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HYBRIDITY AND THE IDEA OF AMERICA

While hybridity has been a topic discussed widely throughout the Americas for the last fifteen years, there are major differences in the focus of social questions to which the term refers. In most countries of America, economic restructuring and its effect on democratic process have been the key issues. The debates circle around the degree to which free markets, popular sovereignty, and strong state institutions can form a coherent social pattern that will allow the decisions affecting the lives of millions to be made at home rather than abroad. In the U.S., hybridity has appeared first and foremost as a question of demographic change. For some it is a hopeful development that will strengthen pluralism and democracy. Others decry the introduction of "alien" peoples whose presence endangers the core values they believe led the U.S. to prosper.

The word *hybridity* entered public discourse as a critical term for discussing contemporary America in 1990 when the Argentinean scholar Néstor García Canclini published his extraordinarily influential book, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* ("Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity"). García Canclini, long a leftist, observed that the liberal models for social organization that he had long disdained had in fact effectively transformed his world. "Modernization" (his term) had been "produced [in Latin America] in a different way from what we expected in earlier decades." From the 1920s on, vanguard intellectuals had believed that they could literally *create* nations by mobilizing popular discontents

against “oligarchs, conservatives, and foreign dominators.” The nation, understood as the people united, would throw forward a popular state that by definition spoke for and protected its citizens.

The idea that the nation should be an instrument for popular aspirations was hard to give up if one believed in either democracy or justice. Who else but democratically chosen leaders of the people could best protect the interests of the nation as a whole? What left-wing intellectuals had never expected was how much more effective private enterprise had been than government in bringing modernization to the continent. Inequalities permeated cultural and social life, “but that inequality no longer takes the simple and polarized form we thought.”[i]

García Canclini advanced the term “hybridity” to describe the confused, complex but productive situation of American life at the end of the twentieth century. *Hybridity* took as a given that all countries in the Americas were equally part of the modern world and that every country was constituted by a complex mix of peoples coming from every corner of the globe. In the U.S. context, *hybridity* took its place alongside *multiculturalism*, *diversity*, and *pluralism* in the lexicon for conceptualizing and organizing difference. Hybridity was a formulation, Canclini thought, that better addressed questions of difference in a world where the rise of feminism, gay and lesbian claims for justice and equal treatment, and other new social movements such as disability rights challenged the primacy given to class, race and ethnicity as the foundations of hierarchy. *Hybridity* as well reflected a world in which identities were no longer determined by the structures of any single country.

When the book appeared in Spanish, the Berlin Wall had just fallen. The triumph

of the U.S. in the contest between "democracy" and "socialism" affirmed the historical inevitability of neoliberal objectives. The state ironically was an obstacle to democracy not its fullest expression. That a majority of Latin Americans had seen a disastrous decline in personal purchasing power during the 1980s contradicted free market triumphalists, as indeed should have the decline in relative income for a majority of U.S. residents. García Canclini's work questioned only the value of following a model that in Latin America had deepened political divisions and poverty. The fall of the Berlin Wall certainly did not mean that the world was united. A world divided by income and development levels could be, and of course proved to be, as dangerous as one cracking apart under ideological differences. The costs were to be found in an increase in violent crime, uncontrollable labor migrations, and the desperation of the millions slipping into a poverty that was shameful given the general prosperity that the media trumpeted.

By 1995, when the English translation appeared, the U.S. had reemerged from recession wealthier and more powerful than ever. The economic revitalization of the U.S. after three decades of stagnation and restructuring made its resurgence all the more dramatic. Computers and the World Wide Web overnight recreated the world economy, centering it firmly around U.S. corporations—an outcome that ten years earlier seemed dubious amidst prophecies that Japanese and Western European capitalism had overturned North American hegemony.

President Clinton promised that the globalizing economy could "lift billions of people around the world into the global middle class."[ii] During the booming second half of the 1990s, consumer markets expanded throughout Latin America, but frequent financial crises showed that the global system did not function smoothly. These crises

could not be ignored easily by the advanced countries, for the prosperity of the U.S. in fact was increasingly *dependent* on its southern trading partners. In 1970, Latin America accounted for less than 3 percent of U.S. foreign trade and investment. Latin America provided the United States with several strategic raw materials, coffee, bananas. Mexico and Puerto Rico provided low-cost labor. Latin America was important for some companies and sectors of the economy but of limited importance in the total economy.

