate sufficient energy to have a refrigerator and a washing machine, it would be incredible.

Marina and Eliseo's insights helped me understand a component of everyday, embodied praxis that cannot be grasped by merely referring to books and articles. Their lived experiences root their political action, their graciousness is extended beyond themselves and their privileges are likewise wished upon their community as a whole.

Moving on I asked Eliseo if he could tell me about the kinds of crops the farm produces, how the farm operates in relationship to commerce via the state, to which he responded,

Not only in the farm, but the entire collective produces almost everything; rice, mangos, beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, guavas, avocados, coconuts, coffee, pineapples, plantains, bananas, almost everything is produced. This is a cooperative of individual *campesinos* (farmers) some who also grow tobacco. The cooperative is called Cooperative of Credit and Services (CCS) in our cooperative there are 156 *campesinos*. Out of the 156 only 30 grow tobacco.

Interested on where the tobacco was sold I asked Eliseo if the cooperative itself was in charge of selling the products, to which he replied,

Look, 90% of tobacco production is sold to the government. In the case of my farm, which is one of the largest, I sell close to 97% of the tobacco to the government. The remainder of my other crops is for family consumption or to sell at the agricultural market supplying the demand. I can sell the crops anywhere I want to in Cuba.

My last question to Eliseo and Marina was whether or not they used pesticides and other chemicals in the cultivation of their crops, to which they said,

Oh no, we use compost, the leaves of the tobacco, guano, we use the central stem of the tobacco as pesticide, not only for tobacco, but also for rice, corn, beans, tomatoes, we do not use any chemicals, everything is natural.

Drawing from the conversation with Marina and Eliseo I conclude that perhaps, in the everyday, the “new people” owe their longevity and perseverance to transformation. In some cases the “new people” comes to disidentify with the mechanisms of the state,

nevertheless seeking change from the inside out. In other cases, *some* of the “new people” are rewarded with material compensations “of a social kind” like solar panels. The complex picture that is painted by analyzing the evolution of theory and practice in Cuban Revolution does not lead to a holistic condemnation or commendation of the Revolution. Instead, it serves to ground a more fully informed understanding of the conditions and contradictions inherent to the prescriptive character of social movements.

CHAPTER FOUR

EPISTEMOLOGIES OF LIBERATION

“Most of the nations that gained freedom from colonization have tended to form around an idea of power—the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root—rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other.”

Eduard Glissant *Poetics of Relation* (1997)

“It is important to fight against the colonial traditions we bring with us. It is imperative that we fight to defend the relevance of our task, a relevance that must gradually (but as quickly as possible) become incorporated within society’s most general and obvious stratum of knowledge.”

Paulo Freire *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* (1998)

Paulo Freire, Eduard Glissant and Ernesto Ché Guevara were all Latin American liberation theorists born in the decade of 1920. Each one of them takes on the project of liberation and theoretical rebirth in ways that are specific to their context, yet generalizable to the Latin American experience of colonialism. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire draws inspiration from the Cuban Revolution and the revolutionary fervor of Colombian priest

Camilo Torres. Freire quotes Ché Guevara throughout the fourth chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* recalling the triumphs, conflicts and strategies for practical revolutionary success. The hemispheric impact of Ché and Freire echoed across borders and political structures threatening the status quo. After the 1964 coup that established a military regime in Brazil, Paulo Freire was forced into exile for over 15 years before returning to Brazil to serve as Secretary of Education in the state of São Paulo. Ché Guevara was also persecuted and eventually assassinated due to the threat that his liberatory praxis posed to the status quo.

The writings of both Eduard Glissant and Paulo Freire reaffirm that social transformation demands creative praxis, or *poiesis*. Tautologically, social transformation does not emerge by reiterating the praxis of the previous regime. Creativity and imagination are indispensable elements for a theory that seeks to transform the oppressive elements of history and consciousness.

This chapter builds upon previous analyses and seeks to further develop creative praxis as a decolonial methodology. My aim is to combine Paulo Freire's dialectic of "*reading the world and reading the word*," with Edward Glissant's inter-cultural theory of the "*Poetics of Relation*." The purpose of this methodology is to address the tension between the ideal and the embodied *New Man*. I believe a dialectic that recognizes and incorporates context and Relation in a framework of epistemology will be able to provide an appropriate model for disambiguating the relationship between ideology and embodiment. Because the New Man is only new insofar as the individual embodying the New Man comes to have a previously unpermitted engagement with context and the other, thereby forging a new epistemology.

