


ARTICLE

“Draw a Guerrilla!” Betrayal, Solitude, and Revolutionary Art

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Abstract

This article analyzes the sketches of Ernesto “Che” Guevara and fellow guerrillas made by the Argentine Ciro Bustos during his captivity in Bolivia in 1967. Many of the references to Bustos in biographies of Guevara and in writings about the latter’s failed Bolivian campaign depict Bustos, because of those sketches, as “the man who betrayed Che.” The tensions and discrepancies in those accounts suggest instead that Bustos’s sketches should be seen not merely as documents of betrayal but as artworks embedded in the period’s wider revolutionary visualities. The article argues that Bustos’s drawing of Che Guevara, who is usually depicted visually as “heroic guerrilla” or “saintly martyr,” introduces an affective, intimate gaze of armed struggle in all its complications.

Keywords: Ciro Bustos; Ernesto “Che” Guevara; art; revolution; sacrifice; betrayal

Resumen

En este artículo se analizan los retratos que el argentino Ciro Bustos hizo durante su cautiverio en Bolivia en 1967 de sus compañeros guerrilleros, entre los que se encontraba Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Muchas de las biografías de Guevara y los escritos sobre su fallida campaña en Bolivia señalan a Bustos como “el hombre que traicionó al Che” y justifican la acusación refiriéndose precisamente a esos dibujos. Pero la falta de acuerdo en el rol que ocuparon los retratos en la captura de Guevara habilita la posibilidad de que los bocetos de Bustos sean abordados no como meros documentos de una traición sino como imágenes complejas del régimen visual de aquella época revolucionaria. Sostenemos aquí que el retrato hecho por Bustos del Che Guevara, históricamente representado como “guerrillero heroico” o “mártir sagrado,” introduce una mirada afectiva, íntima y compleja de la lucha armada.

Palabras clave: Ciro Bustos; Ernesto “Che” Guevara; arte; revolución; sacrificio; traición

Everything combined, then, to leave the guerrilla group alone with itself. That solitude was the real war of attrition that wore it down; of that solitude it died The solitude of the Vallegrande area, the poorest part of a desperately poor country. The solitude of the little column wandering about in that area of solitude. And amidst all that, the solitude of Che himself in the middle of the encampment, sitting upright on his stool in the evening, by the fire, his khaki felt hat pushed back, drawing slowly on his pipe, and reading perhaps León Felipe’s poem, *La Gran Aventura*. (Debray 1975, 145–146)

The first time I saw high-quality reproductions of *Ciro Bustos's* drawings of *Ernesto "Che" Guevara* and his band of guerrillas in Bolivia was at the Latin American Library at Tulane University. Due to library renovations, the special collections were housed temporarily in a warehouse, accessible only via a limited-service minibus. Finished with my research into photographs of pre-Columbian ruins and with time to spare until the journey back to campus, the library staff kindly offered to pull other material of possible interest. I requested the "Robert Kim Stevens Collection of Che Guevara and the Bolivian Guerrillas Materials," an assortment of papers pertaining to a US State Department official based in the US embassy in La Paz during the time Guevara's group was active in Bolivia. Among the documents—which also included a business card listing French intellectual Régis Debray's teaching status and a map annotated with key sites pertaining to guerrilla activity—were photographs of the sketched portraits Bustos had made during his captivity alongside Debray at the hands of the Bolivian military in 1967. Some of the images were familiar, particularly that of Che labeled with his nom-de-guerre "Ramón," but the few reproductions I had seen previously were always poor quality. Seeing the full set of detailed images, I was struck, even moved, by Bustos's draftsmanship and the way his drawings, traces of the abject failure of Guevara's guerrilla project, made these figures come alive.