Not so thirty years later. By 2000, Latin America had become the third most important trading partner for the U.S., surpassing Europe and gaining on Canada (#1) and Japan (#2). Trade with the European Union has declined as a percentage of U.S. GNP since the end of the Cold War, while business with Latin America continues to increase rapidly both in absolute and relative terms, keeping pace with the recent surge in U.S.-China trade. An expanding (if erratic) middle-class consumer market across the hemisphere is now one of the largest growth markets for U.S. manufacturing and service firms. Economic interactions have become more collaborative, with ownership, profits, management, technical and scientific expertise becoming much more trans-national than it had been a generation earlier.[iii]

The continued poverty that affects all American nations, the modern economic triage that renders large numbers of people everywhere, including in the U.S., superfluous is the other side of this process. All across the hemisphere, active political movements seek to restore the ideal of national self-sufficiency. After the attacks of September 1, 2001, the United States has thrown up barriers and renewed the violence long intrinsic to the nation's relationship to the rest of the world. It has not however withdrawn from the world, nor can it except in the fantasyland scenarios of nativists.

In this context of debates criss-crossing the American nations, I want to discuss a recent film, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, made in 2004, that exemplifies the hybrid, trans-national culture García Canclini proposes as characterizing the contemporary American experience. *The Motorcycle Diaries* is a dramatization of Ernesto Guevara de la Serna's 8,000-mile journey in 1951 and 1952 from his home in Argentina through the Andes into the Amazon, arriving at film's end in Caracas, Venezuela. The film is based on Guevara's posthumously published diary of the trip, as well as two books by his traveling companion Alberto Granado. The film transforms El Che from a radical communist into a liberal revolutionary, a young man whose trajectory of personal growth speaks more to contemporary dilemmas than to the divisions of his own period. Che remains a romantic icon but the film makers recover him for the contemporary era in an effort to assert that liberalism is first and foremost the free unfolding of every individual's potential and not simply an ideology of unfettered markets.

The differences between the film and its sources can be seen clearly in the movie's treatment of Guevara's speech at the birthday party given for him in 1952 while he was visiting a leper colony deep in the Peruvian Amazon. Guevara thanks his hosts by telling them that after six months on the road, overcoming the many obstacles to travel between his home in Argentina and other American countries, "creemos, y después de este viaje más firmemente que antes, que la división de América en nacionalidades inciertas e ilusorias es completamente ficticia. Constituimos una sola raza mestiza que desde México hasta el estrecho de Magallanes presenta notables similitudes etnográficas.

Por eso, tratando de quitarme toda carga de provincialismo exiguo, brindo por Perú y por América Unida."[iv]

As presented at in the climactic scenes of Walter Salles's film *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), Guevara's toast transforms from a polite restatement of clichés into the symbol of a young man's awakening. The film retells the story of Guevara's trek as a parable of a sensitive but somewhat callow youth coming into moral consciousness. Leaving the relative privilege of his family home, he confronted the misery surrounding the grandeur of the continent and he became an American. As the movie's Guevara struggles to articulate the strong, but inchoate feelings his experiences have inspired, the script writer surrounds the simple words he incorporated from Guevara's posthumously published diaries with more elaborate ideas.

Guevara says to his handful of listeners: we appear deeply divided, we feel divided, but we are one people; we are one people but we are mixed; from our interaction comes our strength, our future; if we live to aid one another we will prosper; the future of America lies in all rising up together. The dry sociological concept of "ethnographic similarities" disappears altogether. Instead, the basis for a united America lies in the shared consciousness that intellectuals can provide their fellow citizens. Alberto Granado, Ernesto's traveling companion, presented as a somewhat self-indulgent, roguish playboy in the film, wipes away a tear. The message has been heard by another young intellectual who will straighten out and dedicate his skills as a pharmaceutical chemist towards improving the health of his people, understood at last as the people of the continent.