For the New Man, consciousness and the world must be the objects of transformation. This is evident in Guevara's claim that, "the new man must be created simultaneously with the material base."^{lxxiv} Consciousness cannot be transformed without a series of dialectical engagements between subject and objects that result in a new synthesis. Freire's dialectic epistemology of reading the *world* and reading the *word* helps me illuminate the role that contextual knowledge plays upon critical thinking. It also provides an account for change that proposes neither world nor word as static; as objects of human creation, text and context are objects that can also be transformed by praxis.

Consciousness for Freire is always already characterized by intention. That is, consciousness comes about through actions and is likewise transformed only through actions. However for a liberatory praxis, such actions cannot be devoid of intense reflection. The purpose of reflection is to comprehend the reasons for economic, social, and political contradictions. Reflection links the fundamental elements of coded situations to their historicity. The role of action is then to transform the oppressive elements of reality such that a new reality can come into being.^{lxxv}

Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* adds another layer to Freire's epistemology for liberation by emphasizing the interpersonal relationship aspect of transforming consciousness. These models are naturally complimentary insofar as they both acknowledge the centrality of actions for change in both the material world and in consciousness. For Freire, this is illustrated by his concept of conscientização, and for Glissant it's "*thought of the other* and the *other of thought*."^{lxxvi} Glissant's theory recognizes the importance of imagination and artistic creativity in launching a decolonial praxis. Whereas Freire's

epistemology addresses the dynamic interaction between a given individual and their society, Glissant's *other of thought* focuses on actions and interactions between individuals.

Glissant's insights help me address shortcomings of the New Man expressed in the previous chapter. I argue that the New Man as an imposed identity failed at attending to the everyday praxis of people who did not meet or outright rejected the imposition of the New Man. Misfit subjects such as Reinaldo Arenas, Caridad and Ines were deprived of a political identity that could raise and transform the collective consciousness of misfitting. I conclude the chapter and close out the thesis by offering an example drawn from a news segment which aired on the Cuban television network, Artv. The said news, reports on an innovation made by Lázaro, an electrical engineer who has put his skills to the service of others who have traditionally misfit the material environment by way of their embodiment. This example serves to ground the above discussion on epistemologies of liberation and revisit the most central themes of the thesis by way of conclusion.

Freire's Conscientização and Liberatory Praxis

The project of the New Man for Freire is first and foremost a pedagogical undertaking. As Freire sees it, one cannot truly learn when the content of knowledge is disenfranchised from the lived experience of the learner. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire addressed the ambiguous being^{lxxvii} that emerges out of a situation of oppression. That is, if the model of being has been perceived to be the oppressor, when the oppressed gets into power they tend to mimic the old order of oppression. This can happen as a totality where oppressive power is merely enacted by new oppressors, or it can manifest as coded situations, which requires critical consciousness in order to be decoded. If the oppressed

enters the process of creating the New Man as an ambiguous being, “partly themselves and partly the oppressors housed within them”^{lxxviii} their contribution to the project of the New Man as a model for liberatory praxis will be non-existent. In light of this premise Freire concludes,

it is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves can free their oppressors...It is therefore essential that the oppressed wage the struggle to resolve the contradiction in which they are caught; and the contradiction will be resolved by the appearance of the new man: neither oppressor nor oppressed, but man in the process of liberation.^{xxix}

I take it to be the case that for Freire the New Man cannot be prescribed top down. The process of rebirth is a painful one that must be waged by the oppressed themselves. Freirean scholar, Jones Irwin, elaborates when stating, “instead of being a ‘method’, we might describe Freire’s approach as being rooted in an attempt to construct a new epistemology or theory of knowledge.”^{lxxx} Freire’s epistemology of *reading the world* and *reading the word* merges with praxis and *conscientização* in complex ways that deepen our awareness of the New Man as an abstract and ideal project. As such, it is necessary to define and contextualize the components of Freire’s epistemology more clearly in order to thoroughly engage with the *World-Word* dialectic.

Irwin defines the Freirean praxis as, “a practical exploration of the relation between philosophy and the world, so as to bring about real and progressive change in people’s lives.”^{lxxxi} Freire himself writes, “Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and

women upon their world in order to transform it.”^{lxxxii} As for *conscientização*, Freire writes, “*conscientização* is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence.”^{lxxxiii} Freire continues, “*conscientização* does not stop at the level of mere subjective perception of a situation, but through action prepares men for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanization.”^{lxxxiv} Here, we see that Freire’s *conscientização* necessitates praxis, since without intentional action upon the world, the obstacles to humanization cannot be challenged.