Many people on the left came to see Bustos's drawings as proof that he was Guevara's Judas. They saw the sketches as tangible evidence that the artist had given in to his interrogators and confessed that the guerrilla was indeed in Bolivia. The accusation of betrayal evidently weighed heavily on Bustos. In 1971, following his release from captivity in Bolivia, he declared, "Es mucho lo que debo pensar, analizar y expresar; no sé en qué forma, tal vez artículos, quizás un libro, como una obligación de un revolucionario que debe contribuir con su experiencia, positiva y negativa, al proceso de liberación de nuestros pueblos, del que no acepto marginarme" (Bustos 1971, 29). But the drawings would shape his life otherwise, and he subsequently kept silent for the following quarter of a century, living out exile in Malmö, Sweden. As he said subsequently in Erik Gandini and Tarik Saleh's documentary film *Sacrificio—Who Betrayed Che Guevara?*, which sets out to vindicate the Argentine, "en estos cuarenta años lo único que ha funcionado es la mentira. Todo está montado a partir de los dibujos."

Despite their significance, however, Bustos's drawings remain largely a footnote in the visual iconography of *Ernesto "Che" Guevara*, a man whose image has otherwise circulated so widely both before and after his death. He was photographed extensively as a leading figure of the Cuban Revolution, famously by Rene Burri, Raúl Corrales, and Alberto Korda. Since his death in 1967, he has been depicted in several major films by actors including Omar Sharif, Antonio Banderas, Benicio del Toro, and Gael García Bernal. He is the subject of several graphic biographies, has been used as an icon for marketing consumables and conveying ideologies alike, and even appeared tattooed on the arm of Argentine footballer Diego Maradona. And yet for all this apparent diversity, the visual currency of Che converges on a confined set of meanings based around the narrative of the sacrificial heroism of the solitary revolutionary. That visual encoding is encapsulated in two images: Alberto Korda's *Guerrillero heroico*, the photograph of Che taken in 1960 that has been reproduced across the world, and Freddy Alborta's pictures of Che's corpse laid out proudly by the Bolivian military in Vallegrande in 1967. Mariano Mestman (2010) has highlighted how Alborta's images, used alongside similar photographs in the documentary film *La hora de los hornos* (1966–1968), for example, partly offset Che's visual iconography as encapsulated by Korda's photograph. But both images speak to the left's recurring desire to venerate the transcendental heroism of the sacrificial body.

This article argues that Bustos's drawings are a crucial but overlooked part of Che's landscape. When Bustos's portraits are discussed, even by him, they are seen only within the parameters of evidence: as proof—or not—that Bustos was guilty of the ultimate act of

treason for the revolutionary left, the betrayal of Che Guevara. Instead, I see them as artworks that reveal an alternative affective dynamic to the dominant narratives that have emerged around Che's visual iconography. If Korda and Alborta's photographs have been wielded as symbols of heroism and sacrifice, then Bustos's sketches represent the missing—and messy—element of what should really be a trilogy. Bustos's portrait of Che too often remains invisible because it disrupts the visual narrative of the heroic, prophet guerrilla that was already being canonized in the mass media and in cultural production toward the end of the 1960s.

If the sentimental response to Che's death was part of a "quest for a transcendental subjectivity other than religion" (Marchesi 2018, 92), then Bustos's drawings offer an alternative to such ethereal aspirations. Collectively, they invite us to trace the networks of affect that existed within the armed left, offsetting the solitude of the failed revolutionary enterprise and Bustos's own exile. In their very uncomfortable messiness—whether the ambiguities of the drawn image, the entanglements of the Bolivian enterprise, the turmoil of the entire period—they encourage us to embrace the complicated nature of a period that all too often is polarized between hero and traitor, sacrifice and betrayal, and righteousness and lack of principle. Repositioning Guevara within the context of a wider group of combatants, the drawings ask us to look again at the figure of both hero and traitor. And they invite us to ask what constitutes revolutionary art, perhaps not in the sense of the artistic practice carried out by other Argentine artists working in the late 1960s following Che's death, but in the way that Bustos's body and those of the people he was drawing were invested in the conflict.