Immediately following the short speech, the film makers dramatize the theme of a

unity that transcends class, race, and national citizenship by having Guevara leap into the Amazon river and swim across to the compound on the opposite bank where the patients live. He literally bridges the chasm dividing the professional staff of the hospital (the continent's middle class) and the lepers (the continent's despised popular classes) with his own fragile body.[v] Guevara has at last found his vocation as an engaged intellectual who serves the people of America by confirming their innate dignity and their potential. No longer drifting or aimless, he has become a man with a purpose prepared to assume his responsibilities as a leader of his people.

The scene is an invention of the film makers. In the appendices of *Notas de viaje*, a letter from Guevara to his mother written shortly after his birthday contains a brief reference to his having swum across the river while staying at the colony in order to overcome his fear of water. In his account of the birthday party, rather than he crossing the river to join the patients, a group of patients who are musicians cross over to serenade him with their accordions and guitars. Granado's account of the trip made no mention of the toast at all and focuses instead on the dancing that evening, emphasizing the light-hearted joke Granado played on his friend that led to Guevara attempting to dance the tango to a samba tune, a moment incorporated into the film for its humanizing levity.

Many viewers of the film know that a few years after the events dramatized in *The Motorcycle Diaries*, Guevara joined Fidel Castro's armed rebellion against the Batista dictatorship in Cuba. He became a leader of the revolutionary government established in 1959. He was perhaps the single most visible symbol of the new consciousness taking root in Cuba. His specific charge was to develop a new industrial policy for Cuba based on moral rather than material incentives. His policies were

effective at first in boosting productivity, but then faltered. After the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, Guevara found himself increasingly on the losing end of debates within the government. He resigned his position and left Cuba, fighting in the Congo first before going to Bolivia to lead an insurrection he hoped would spread from the Andes across the continent. He died at the hands of the Bolivian army in 1967, but his image has remained an icon, almost without equal, of a revolutionary fervor that cannot be killed.

Others, perhaps the majority of young viewers, will know little of the history beyond what the film tells them about Guevara. That story is one of an American youth coming to self-awareness through embrace of an ideal. He has become an icon found on murals all over the world, an icon in need of a story if he is to remain relevant for today's world. In the film, young Guevara transforms into a hero because of his growing commitment to treat the people at the base of society with dignity, an outcome overlapping with but nonetheless distinct from a revolutionary commitment to tear down an economic system that *requires* privilege and inequality. Guevara's growth in the film is marked by a series of small acts of charity as he encounters representatives of his continent's poor: he gives his asthma medicine to an old woman dying from emphysema and too poor to buy what she needs to alleviate her suffering; he gives the U.S. dollars his girl friend entrusted to him to buy her a bathing suit when he reached Miami to a mine worker and his wife, two communist activists who have fled death squads and need the money to continue their organizing work; he convinces a despondent young girl suffering from leprosy to undergo the operation that might save her arm from amputation. None of these acts are found in either his diary of the journey or Granado's two published accounts.

In those sources, there is simply no need for them to dramatize his growth because he is a committed communist from beginning to end. Granado described the trip across South America as "ratificación práctica de conocimientos teóricos."[vi] The immediate impetus for the trip was Granado's losing his job in a government biochemistry laboratory after he refused to become a member of the ruling Peronist party. Leaving the country was a way of avoiding further scrutiny into his activities and traveling provided an opportunity to compare the situation in middle-class, white Argentina with the poorer, less developed, racially mixed countries of the Andes.

Both Guevara and Granado were already convinced that everywhere in the world, the capitalist system created class and racial hierarchies. They saw the division between bosses and workers as the cause of the many problems facing the American nations. As a medical student, as an intellectual, Guevara had to choose whether he would serve the bosses or the workers. Social reality is like the two sides of a coin, Granado reports Guevara telling him during their trip. The wealth of a country is inseparable from the poverty of those who labor. Heads or tails, everything is one or the other, and each person must make a choice about which side they are on.[vii] Even though the image reappears in the books on which the film was based, it was not used in the script.

The film makers curtailed the explicitly Marxist convictions that the young Guevara already had formed and in effect placed his ideas into an older, liberal conception of American unity that profoundly influenced intellectuals in the first decades of the twentieth century but which receded in the 1920s and 1930s as Marxism and competing populist ideologies focusing on racial and class divisions within America grew stronger.