Freire’s Epistemology: Reading the World and Reading the Word

The primary texts I am drawing from in order to articulate Freire’s epistemology of *reading the world* and *reading the word* are his book, *Teachers as Cultural Workers Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*^{lxxxv} and a published interview “Reading the World and Reading the Word: An Interview With Paulo Freire.”^{lxxxvi} I have chosen these texts because they most clearly present his epistemology as a methodology aimed at transforming context and consciousness. Freire’s methodology gives an account of the processes that must be embodied for the emergence of the New Man. I begin by presenting a diagram of Freire’s epistemology which I then deconstruct by referring to the texts themselves.

Paulo Freire's Epistemology of Reading the World and Reading the Word

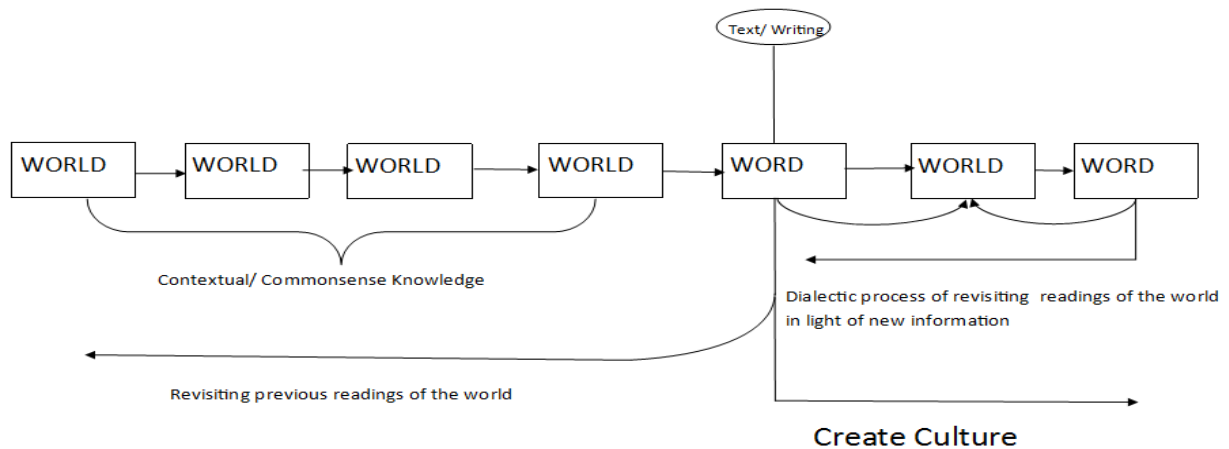


FIGURE 2- PAULO FREIRE'S WORLD/WORD DIALECTIC

For Paulo Freire, knowledge that is produced by pure interaction between the world and the senses is characterized as *commonsense knowledge*. Freire writes, "I must make it clear that this reading of the world, which is based on sensory experience, is not enough."^{lxxxvii} That is because when one is immersed in the world lacking the capacity to critically reflect on the reason for being of social conditions, one can fall into fatalism and adopt stereotypical representations of the other. However, this commonsense knowledge forms a foundation that is indispensable as an object of reflection and as such cannot be dismissed or overlooked. Theory for Freire becomes tangible only when synthesized alongside commonsense knowledge. Absorbed into a mechanistic view of reality, "we act in it on the bases of bits of knowledge that, having been learned throughout our socialization, have become automatic habits."^{lxxxviii} In other words, commonsense knowledge leads to uncritical action upon the world. As such, *conscientização* must emerge via a double

movement that questions the content and practice of commonsense knowledge. Yet conscientização is not merely a theoretical endeavor, it is a praxis, as such it must crystalize critical consciousness through actions that pose oppressive reality as the object of change.

Freire writes, “the practice of thinking and studying takes us to the perception of the previous perception or to the knowledge of the previous knowledge that, generally, involves a new knowledge.”^{lxxxix} This process of reading a previous reading of the world is made more critical by reading and studying the word (higher level theoretical understandings that research the *reasons for being* of an object or social phenomenon). However, for Freire, reading the word is not merely engaging with a text with the intention of memorizing it and depositing its contents into a storage tank. The reader is brought to the text by a curious desire to decode a coded situation. In this kind of engagement the reader establishes a relationship between his or her lived experience (contextual knowledge) and the word. The reader’s interested position compels her or him to take actions upon social reality in order to transform it.