There are no illustrations to accompany this article. Although I did seek permission from Bustos's heirs to reproduce his sketches I encountered some hesitancy, an indication of the ongoing affective weight of these historical images. Perhaps they could have been included on the grounds of fair use. Perhaps my reluctance to do so on those terms itself says something about the aura of the image. In any case, most of the sketches, albeit in poor quality, can be seen in the October 1967 issue of the magazine *Punto Final*, the first issue published after Che's death, which is readily available online (*Punto Final* 1967). And many are also visible online or in other publications, although it is unlikely that the authors of the latter ever sought permission to reproduce them. The librarians at Tulane University pointed out that on one website, the image credits for the drawings are attributed to the US Army, which leads to the troublesome conclusion that copyright for images produced during captivity and under duress is held by the captor.¹ Ultimately, perhaps the lack of these sketches in this article is an apt metaphor for their ongoing absence in Che's visual pantheon.

Heroic sacrifice and the revolutionary Left

In mid-twentieth-century Latin America, many on the left firmly believed that political change was possible only through armed revolution (Marchesi 2018, 5). The 1959 Cuban Revolution ratified the belief in legitimate revolutionary violence, shifting the dynamic of political change away from the communist notion of what Vera Carnovale (2022, 1) refers to as "revolution by stages." But Che's failure in Bolivia challenged that belief and raised doubts about Guevara's theory of guerrilla warfare. On the basis of his experience in the Cuban Revolutionary War, Guevara saw the *foco*—an armed vanguard fomenting a rural-based revolution—as the blueprint for future uprisings in Latin America. Following his death, the flourishing left-wing guerrilla organizations of the Southern Cone acknowledged, often in private, that Guevara had made strategic mistakes and that armed

¹ See "Che's Posse: Divided, Attrited, and Trapped," US Army Special Operations Command History Office, https://arsof-history.org/articles/v4n4_posse_page_1.html.

revolution did not have to be rural (Marchesi 2018, 89). But their fundamental belief in revolutionary violence did not waver, and the veneration of Che as the sacrificial hero only intensified (Carnovale 2022, 5).

The discourse of the guerrilla as a sacrificial hero was partly constructed by Che himself. In the dedication to his book *La guerra de las guerrillas*, published in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Revolutionary War, he described his friend and fellow guerrilla Camilo Cienfuegos, whose plane disappeared over Cuba in 1959, as “the stoic fighter who always made of sacrifice an instrument for steeling his own character and forging the morale of his troops” (Guevara 2003, 3). And in his 1965 letter entitled “El hombre nuevo,” in which he set out his vision for the revolutionary subject, he presented sacrifice as the ultimate symbol of heroism (Guevara 1978, 21). As Carnovale (2022, 9) points out, after his death, left-wing militant groups saw Che as “a model of exemplary conduct, bearer of a set of moral-ethical values . . . characterized by an ethic of sacrifice.” Although sacrifice could be taken in different ways—sacrificing family life, sacrificing financial gain, sacrificing everyday comforts—the ultimate sacrifice was embodied by death in combat (Carnovale 2022, 10), a vision that enabled Che’s death to be transformed from potentially tragic farce into a Christ-like tale of laying down his life for others.

The ties between revolutionary sacrifice and religion preceded Che’s death: in mid-twentieth-century Latin America, the Catholic Church was in upheaval over the continental growth of liberation theology, a Marxist-Christian set of beliefs that advocated for radical structural change, including the redistribution of the church’s wealth, to tackle the region’s extreme poverty.² The death of the Colombian priest Camilo Torres in 1966 exemplified the discourse of sacrifice that dominated the thinking of left-wing guerrilla organizations throughout Latin America: the guerrilla army he fought with, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional, referred to him as a martyr (Gott 1973, 353), and many subsequently made connections between the deaths of Torres and Guevara in ethereal terms (Gott 1973, 322; Gheerbrant 1974, 53).