These older liberal conceptions are often called *arielism*, after the title of a book by the Uruguayan essayist and philosopher José Enrique Rodó published in 1900, *Ariel, a la juventud de América* ("Ariel, to the Youth of America"). Rodó galvanized his contemporaries with the idea of an inherent but hidden American unity based on a shared humanist heritage that preceded and would outlast the commercial frenzy of the contemporary era. The humanist classics were the heart of the education provided to every generation of young people (at least of the privileged classes). Humanism inspired them to think of the spiritual betterment of their world, but unfortunately as they matured and took their place in society, their ideals faded. Thus every new generation had a great responsibility to return their societies back to the ideals the countries of America honored but did not practice. The division of the continent into nation-states had fostered a political culture in which self-interest and passion trumped principle. The challenge was to establish stable civil societies organized around the exchange of ideas and political structures that adhered to and respected the rule of law.

Because America was the "new world," the "young" continent (Rodó's European perspective is obvious as is his lack of interest in the indigenous peoples of America as a living intellectual and cultural force), the nations of America played a role on the world stage analogous to the role that adolescents played in society. The American ideal pulled the rest of humanity back to ponder their highest ideals. At the time he wrote, Rodó was convinced that the responsibilities of the American ideal had fallen to Latin America. In the U.S., the market and engineering had emerged as the talismans of progress. The dominance of these two institutions showed how far English-speaking Americans had strayed from the American ideal. The residents of the U.S. had subordinated free will and

creative intelligence to mere mechanisms.[viii] Engineering was a set of problem-solving practices. The market was a mechanism that helped determine relative worth of goods and services. They were techniques and could not determine the goals people set for themselves. The reliance on technique rather than idea had fostered the emergence of a rapacious plutocracy that undermined the very democracy that had been the source of U.S. wealth and strength. Against the idea of the market Rodó posed the idea of community developing itself through conversation about its needs and experiences. Intellectuals, not business people or engineers, were the natural leaders of a liberal America. America would unite through developing institutions of cultural exchange that would share ideas about common problems and how to solve them. Instead of relying on a coercive state to maintain cohesion, a new, liberal social life would emerge out of the moral commitment of a population increasingly more knowledgeable and sophisticated about the world in which they lived. It was an idealistic book written by a young man in his twenties. It is mostly hot air, but it was powerfully influential in its day.

Indeed, *Ariel* became a classic of American literature, read in schools everywhere throughout Spanish-speaking America. Certainly both Guevara and Granado had read him and probably dismissed him as too conservative, as unconcerned about the deep inequalities at the heart of American society. Nonetheless, Guevara's toast to his hosts in the leper colony, as *he* reported it in his travel diary, is largely drawn from the Rodonian repertoire. The liberal faith in social progress and individual growth that Rodó propagated was a superficial grace note to Guevara's far harsher vision of a world that required heroes to give up their lives in the movement for liberation.

In 1956, as he prepared to join Castro's revolution in Cuba, Guevara wrote his

mother that she must never expect either moderation from him or a modest self-image (*moderado egoísmo*). "Para toda obra grande," he told her, "se necesita pasión y audacia en grandes dosis."[ix] To act was already to win, he insisted. Even if to act meant death. This was a radical humanism that Guevara summed up at the end of the diary of his first journey across America with the words of a humble, anonymous working man he met in Caracas, Venezuela: "El porvenir es del pueblo y poco a poco o de golpe va a conquistar el poder aquí y en toda la tierra. Lo malo es que él tiene que civilizarse y eso no se puede hacer antes sino después de tomarlo. Se civilizará sólo aprendiendo a costa de sus propios errores, que serán muy graves." Everyone alive in today's corrupt world deserves to die for their very being has been infected with corruption. Indeed they must die before a future generation of new men and women will emerge with a new psychology who will take living in utopia as their natural right. The revolution will consume everyone, both those who resist and those who join it. After their deaths, a new world will emerge where idea, action, and result will be in harmony. Guevara concluded his own account of his trip by reconfirming that since humanity is divided "en sólo dos fracciones antagónicas, estaré con el pueblo." He saw himself falling gun in hand "inmolado a la auténtica revolución estandarizadora de voluntades."[x]

That Guevara's toast at the leper colony might incorporate echoes of Rodó's language is not surprising for it provided a set of useful clichés for celebratory, quasi-patriotic events that even young communists found helpful. The makers of *The Motorcycle Diaries* structured their narrative around an epiphany that recuperates Guevara for the contemporary liberal world by eliminating his radical, existential politics and enfolding him back into the liberal humanist tradition that Rodó epitomized.