For Freire, the act of reading is not merely engaging with words, reading is also directed towards reality, which is to be deciphered and transformed. Freire states, “there is a permanent movement back and forth between “reading” reality and reading words.”^{xc} Traditional educational orders dismiss the importance of commonsense knowledge and therefore hinder the emergence of critical consciousness.

Incorporating these insights from Freire and beginning to analyze the prescription of the New Man in Cuba, we see that the New Man is not a rebirth in the sense that the man from the past dies or ceases to have a role in the present. The case is quite the contrary, for

Freire the New Man must utilize past knowledge to supersede it. This dialectic process does not have an endpoint, since it is rooted in the acknowledgement of the unfinished quality of man. That is because in transforming reality new conditions and contradictions will become revealed that demand a new synthesis between reflection and action.

Whereas commonsense knowledge that is not surpassed by reading the word leads to fatalism, *conscientização* and praxis set in motion liberatory cultural transformation. As the New Man/ New Woman creates culture she or he also work towards demystifying difference as pejorative, because the New Man recognizes that the lived experience of those who are different from us is full of navigational insights, ready to be articulated and elevated to the level of theory. In this case, embodied difference is celebrated for the deepening contribution it makes to the project of the New Man.

Freire's Transformative Cultural Action

In the fourth and last chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Paulo Freire argues that transformative cultural action (revolution) must be rooted in dialogue. Freire's argument runs as follows:

(P1) If true commitment to the people (in transforming reality) requires a theory of transformative action, then this theory cannot fail to assign the people a fundamental role in the transformation process.

(P2) If leaders do not act dialogically, they have retained characteristics of dominators, then they are not truly revolutionary.

(C1) The validity of any revolution resulting from anti-dialogical action is thoroughly doubtful.^{xci}

Grounded by this conviction, Freire begins to formulate a theory that seeks to identify anti-dialogical elements that must be avoided by the New Man. He begins by recognizing that the praxis of the oppressors is antithetical to the praxis of the oppressed. Whereas the central concern of oppressive praxis is to maintain oppression through the exercise of power and manipulation, the praxis of the oppressed must dialogically work towards liberation. In Freire's words, "revolutionary praxis cannot tolerate an absurd dichotomy in which the praxis of the people is merely that of following the leaders' decisions—a dichotomy reflecting the prescriptive methods of the dominant elites."^{xcii}

It is fair to ask if the prescribed praxis of the New Man in Cuba represented the "absurd dichotomy" articulated by Freire. In a 1960 speech to an assembly of workers in Havana entitled, "On Sacrifice and Dedication" Ernesto Ché Guevara invoked that the Cuban Revolution only succeeded because of the unification of the peasants.^{xciii} Later in *Man and Socialism in Cuba* (1969) Guevara notes that, "it is true that [the masses] follow its leaders, basically Fidel Castro, without hesitation. But the degree to which he won this trust results precisely from having interpreted the full meaning of the people's desires and aspirations, and from the sincere struggle to fulfill the promises he made."^{xciv} The above citations give us two accounts of the dialogical nature of the Cuban Revolution. In the first we see that the first phase of the Revolution, armed struggle, was only successful because the subjective conditions for *conscientização* within the peasant class existed and lead to unification. In the

second account we are told that the leader of the masses, Fidel Castro, is followed without hesitation because he synthesized the historical moment with the desires of the people. Returning to Freire's statement about the "absurd dichotomy" between the praxis of the people and the will of the leaders, we see that the demand for dialogue for the sake of liberation is inescapable in every part of transformative cultural action. It seems as if after the armed struggle phase of the Revolution dialogical exchange between the people and the leader and vice-versa diminished at a time when it should have increased.

Freire outlines three essential characteristics of liberatory cultural action, they are:

(1) Oppressed people must participate in the revolutionary process with increasing awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation. Attempting to carry out a revolution for the people is equivalent to doing so without the people.^{xcv} (2) No dichotomy: action and reflection occur simultaneously, reality is the medium for the transforming action.^{xcvi} (3) Leaders and people must act in unshakable solidarity,^{xcvii} humble, loving, and courageous-, otherwise they become inflexible and treat others as mere objects. In other words, liberatory revolution can only be achieved by the tyrannized with their leaders who are authenticated in their praxis with the praxis of the people.^{xcviii}

Paulo Freire's insights help us identify certain processes that are essential for the development of critical consciousness and liberatory praxis. Freire's conditions of transformative cultural action also help us be critical of the ways in which the New Man was prescribed in Cuba. The theoretical and practical positions occupied by the New Man tends towards the same ends, the liberation of man as object. Underlying the processes of *reading the world* and *reading the word* as well as dialogical revolution, is the notion that an

epistemology of *conscientização* is constructed by the individual in their interactions with society and socially constructed history. That is, Freire's theory of transformative knowledge does not focus on transforming consciousness via interpersonal relationships.

Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*

Édouard Glissant is another Latin American theorist whose work has come to be categorized as fitting into the project of liberation. Historically situated during a period of tumultuous world history, Glissant's work parallels Freire and Guevara insofar as the centrality of transforming the colonized consciousness post World War II is concerned. Glissant's work focused on Antillean identity for racialized populations in the Caribbean, and this approach to rootedness in the Americas extended to Latin American and the plantation system that was so central to the western hemisphere. Glissant's work also featured the importance of interpersonal relationships and how to approach dialogue from a creative and transformative perspective.

In *Poetics of Relation* Glissant's first move is to locate Western conceptions of identity within the metaphor of a root (influenced by Deleuze and Guattari). For Glissant, colonial conquest has always been predicated on the idea that "my root is the strongest"^{xcix} which then spreads as a value judgement determining the value of other roots as less significant qua my root. Glissant invokes the life and work of Frantz Fanon and his intimate praxis with Martinique, France and Algeria to argue for a more complex metaphor of identity, not as a linear root but as a rhizomatic root. Glissant states, "that is very much the image of the rhizome, promoting the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within

the root but also in Relation.”^C Ché Guevara’s personal internationalism as well as his application of its ideas at a state level, which contemporarily manifests though out the world in the immense internationalist efforts of Cuban doctors and educators, shows the rhizomatic identity being lived and simultaneously theorized by Ché’s generation of revolutionary theorists, and embodied in the concept of the New Man in Cuba. As such, I believe that Glissant’s insights about the link between relation and *poesis* are indispensable for a revitalization of the theory of the New Man.

Glissant’s rhizomatic root and the Freirean view of the ingenuous, yet indispensable quality of purely corporeal knowledge guides this reading of the New Man in significant ways. From these perspectives, the New Man is not “new” in the sense that it has uprooted the old and been self-reborn. Just as commonsense knowledge cannot be dismissed, neither can the identity previously attached to the old root. Instead, Glissant aims towards a conscious redirection of rhizomatic growth, which can only come into being through actions.

Glissant further argues that, typically, relation centers on the model of transparency. However, a *poetics of relation* embraces opacity alongside rhizomatic notions of identity. In other words, under the impression that identity is a singular root, it follows that in relation it is best to be transparent. However, a rhizomatic attitude towards identity gives way towards embracing the inherent opaqueness of identity. Merging poetics, *poesis*, or creative praxis with relation, creates the opportunity for infinite ways of creating and recreating the New Man.

Glissant in comparing poetics with mathematics states, “The poetic axiom, like the mathematic axiom, is illuminating because it is fragile and inescapable, obscured and

revealing. In both instances the prospective system accepts the accident and grasps that in the future it will be transcended.”^{ci} That is, neither the poetic axiom nor the mathematic axiom exist as totalities that have solidly defined boundaries. However, both poetry and mathematics share the feature that, “the accident,” the function, or the poem will be transcended in the future. This position shares striking similarities with Freire’s assertion that by thinking and studying the practice (the accident,) we come to have a new perception of a previous knowledge, which itself transcends the previous knowledge creating new knowledge.

Glissant’s focus on relation resonates with the project of building the New Man by adding yet another layer to an analysis of becoming liberated. That is, transforming the consciousness alongside the material base is not likely without a methodology of relation among subjects. Furthermore, relation serves to propel the New Man towards future becoming by allowing for equal interchange between embodied knowledges. Ultimately, in the process of becoming a new society, one that tends towards liberation, relation must exist between its leaders and it’s most disenfranchised citizens. Glissant writes, “Relating realms of knowledge (questions and solutions) with one another cannot be categorized as either a discipline or a science but, rather, as an imaginary construct of reality that permits us to escape the pointillistic probability approach without lapsing into abusive generalization.”^{cii} This means that, coming to have a new perception of a previous knowledge, whether in relation or in *reading the world* and *reading the word*, cannot be prescribed as a mechanistic procedure. Instead, it must incorporate elements of imagination. Through open, purposeful dialogue with the other I come to imagine myself as

the other, not in the sense that I claim to have knowledge over the other, for I have embraced the opacity inherent to relation.