Following Guevara’s death, the narrative of Christ-like sacrifice intensified, whether in metaphorical terms, such as in Fidel Castro’s eulogy for Guevara, where he stated that the latter’s “blood was shed for the sake of all the exploited and all the oppressed” (Kenner and Petras 1972, 251), or to a whole gamut of visual and textual crossovers that presented Che as a secular Christ (Kunzle 2016). As Aldo Marchesi (2018, 89) explains, left-wing guerrillas in the Southern Cone gave his death “strongly emotional” and “sentimental” readings, part of a wider discourse that linked “loyalty to Guevara” with “the quest for a transcendental subjectivity other than religion” (92). This affective spiritualism was fueled by those who saw his dead body, including the local Bolivian peasants who described him as resembling a dead Christ. As Mariano Mestman (2010, 29) argues, this comparison was connected to the “iconographic legacy of an imaginative tradition for which the adoration of saints and of the wounded or flagellated Christ was central” and to “the evocation of a more faith- or gospel-inspired Christ and his messianic role and mission.” In fact, many of the works discussed here include such messianic discourses. Luis González and Gustavo Sánchez Salazar’s (1969, 11–12) account of Che’s Bolivian campaign starts with an anecdote about a local priest saying mass to remember those who died near La Higuera in 1967, and it ends with a reference to local peasants’ belief in “the miracles of ‘Saint Che,’ whose portrait can frequently be found in peasant huts in the midst of Catholic images” (232). In the chapter entitled “Betrayed by Whom in Bolivia?” in his biography of Guevara, Jorge Castañeda (1998, 388) refers to the “Christlike destiny” that Che was seeking. And Laurence Debray (2018, 63) describes how her father, Régis, berated her mother for rummaging through Che’s office in the Ministry of Industry during a stay in Cuba, an example, she

² There were, more widely during this period, also strong links between many intellectuals who joined left-wing militant organizations and middle-class Catholicism (Marchesi 2018, 8).

suggests, of how her mother “buscaba elementos de análisis, mientras que mi padre estaba en la admiración beata.” Even Bustos partakes in similar forms of hero worship. He writes that “all great social transformations . . . have been led by the genius, will and charisma of a great man” (Bustos 2013, 68) and that, when Che was due to meet with the guerrillas in Cuba preparing for a campaign in the Argentine province of Salta, he felt that “with our chief before us, we would be a cohesive unit wielding hopes, passions, fears and joys into the metal needed to sustain the heart and soul of such an endeavour” (75).

Images were crucial to the construction of a narrative that produced this veneration of the sacrificial hero. In his native Argentina, for example, Che’s image was quickly taken up in the art world after his death to mobilize a certain revolutionary praxis. At the time, Argentine artists were debating the relationship between art and politics. As the chasm between institutions and artists grew, political and aesthetic avant-gardes began to fuse artistic practice with political interventions, seeing their work no longer as an expression of revolution but as a detonator of it (Giunta 2001, 338–339). If Che had referred to Cienfuegos as “forging” revolution and to himself, while in Bolivia, as “the primer, the thin layer of fulminate of mercury inside the detonator covering the explosive which merely activates it—helps it to fire better” (Debray 1975, 15), then his image came to embody that catalytic purpose after his demise.

On 28 November 1967, less than two months after Guevara’s death, a collective exhibition titled *Homenaje a Latinoamérica* opened at the site of the Sociedad de Artistas Plásticos (SAAP) in Buenos Aires. Invited to pay homage to the dead Argentine guerrilla, many leading artists, including Carlos Alonso, Jorge de la Vega, León Ferrari, and Roberto Jacoby, contributed works, all one meter by one meter, based on Che’s silhouette. Threatened by this artistic celebration, Argentina’s right-wing military government ordered the police to close the exhibition the following day. A year later, on the anniversary of Che’s death, a second edition took place, this time with artists working with a full-length portrait of Che taken in Havana. Once again, the event was shut down (Longoni and Mestman 2000, 75–76). In July 1968, the group Amigos del Arte interrupted a presentation being delivered in Rosario by Jorge Romero Brest, the director of the Di Tella Institute, declaring, “La vida del ‘Che’ Guevara y la acción de los estudiantes franceses son obras de arte mayores que la mayoría de las paparruchadas colgadas en los miles de museos del mundo” (Fantoni 1998, 104). The same year Francisco Díaz Hermelo used the term *foquismo estético* in the catalog to the *Ver y estimar* exhibition held in the Di Tella, a clear reference to Guevara’s theory of guerrilla warfare (Longoni and Mestman 2000, 79). And when Graciela Carnevale organized the happening *El encierro* in Rosario in October 1968, locking members of the public in a room from which they had to smash a glass window to escape, the police believed that the date was an attempt to mark the anniversary of Che’s death (Longoni and Mestman 2000, 123). The following day a group of artists set out to dye the water of several principal fountains in Buenos Aires red as an allusion to Che’s death (Longoni and Mestman 2000, 124).³ Perhaps most famously, the first part of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino’s militant documentary film *La hora de los hornos*, completed in 1968, concludes with a three-minute close-up take of the dead Che’s face as part of their call to revolutionary action. And although the 1968 graphic novel *La vida del Che* (Oesterheld, Breccia, and Breccia 2008), written by Héctor Germán Oesterheld, included two different artistic depictions of Che, one drawn by Alberto Breccia and the other by his son Enrique, an approach that unsettles the indexical relationship between images and the past (Scorer 2010), the political biography remains a call to arms shaped around a narrative of the heroic, sacrificial revolutionary. Collectively, these works demonstrate that, following his death, the image of Che quickly became the artistic marker