As a result, the understanding of social difference presented in the film has shifted from a hard-edged Marxist understanding of class and race as products of an economic structure to a more moral perspective. One of the key images of *The Motorcycle Diaries* occurs as Ernesto and Alberto travel down the Amazon to the leper colony on a river cruiser. The spacious and comfortable cruiser, where foreigners and middle-class professionals like Alberto and Ernesto find many diversions, tows a crammed little vessel with a makeshift roof where the poor have been segregated. "So much injustice," Ernesto says as he studies the tow line separating him, a young man of good education and a respectable family, from the common masses. The film emphasizes that Ernesto and Alberto were broke, but their backgrounds gave them a presumption to security and comfort that most of their fellow Americans were forbidden to enjoy.

W. E. B. Du Bois stated at the beginning of the twentieth century that the color line defined the modern world, a position that Marxists for most of the century would find an irritant to their representation of the world as structured by class and economic power. We should be clear that the division of the world Du Bois described was not simply a question of difference, whether cultural or biological, nor was it simply a question of hierarchy and stratification. The question facing the world in the form of the color line was one of a system based on active separation of people, of what the South African Nationalist Party would call *apartheid*. The color line meant a forcible division of the world into *lo sano* and *lo enfermo*, to use Ernesto's language in the leper colony as he responded to what struck him as arbitrary and demeaning treatment of the patients the doctors were in theory there to serve. The *well* and the *ill*, which is another way of saying the *pure* and the *impure*.

If the *Motorcycle Diaries* liberalizes Che by refocusing the political message from revolutionary challenges to an economic system to the moral dilemmas of societies ideologically dedicated to personal growth but at every turn stifling the free development of the majority, there nonetheless remains in the film's presentation of social difference glimmers of who he historically was when he made his journey and who he became. The question of violence remains in the shadows, a puzzling remainder to the problem of how to achieve both justice and unity in the Americas. Over the closing credits, a voice-over narrator gives due homage to the aspiration for liberation that the *image* of Che had come to symbolize around the world, an image that said that the division and separation of the world into the privileged and the impure be ended once and for all. The voice-over then asks, "were we too rigid? too hasty?" The answer implied is yes, and indeed one of Guevara's more recent biographers has noted that despite Che's romantic, idealistic image, to plunge deep into his life and environment is to return to the failed and static political mind-set of Marxism during the post-World War II decades where contradictions between theory and practice were explained away as "petty-bourgeois deviations."[xi]

Even so the ideal was neither false nor disingenuous. The trap was in being seduced into believing that sheer will-power could achieve goals to self-determination, justice, and equality that all thoughtful people should accept. But is not voluntarism and a belief in the power of the will to break through long-standing barriers not an inherent part of the liberal vision? Is not the hero, at least as Thomas Carlyle defined him in the early nineteenth century, the purest expression of individuality uncompromised by collective demands? Is not the vocation of the hero to illuminate the consciousness of

others so that they see the world in new, previously unimaginable ways and suddenly see new ways of acting within it? A combination of will-power, vision, and discipline were at the core of Rodó's vision of Americans slowly uniting into a political union after they had built a whole set of shared cultural institutions that would allow for regular exchange of ideas and perspectives.

Developing America into a single community that could discuss matters of mind and beauty required a trans-national market that did not yet exist in 1900 when Rodó's *Ariel* was published. Cooperation between governments, universities, and other not-for-profit public institutions over the following decades helped to create a more regular interchange between intellectuals and artists from different countries. In the 1930s in particular, mass media markets emerged across the western hemisphere, and whether the product was books, magazines, motion pictures, radio, or phonograph records, exchange between producers in different countries helped establish a cultural market where profits were more reliable if cultural goods crossed national boundaries.