Glissant links this empathy centered relational method to what he calls an “aesthetic of rupture and connection”^{ciii} which is in contrast to an “aesthetic of disruption and intrusion.”^{civ} Traditionally, relation which imparts from the idea of identity as singular root, and which seeks reductive transparency as a model of dialogical exchange, imposes the reality of an ideal subject who has already been defined as valuable. As such, people who fall outside of the idealized norm by way of root or embodiment are kept way from contributing the theory of their lived experience to the project of social becoming.

Conversely, the idea in the “aesthetics of rupture and connection” is that in the process, new links between self and other heighten common, disinterested relation to the level of critical relation. Critical relation has a two pronged feature, one of self-assessment and another of social assessment. In the self-assessment phase, one imagines reading the world as the other and begins to deconstruct assumptions that were previously taken as natural. In the social-assessment phase of the aesthetic of rupture and connection, one combines their new reading of the world with intrinsically motivated research (reading the word,) and comes to have a more thorough understanding of the myriad ways in which humanization is denied.

Christina Kullberd in “Crossroads Poetics Glissant and Ethnography” writes, “for Glissant the idea of encounters between disparate elements offers the basis of a poetics of radical otherness and relation.”^{cv} Likewise, in the second chapter of *Man and Socialism in Cuba* Ernesto Ché Guevara argued that for voluntary work to truly transform

consciousness, it had to be done in places where workers do not habitually operate.^{CVI} That is, there is a quality to relation that more fully develops consciousness when previously unconnected rhizomes rupture away from the old and entwines with the new. However, in the case of building the New Man via voluntary work, there is a certain kind of body that comes to be valued as fulfilling the duties associated with self and social transformation.

Robert McRuer in “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence” reminds us that, “Being able-bodied means being capable of the normal physical exertions required in a particular system of labor.”^{CVII} Guided by McRuer’s insights we can pursue the idea that given Cuba’s material conditions, there were specific modes of production, related to agriculture and industrialization, which required a certain kind of body to perform the tasks at hand. All other bodies that were in resistance to the modes of production are thus casted off as antithetical to the project of the New Man. However, authentic relation cannot emerge from purely utilitarian value of the other. Under McRuer’s analysis, able bodied privilege, whether under voluntary work and the fulfilment of the New Man in Cuba, or under capitalist individualism serves to reinforce the stereotype that people with disabilities as a group are inferior to non-disabled people by way of the tasks they can perform under the demands of the system of labor. As antithetical to the project of the New Man, people with disabilities are denied access to relation vis-à-vis the state. In other words, the everyday praxis of people with disabilities is left unable to ascent to the level of transformative social theory.

For example, in the first chapter I recounted a meeting I had with Caridad and Ines, which happened on the day I arrived in Cuba. Caridad, who is the mother and caretaker of Inez, mentioned that she knows good things are said about the Revolution, but that they are not about people “like us.” Caridad possesses a more critical understanding of the Revolution in part due to her close relation with Ines. That is, Caridad has ruptured any connection she might have to the good things that are said about the revolution because daily, she and Ines experience both disability oppression and class oppression. Another way of putting it, and thereby applying Glissant is, Caridad and Ines are not meaningfully incorporated into purposeful dialogue that could bring about real significant changes in their lives and their society.

Glissant’s distinction between a “thought of the other” and an “other of thought” can help illuminate the ways in which relations contribute to the project of the New Man and also challenges some of its shortcomings. Glissant begins this section by raising the fact that struggles to have otherness recognized and validated are widespread throughout the world. For Glissant, coming to recognize and value the “dialectic of interdependencies”^{cviii} is inherently necessary for building a praxis that initiates at the level of everyday and is then risen to the level of social praxis. Bringing about real, significant changes to the daily life of people by transforming the oppressive elements of reality is the goal of liberatory praxis, the project of NM and the *poetics of relation*. Glissant writes,

Thought of the other is the moral generosity disposing me to
accept the principle of alterity, to conceive of the world as not

simple and straightforward, with only one truth—mine. But thought of the Other can dwell within me without making me alter course, without “prizing me open,” without changing me within myself. An ethical principle, it is enough that I not violate it.^{Cix}

Above all, “thought of the other” does not compel me to change my previous perceptions, it does not make me change my actions. “Thought of the other” is not critical praxis.