³ This last militant act failed since fountains in Buenos Aires do not recycle their water.

of revolutionary heroism and a way for artists to reconfigure political art into expressions of an artistic politics.

Even so, just a year later, Roberto Jacoby would satirize the way Che's image had already become an empty symbol of revolt. His so-called anti-poster, created around the time of the Cordobazo uprising that took place in the Argentine city of Córdoba in 1969, reproduced Korda's *Guerrillero heroico* with the slogan "Un guerrillero no muere para que se lo cuelge en la pared." Jacoby's poster, which was produced for the short-lived anti-magazine *Sobre*, suggests that Korda's photograph, which dated from 1960, was already iconic enough to be used ironically. Ana Longoni (2013) has suggested that the most surprising quality of Jacoby's anti-poster is the speed with which it anticipated the appropriation and massification of Korda's image by the mass media and its transformation into "la superficie de un mito, la fachada opaca que obtura cualquier exploración más allá de su brillo fatuo." If Korda's portrait provided a ready visual template for revolutionary heroism, Jacoby's poster flagged up how it was also fomenting a stagnant political imagery (and an overly mythologized rendition of Guevara's life and politics). Nevertheless, Jacoby's work could not combat the power of the icon and the anti-poster remained largely invisible, at least until the revisiting of predictorship Argentine art that took place around the turn of the millennium.

The visual codification of Che as the sacrificial hero went hand in hand with the concurrent discourse of betrayal. As Carnovale (2022, 12) writes, "In the binary logic of the guerrilla imaginary the hero had his essential opposite: the traitor, the 'quebrado' [broken one]." Betrayal could take many forms, including a failure to adhere to revolutionary values, a failure to keep up in the jungle, or a failure to withstand torture. And betrayal could go even further. In her analysis of militant survivors of the last Argentine dictatorship (1976–1983), Ana Longoni (2007, 14) highlights that because many believed that to have avoided disappearance a survivor must have provided information, the disappeared are often presented as heroes and those who survived incarceration as traitors. That discourse forms part of the wider vision of heroism and militancy that is linked to ideas of sacrifice and to Guevara (Longoni 2007, 186–189). As Héctor Schmucler declares, "La impiadosa historia del siglo [XX] ha repetido hasta el hartazgo la imagen del traidor como causa de los fracasos colectivos" (qtd. in Longoni 2007, 43).

Several people have been accused of "betraying" Che's campaign in Bolivia. If the Cuban Revolution created something of a fracture between armed revolutionary socialism and the Communist Party, then the latter also came under scrutiny for its role in the Bolivian campaign. Mario Monje, for example, leader of the Bolivian Communist Party, had intimated that the party might support the guerrillas, but he changed his mind after he and Guevara disagreed about how such an alliance might work. Following Che's failure, he went into exile, also labeled a traitor, as Anderson (1997, 705) indicates: "Thirty years after the event, Che's widow Aleida still considers Monje—'ese indio feo' (that ugly Indian)—as the man who betrayed her husband." Others have taken aim at Castro and the perceived lack of support provided by the Cuban government to Guevara. Such criticisms, as Marchesi (2018, 40) notes, were sometimes filtered through attacks on Régis Debray, "a way of criticizing the Cuban Revolution without the cost such criticism involved."