The irony was that the construction of a continental cultural market linking the different nations of the Americas was achieved first by Hollywood, followed by mass media industries largely based on a North American model. Given their divisions and the orientation of their economies towards export to the more industrially developed north, the countries of Latin America did not have the resources initially to do it themselves. Spanish firms, though long organized to reach the book market across the continent, were too small to expand beyond the role they had secured of providing books and journals for educated élites. Their model of a global market was one that need reach only a tiny fraction of the population, a group that took its privileges for granted and its cultural

distinction very seriously. Enterprises based in the United States had the capital and the organizational ability to produce and distribute cultural products on a truly hemispheric *and* mass basis. Often, U.S. companies marketed the same products they made for domestic distribution, but with increasing frequency, U.S. firms invested in developing a continental market that applied the same principles and procedures used at home for products developed specifically for Spanish-speaking or Portuguese-speaking America relying on local talent to provide the content. The cultural market that emerged through the twentieth century supported a *Latin American identity* but one that has been difficult to separate from Anglo American cultural hegemony. Indeed, at the risk of oversimplification, the only institutions that exist even today for articulating a *Latin American* opinion, as opposed to a Mexican, Venezuelan, Brazilian, or Chilean, are the Organization of American States and the trans-national media industry, both of which are bluntly outgrowths of United States society, of U.S. conceptions of political and economic life. As a result, it is almost impossible to disentangle U.S. conceptions of the liberal project from those in the rest of America.[xii]

To which national cinema does *The Motorcycle Diaries* properly belong? The director Walter Salles is Brazilian, who made television commercials and documentaries before moving into feature films in the 1990s. The screenwriter José Rivera is from California. He is a playwright who frequently writes for dramatic series on U.S. network television. Born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Rivera grew up in a small town on Long Island, where his family moved when he was four years old. His script was written in English and then translated into Spanish for the production. The idea for the film

originated with Robert Redford, a Hollywood movie star turned producer with a well-known track record of promoting independent films and a reputation as a social progressive. He assembled the funding, he hired the writer and director, and he remained engaged in the shaping of the film throughout its production. Gael García Bernal, a young Mexican movie actor with international star appeal, plays the role of Ernesto Guevara. *The Motorcycle Diaries* was produced by a U.S. company and distributed by Universal Pictures.

As a collaborative artistic statement, it is an American film in the sense that Americans from different nation-states came together to express the sentiment of "nuestra América /A nossa América." The film has allowed Latin American and U.S. Latino creative artists to speak about the relationship of intellectuals to the working poor of their countries. But Redford's role was not incidental, nor was that of Universal Pictures. As a commercial product, it is a U.S. film, and its form and content rely on the tried and true Hollywood conventions of the "bio pic" and the "road movie" genres. *The Motorcycle Diaries*, like every Hollywood film, was designed to be compelling to a global audience including Americans, whether they speak English, Spanish, or Portuguese. The film, whatever else it may be, is a stepping stone in the synthesis of the Americas, not excluding the U.S., into a shared cultural market. The team behind the film continued its collaboration with *Dark Water*, an English-language adaptation of a Japanese horror film restaged in New York City. They are now preparing a film adaptation of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, tackling another icon of post-World War II American rebellion.

Latin America has become the site of a prosperous cultural industry that exports to other parts of the globe. Indeed the governments of Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil,

whatever disagreements they have with the Bush administration on other policies have been stalwart supporters of the U.S. position on intellectual property and copyright issues. The mass media in Latin America could theoretically result in a public sphere that crosses national borders, but the goals of the firms have been to use the hemispheric market as a springboard into the global entertainment market, a strategy that has largely been successful, in part because Latin American firms have not been afraid to invest in the U.S. market or to enter into collaborative agreements with U.S. firms..