Reflection that culminates in a “thought of the other” meets the same fatalistic attitudes as Freire’s commonsense knowledge, adhering to stereotypical notions of the other as natural.

What is needed then is what Glissant calls an “other of thought”. Whereas a “thought of the other” is satisfied with accepting the principal of authority and reaming neutral in action,

Glissant writes,

The other of Thought is precisely this altering. Then I have to act. That is the moment I change my thought, without renouncing its contribution. I change, and I exchange. This is an aesthetics of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance.^{CX}

From a liberatory political standpoint, an “other of thought” in Relation with the other, is essential for guiding transformative cultural action. As noted by Freire’s earlier assertion involving the ambiguity of the oppressed and the tendency to imitate the oppressor, as well as in the “absurd dichotomy” between the praxis of liberation and the praxis of oppression,

true, liberatory praxis, which is the endeavor of the New Man, cannot be carried out without raising everyday embodied theory to the level of social theory so as to guide transformation. Glissant's "other of thought" locates the interpersonal aspect of transforming consciousness through relating and acting *with* the other.

Glissant adds, "if we allow that an aesthetics is an art of conceiving, imagining, and acting, the other of Thought is an aesthetics implemented by me and by you to join dynamics to which we are to contribute."^{CXI} That is, an aesthetic of liberatory transformation, must begin at the level of everyday theory with the other. "The other of thought" in relation transforms me from within; "the other of thought" in relation percolates to the level of social theory and transformation; the "other of thought" in relation transforms my consciousness about the social construction of otherness; the "other of thought" in relation implicates me as either an agent of oppression or liberation, there is no space for neutrality in transformation.

This chapter has presented and attempted to merge two primary theories that form the conceptual framework of my project. The first, Paulo Freire's epistemology of *reading the world* and *reading the word* was explained in conjunction with his theories of *conscientização*, transformative praxis, and dialogical cultural action. The second, Eduard Glissant's *poetics of relation*, was added to supplement Freire's transformative cultural action, since it focuses on a more basic transformation taking place in interpersonal relationships. Glissant's notion of rhizomeatic identity was presented as a challenge to Eurocentric views of identity that continue to hold essentialist characteristics of belonging

and embodiment. Furthermore, Glissant's aesthetics of rupture and connection alongside Freire's assertion that by studying the practice we come to have a perception of a previous perception, which takes us to a new, more critical understanding show us that the New Man is not necessarily new, as much as it is transformed.

Drawing from Freire's dialectic epistemology of world/word I discussed the ways in which common sense knowledge builds a foundation from which critical knowledge can emerge. As such, common sense knowledge was regarded as naïve yet indispensable. Freire's insights play a fundamental role in deepening our understanding of the overall project of the New Man as the synthesis of theory and action, which seeks to transform the world and consciousness. Freire shows that liberatory transformation cannot happen when the channels to power are made inaccessible to people simply by virtue of their embodiment.

As I pointed out by referring to Robert McRuer's work in Disability Studies and Queer Studies, the imposition of volunteer work as developing the New Man in the second phase of the Cuban Revolution continued to follow capitalist means of assessing ability and merit. As such, I argued that Caridad's claim in the first chapter about being excluded from the good things that are said about the revolution came as no surprise, since Caridad and Ines have been excluded from contributing their embodied knowledge to the project of transformation. The question that arises then is how to become aware of the ambiguities we carry within us that lead to stereotypical assertions regarding the value of the contribution of the other?

In order to address this shortcoming of the New Man as prescribed during the second phase of the Cuban Revolution, I drew upon Glissant's distinction between a *thought of the other* and an *other of thought* to highlight the importance of developing, deepening, and sustaining relations that truly transform us from within. I believe that a critical methodology of relation between subject and society and between subject and subject is necessary for a research based on the ideal and application of transvaluating values. If creative praxis is to take us beyond understandings that have been given to us by our colonial inheritance, then a theory that exalts creativity and imagination for the sake of transformative cultural action is necessary.