But it is Bustos who is most often presented as the principal traitor. As Tomás Eloy Martínez wrote in 2001, if Che represents the fallen sacrificial hero, then Bustos is the Judas of the tale: "todo héroe mitológico que se sacrifica por sus ideales necesita siempre un traidor." Patrick Dove (2008, 287) makes a similar point: "the real sacrifice here was not the exemplary martyrdom of Guevara but instead the unseemly scapegoating of Bustos." Ultimately, such scapegoating and discourses of betrayal draw our gaze away from Che's own failings, allowing the aura of the guerrilla hero to persist and hindering more nuanced readings of historical events and their political content.

Ciro Bustos: The man who betrayed Che?

In 1961 *Ciro Bustos* traveled to Cuba, like many of his Latin American peers, to support the Revolution, which had come to power in 1959. During his stay he was invited by Che and the former journalist and fellow Argentine *Jorge Masetti*, who was then leading the new Cuban press agency *Prensa Latina*, to participate in what would be a disastrous attempt to create a guerrilla uprising in northwestern Argentina in 1964. During the campaign in Salta, Masetti ordered the execution of two recruits, one of whom was shot by Bustos. Bustos survived the fiasco, but most of his fellow combatants, including Masetti, did not. Two years later, Che invited Bustos to act as his liaison for another attempt at a guerrilla campaign in Argentina, and in early 1967 he met up with Guevara in Bolivia, where the latter was leading a clandestine band of guerrillas. Using a false passport in the name of *Carlos Alberto Frutos*, Bustos arrived alongside *Régis Debray*, a vocal intellectual supporter of the Cuban Revolution who was close to Fidel Castro. After a short stay, Bustos and Debray were given permission to leave the camp, but they were subsequently arrested by the Bolivian authorities on April 20, 1967. Bustos initially kept up the pretense of being Frutos, a civil engineer volunteering with political prisoners, until his interrogators, with the help of the Argentine police, discovered his real identity.

At the heart of the debate about the information provided by Bustos and Debray during interrogation lies the question of who gave the confirmation that Che Guevara, who had been operating under strict secrecy as he tried to gather support in the Bolivian hinterlands, was indeed in the Andean country. Although questions have also been raised about maps Bustos drew of the guerrillas' caves, which contained supplies and weapons, it is particularly the twenty sketched portraits he made of the guerrillas during this period, particularly that of Guevara, that fueled the accusation that Bustos was responsible for Che's downfall.

The references to Bustos in texts that discuss Che's final campaign, which often address the question of who betrayed Che Guevara, highlight both the difficulties in determining the precise nature of who said what and also the wider "messy" nature of Guevara's guerrilla war in Bolivia. Of the major biographies that were published in 1997 on the thirtieth anniversary of Che's death, *Jon Lee Anderson's* account is the most sympathetic to Bustos, perhaps because he was the only one to visit the former militant in Sweden. He writes: "Of those who survived the Bolivian affair, perhaps none suffered more than Che's loyal protégé, painter *Ciro Bustos*" (Anderson 1997, 747). *Paco Ignacio Taibo II* (1997, 514) is more measured but less detailed. He suggests that both Debray and Bustos were tortured (something that Bustos himself denied) and that "Bustos divulged information he thought would not affect the guerrillas: he spoke of the central camp that had been discovered on April 4, of the presence of foreigners, and of the fact that *Inti Peredo* was the chief, as Che had told him to."

Jorge Castañeda, however, is considerably less sympathetic. He describes Bustos as "a mediocre painter and naïve leftist" (Castañeda 1998, 364), who, following his capture, broke down when confronted with pictures of his daughters. He concludes condescendingly: "lacking the integrity and stamina needed to resist interrogation, Bustos was not even beaten" (Castañeda 1998, 368).⁴ *Pierre Kalfon* is equally damning. The two-page prologue to his biography of Guevara is centered on Bustos's drawings, relating how Bolivian officer *Gary Prado* consulted the sketches when identifying Che after his capture. Referring to Bustos as an "occasional guerrilla," Kalfon (1997, 12) writes: "The Argentinian was eager to reveal all, and more. He accurately traced the features of each of the guerrilla