The danger inherent to the U.S. model of centering the public sphere around the culture industries, García Canclini has noted, is that the public is united around spectacle and consumption not around political structures in which citizens engage the dilemmas of their world.[xiii] When media producers seek the lowest common denominator of understanding in communication, hybridity comes to mean softening differences rather than trying to find out why they emerged and what their presence demands.[xiv]

García Canclini's perspective assumes that the structures of production and distribution determine who participates and what can be said. A commitment to liberalism as a moral philosophy might lead to a distinct interpretation of what can and needs to be done. *The Motorcycle Diaries* and Robert Redford's strategic position in the enterprise point to a debate over the parameters of liberal societies. Since the 1970s, the so-called neoliberals have had the edge in asserting the superiority of market mechanisms for advancing progress and prosperity. Redford is part of a movement that challenges neoliberal assumptions by advancing an alternative liberal agenda. Following the collapse of Marxism, this other, humanist liberalism has become one of the focal points for expressing progressive opposition to the free-market ideas that currently dominate

politics and economics. Redford is certainly in no way in rebellion against the market. Indeed he has used the media markets effectively to advance his own vision of a broader, more pluralist culture that may overlap with but is not identical with García Canclini's culture of hybridity.

Beyond his involvement with *The Motorcycle Diaries*, Redford pops up as executive producer, co-producer, or creative consultant on more than two dozen films produced across the continent over the past ten years by a variety of creative teams. The Sundance Institute, which, for better or worse, was critical in developing a market niche for U.S. "independent" films, has been actively developing "independent" film production in other American countries, and it is one of several U.S. based organizations engaged in developing contemporary Latin American cinema. Some of the films produced—I'm thinking of *The Lost Embrace* from Argentina, *Whiskey* from Uruguay, *O Homem que copiava* from Brazil, or *Sexo, Lágrimas, y Pudor* from Mexico are similar in feel and content to their U.S. counterparts though grounded in distinct local and national contexts. They fill in the portrait of the imaginary global middle class that President Clinton invoked, a middle class for the most part shown as not much different from its counterparts in the U.S. or Europe except for language. Other films, I think of *Crane World* or *Bolivia* from Argentina, *Herod's Law* from Mexico, or *Maria Full of Grace* and *Crónicas*, two recent Spanish-language U.S. films, focus on the social crises accompanying globalization. In these films, social crisis provides the context for the moral crisis that the characters work through (or around) in the course of the narrative.

An effort has been made to get these films into U.S. theaters beyond the art house circuit, but no film has yet matched the phenomenal success of Ang Lee's Chinese-

language U.S. film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which he adamantly refused to release with an English-dubbed track.[xv] Another part of the effort has been to open up Hollywood, so that, for example, the director of *Y Tu Mamá también* went on to make one of the Harry Potter films and the creative team behind *Amores perros* made *24 Grams*, an English-language film set in the U.S. using Hollywood stars.

In conclusion, I want to make three points:

First, the hemispheric, trans-national project has been largely defined in terms derived from liberal ideology. Over the past century, there have been alternative foundations—the Cuban revolution represents one pole; integralism, a conservative Catholic movement, represents a very different strand. But alternatives to the liberal perspective have not yet succeeded in establishing the institutional frameworks that are necessary for ideas to reshape people's lives or provide them with new subjectivities that give meaning to the practices of everyday life. The result has been that it remains difficult to conceptualize a broader American synthesis outside the terms liberalism has provided, which means specifically outside the frameworks that have developed in U.S. society for many generations and that rely on myths that still have considerable power for most Americans across the hemisphere as they try to think about what makes for a just society, what makes for a good life.

Second, the liberal values that have, within this country but perhaps elsewhere as well, been identified with the U.S., indeed have been widely shared across the continent. When in the first decades of the twentieth century, the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó or the Dominican Pedro Henríquez Ureña or the Brazilian Oswald de Andrade or the

Chilean Gabriela Mistral each spoke of an "American ideal," they invoked values and images of opportunity, openness to change, personal freedom, individuality, self-governance that most U.S. citizens would think of as uniquely belonging to their own country. Yet the Americanism of these and other ideologues of America's mission in the world was not derivative of U.S. ideas, and indeed each of these figures wrote of the U.S. as a threat to the "American ideal." What U.S. journalists and historians have typically described as nationalist resistance to imperialism might in other countries be viewed as a defense of universal values that United Statesers have betrayed.