Uniting Theory and Action: Concluding Discussion

On the last day of Cuba Solar I serendipitously met a man named Lázaro while waiting on the bus to take us back to Havana. Lázaro, a soft spoken man of a few words and I were sitting next to one another when he asked me what had brought me to Varadero. As we chatted about various topics including the New Man, renewable energy, public transportation and infrastructure in Cuba our shared interest in disability rights became the focus of our short conversation. Lázaro told me about the various inventions he has made in order to assist his wife who has lost mobility in recent years. Lázaro also told me that he was featured in a Cuban news channel for his *silla eléctrica* (electric chair), I was a little bit startled but had come to be aware that if something shocked me it was probably a joke. Lázaro then reached into his briefcase and pulled out a DVD that had the news segment in which he was featured. At the time I did not have any device with which to play the video

but upon my return I watched it, transcribed it, and reflected on how Lázaro's creative praxis fits into a larger discourse about liberation. Bellow I have transcribed and translated the short news segment.

(Reporter) When science and good will come together often wonders arrive. This is what Cirro Hernandez Blanco from San Cristóbal Valencia expressed, Cirro regained his joy thanks to an innovator friend who returned his electric wheel chair totally repaired and much more economic.

(Cirro) Lázaro had the wonderful idea of putting the solar panel on [the wheelchair] so that it can go on charging the chair and the batteries can be refilled, they do not run out and I do not have to replace them every two or three months, because that is impossible.

(Reporter) Various days of research and drawing, intense sessions at the workshop and the decisive collaboration of the Cuban Society for the Promotion of Renewable Energy made it possible that with one solar panel and two batteries of forty-five amperes Cirro could return to the streets.

(Lázaro) We added about 24 volts of charge to the batteries where I have made an interacting electrical system that has been completely designed by me, and happily this vehicle works perfectly, it receives solar energy and converts it into electricity, this vehicle is very good.

(Reporter) This invention, free of noise and environmental contamination not only generates electrical energy, it also guarantees that the disabled person can commute for long distances in the shade, for a period of over five years.

(Cirro) This was a wonderful idea because it gives a chance for people to become integrated with society, it is not only an invention, live and automobile, or a factory, it is an invention that is going to elevate the sovereignty of many people with disabilities.

(Reporter) More than the satisfaction of creating or innovating, Lázaro is pleased to collaborate with people who need his ingenuity.

From the very opening of the news segment we see the idea of praxis emerge, “when science and good will come together often wonders arrive.” That is, when theory and practice come together reality is transformed. The introduction is also reminiscent of a statement made by Oscar Primelles in the third chapter about the solidarity of the Cuban. Lázaro himself is not disabled yet he has found the vocation of his praxis in manifesting liberatory possibilities for a group of people who have traditionally misfit the build environment given the *blueprints of power* that overwhelmingly imagine able bodies as occupying spaces. In this sense, Lázaro’s world/word dialectic has surpassed the level of common sense knowledge, whereby one is immersed in reality with no apparent efficacy of transforming it. On the contrary, Lázaro is utilizing his theoretical skills and his practical knowledge to create culture and transform the oppressive elements of reality. Lázaro’s *other of thought* has undoubtedly been cultivated through everyday interactions with barriers encountered by his wife and friends such as Cirro.

Cirro’s personal gratitude with Lázaro’s invention stems not only from the financial benefit of having an electric wheelchair whose batteries do not have to be replaced as often. Cirro’s gratitude extends to the realm of everyday life, because he can now “return to the streets,” a space that has previously not welcomed or sustained the peculiarities of his

embodiment. Lázaro elaborated on some of the specificities of his design and hails the final product as “working perfectly” thereby having paved the way for similar endeavors.

Cirro’s last reflection is perhaps the most noteworthy one, for Cirro, Lázaro’s invention has the potential of elevating the sovereignty of many people with disabilities, thereby reinstating the transformative characteristic of Lázaro’s invention and crystalizing Lázaro’s praxis as one which successfully transforms oppressive reality. The concluding remark made by the reporter also alludes to the altruistic nature of Lázaro’s work, a condition of work touted by Ché Guevara and embodied by the New Man.

In conclusion, although I have argued the state imposed embodiment of the New Man failed to create the proper channels within which everyday misfit knowledge could be elevated to the level of social theory, the New Man as a set of embodied values and mechanisms for social integration did succeed at various levels. Lázaro can be read as a contemporary representation of the embodied values of the New Man, although he himself is probably not interested in saying so. Similarly to how Caridad and Ines did not feel as if they belonged to the good things that are said about the revolution, yet by way of their complex embodiment and the navigational knowledge they have acquired from surviving under exclusionary constructions and conditions, they hold valuable knowledge about future directions and transformations the contemporary New Man ought to manifest. Insofar as this is true, if we are to build a revolution for “people like us,” misfit praxis must be elevated to the level of social theory and collectively guide future structural transformations.

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