⁴ Castañeda notes that he tried to interview Bustos but that the latter refused to answer questions. Bustos (2013, 459), in his autobiography, states that his refusal was to answer questions over the phone, noting that Anderson "came here so I could look him in the eyes." According to Bustos, Castañeda "said he had no option but to be guided by Debray's version of events which blamed me for everything" (460).

members. Prado checks carefully. The characteristic protuberances of the eyebrow arches leave little doubt.”⁵ Below Bustos’s drawings, which are included in full in Kalfon’s book, there is a disparaging exclamation: “The CIA and the Bolivian Army did not ask for so much!” (n.p.). Even following the publication of Bustos’s autobiography, first in Spanish in 2007 and then in English in 2013, Kalfon’s position did not shift. Following Bustos’s death, the Bolivian journalist Alfonso Gumicio Dagron cites his friend Kalfon as saying: “El pobre tuvo que vivir décadas con el rótulo de traidor. [...] Compadezco al pobre Bustos porque con todos los insultos que mereció su traición no habrá terminado una vida muy apaciblemente sino lleno de vergüenza.” According to the entry, Kalfon adds that “quizás había también un cachito de amor propio como artista, pues pidió un papel de dibujo y lápices especiales para mostrar su maestría como dibujante y representar fielmente, de memoria, los retratos de los guerrilleros que había visto con el *Ché*” (Gumicio Dagron 2017).

Richard Harris (2007, 121), in his later account of Che’s Bolivian campaign, suggests that Bustos, who he describes as “quite an artist,” “may have made a deal with the Bolivian authorities” because he “received better treatment than Debray” (125). More recently, Laurence Debray (2018, 80), whose autobiography spends considerable time critiquing her father’s left-wing idealism and its impact on her childhood, is quick to defend Debray from any suggestion that he was complicit in alerting the authorities to Che’s presence in Bolivia, choosing instead to label Bustos as the traitor and to call him out for his “lack of conviction”: “‘Nuestro dibujante,’ como lo llamaba el jefe de los servicios secretos del ejército, ocultaba su juego a su compañero de detención, que acabó comprendiendo que el traidor era su vecino de celda. ¿Fue una sorpresa para mi padre? Desde el principio de la operación, su acólito no había disimulado su falta de convicción. Seguramente, los demasiados fracasos de la guerrilla argentina habían apago su ardor. Y, sin ardor, la delación se hizo inevitable.”

Laurence Debray’s position echoes the views expressed by Manuel Piñeiro (“Barbarroja”), an important figure in Castro’s government during the time when Che was active in Bolivia. Perhaps as a way of shielding Debray, who was known to be close to Castro and whose book *Revolution in the Revolution?* was promoted by the Cuban government (Marchesi 2018, 39), Piñeiro (2001, 21) also presented Bustos as a renegade: “When Bustos was captured and turned traitor—offering data, maps and drawings identifying Che and the guerrillas and showing where they were—that ‘froze’ Argentina . . . I think that if this hadn’t happened, once Che’s presence in Bolivia was known, cadre and combatants from various revolutionary forces in Latin America would have sought some way to link up with them and to participate.” Bustos, Piñeiro implied, was responsible not only for the outcome of the Bolivian campaign but also for the entire failure of Che’s projected continent-wide uprising.

Elizabeth Burgos, in contrast, Laurence’s mother who married Debray during his captivity, has argued that “nadie traicionó a nadie,” because all the evidence indicates that the authorities already knew Che was in Bolivia (Archondo 2019).⁶ Although she stated in a recent interview that she might reproach Bustos for the drawings he made of the guerrillas’ cave camps and for identifying some of bodies of the dead guerrillas, “nada permite decir que eso permitió la caída de Guevara y el fin de la guerrilla”

⁵ “L’Argentin s’est empressé de tout raconter, et au-delà. Il a tracé avec précision les traits de chacun des membres de la guérilla. Prado vérifie avec attention. Les protubérances caractéristiques des arcades sourcilières laissent peu de doutes.”