Third, I see *The Motorcycle Diaries* as indicative of renewed debate within liberal societies over the definition of the foundations of liberalism, a debate that involves a revolt against neoliberalism that does not imply in any way a rejection of either the market or electoral democracy. The governments of Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, and Costa Rica show the power of this revolt in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking America. The film began as an effort of U.S. citizens to recover liberalism as a moral philosophy fostering individual growth, freedom of choice, responsible self-government of formal (but not actual) equals, which then tapped into the strength of those values across America. The saga of young Ernesto Guevara helps convey to today's audiences that individual moral stance and a sense of responsibility to others in the community are the defining characteristics of liberal philosophy, must indeed be important for any society that embraces the market and democracy. From a social scientific perspective, liberalism is hopelessly amorphous. It provides no analytic tools for understanding social process, precisely what a critical culture needs to explore the options a society faces. From a political perspective, however, the debate over the moral foundations of liberal

values is where the action currently is and probably where it will be for years to come. If liberal culture is diverse and hybrid, then there is no historical necessity for one vision or another to prevail. What liberalism means in the future will be the result of moral choices that Americans elect.

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[i] García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, 65.

[ii] Quoted in Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 40-41.

[iii] fill in

[iv] Ernesto Che Guevara, *Notas de viaje* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2002), 158.

[v] *The Motorcycle Diaries*, Walter Salles, director; José Rivera, screenwriter (Focus Features, Spotlight Series, DVD 25942), chapter 16 "Salute to a United Nation."

[vi] Alberto Granado, *Con el Che de Córdoba a la Habana* (Córdoba, Argentina: Op Oloop Ediciones, 1995), 48. Far from being a political neophyte, Granado had long been an activist against the government of Argentina. In 1943, he was imprisoned for his activities organizing a student strike against a military coup led by people he considered pro-Nazi. On the student strikes, Granado's "clandestine life," his arrest, and Guevara's involvement as a middle-school student in anti-government protests, see 18-25.

[vii] Granado, *Con el Che por Sudamérica*, 31-32, 123.

[viii] "Rodó propone una libertad interior por sobre cualquier otro género de libertad. . . . esta libertad rodoniana encuentra su principal amenaza en la especialización. A partir de

la ley de la evolución biológica transferida a la sociedad, Rodó reconoce . . . implica una creciente tendencia a la especialización. Aunque no deja de creer que tal especialización es una condición necesaria del progreso, tampoco puede dejar de reconocer que ella misma trae consigo desventajas notorias, como la creación de espíritus estrechos: 'Ser incapaz de ver de la Naturaleza más que una faz; de las ideas e intereses humanos más que uno solo, equivale a vivir envuelto en una sombra de sueño horadada por un solo rayo de luz' [*Ariel* in *O.C.*, 213]," Ortega Trillo, *Recuentos y revaloraciones*, 68-69.

[ix] Guevara to his mother, 15 July 1956, in Ernesto Che Guevara, *Otra vez: Diario inédito del Segundo viaje por Latinoamérica* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2001), 177.

[x] Guevara, *Notas de viaje*, 170-171.

[xi] Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Ernesto Guevara también conocido como el Che* (México, D.F.: Planeta, 2003), 10. Guevara's romantic and bohemian revolutionary theory was itself labeled a "petty-bourgeois deviation."

[xii] On the role of U.S. media enterprises in constructing a trans-national American cultural market, see the work of Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), published in Spanish originally as *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (México: Editorial Grijalba, 1990); *La globalización imaginada* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1999); *Las industrias culturales en la integración latinoamericana*, a volume of essays edited by García Canclini and Carlos Moneta (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1999), in particular Carlos Juan Moneta, "Identidades y políticas culturales en procesos de globalización e integración regional" for an effective analysis of the challenges that the market poses for concepts of national unity, and García Canclini, "Políticas culturales: De las identitades

nacionales al espacio latinoamericano"; and García Canclini, *Latinoamericanos buscando lugar en este siglo* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2002).

[xiii] "It is clear that these changes are related to the displacement of a culture of productivity by a culture of speculation and spectacle.…What can still be saved from populism is then displaced onto consumption (cheaper goods and services in shops or state transport) or onto symbolic offers: spectacles of collective identification and guarantees of order and stability'"(García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, 193).

[xiv] García Canclini, *La globalización imaginada*, 197-198.

[xv] The commercial success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, as well as that of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*, should put to rest arguments that U.S. audiences will not watch subtitled films. Believing that the films would be of interest to them, large numbers of people sat through very long films without any English whatsoever.