⁶ In his account in *Rural Guerrillas in Latin America*, originally published in 1970, Richard Gott (1973, 523), who was working as a journalist in Bolivia at the time, also indicates that already by the end of March 1967, the press and the army were reporting that Cubans were leading a guerrilla insurgency in the south of the country and that there were rumors of Che’s involvement. In his obituary for Bustos, Gott (2017), to whom *Ciro Bustos* dedicated his biography, makes clear his belief that Bustos was unfairly treated.

(Archondo 2019).⁷ The same point was made by Debray (1973, 218) himself soon after his release from captivity: “It was not Che’s physical presence, or his presence in Bolivia at that period, which served as the basis for the interrogations: these facts had been verified long before. It was the context, the whys and wherefores of our conversations, the project and contacts which interested these gentlemen.” And even if Jon Lee Anderson (1997, 717) states that the interrogators he talked to stated that it was Debray, not Bustos, who confirmed that Che was in Bolivia, Bustos himself refuted such a suggestion: “Hay que tener cuidado con eso porque realmente nosotros no teníamos nada que contar. No se trata de que si no fui yo el que habló entonces fue Debray. Ninguno dijo nada” (Pavón 2007).

The discrepancies and differences in opinion in these accounts is partly explained by how reliant some of them are on one primary source, *The Great Rebel: Che Guevara in Bolivia*, written by Luis J. González and Gustavo Sánchez Salazar and published in 1969. The book, which Kalfon (1997, 607) describes as “the best synthesis of the origins, development and end of Che’s guerrillas in Bolivia,” explicitly presents Bustos as the Judas figure, and it includes reproductions of Bustos’s drawings, typed CIA interrogation transcripts that are not referred to by other sources, and an appendix with a detailed physical description of those in Bolivia that Bustos apparently provided.⁸ Bustos (1971) was quick to question the book’s content in an interview published in the Chilean magazine *Punto Final*. And in his autobiography, he claims that some of the documents they cite appear to be versions of originals (Bustos 2013, 348). That idea is supported by the interrogation extracts included in González and Sánchez Salazar’s book. Not only does Bustos’s false name “Frutos” appear as “Fructuoso,” but it is also odd that the interrogator would refer to his wife and daughters one or two days after Bustos’s capture if, as they also acknowledge “the investigators did not know that Carlos Alberto Fructuoso, as he was identified on his forged passport, was really *Ciro Roberto Bustos*” (González and Sánchez Salazar 1969, 142). The “transcript” also includes interventions that read like stage directions from a play script:

CIA: We should like you to think seriously about your family. We’re ready to help you. We’re going to let you think about them until tomorrow. We want to tell you that the security of your wife and daughters is in good hands. Good-by, Fructuoso.

FRUCTUOSO: Good-by. (*His face has a rather desperate look on it and tears betray him.*) (González and Sánchez Salazar 1969, 142)

Bustos also critiques Kalfon by refuting the claim that he buckled when presented with threats to his family, noting in a letter written in 1998 that his cover as Frutos would not be blown for another twenty days (Bustos 2003). And in the account provided by Arnaldo Saucedo Parada (1987, 34–35), one of the high-ranking Bolivian officers involved in the

⁷ Even though almost everyone—including Anderson—appears to agree that Bustos did draw the maps of the caves, Bustos denied being the author in an interview with Jaime Padilla in 1997, stating that neither he nor Debray had ever actually visited the caves, meaning that “suponer que yo podía dibujar esquemas de emplazamiento, es adjudicarme una capacidad mágica que nunca he tenido.” Bustos makes no reference to the maps in his autobiography.

⁸ I have found no other reference or discussion of this list of “physical descriptions of the guerrillas made by *Ciro Roberto Bustos* for the military authorities” (González and Sánchez Salazar 1969, 240–243) in other sources. In any case, that the authors are so keen to present Bustos as the scapegoat and draw attention away from other shortcomings of Che’s operation, makes for an alternative reading of their book, especially given the supposition included in an internal review produced for the British publishing house Cape in 1968, which subsequently decided not to pursue publication of a UK edition, that it was “a presumably Cuban authorized account of Guevara’s Bolivian adventure.”

capture of Che, Fructuoso was revealed to be Bustos on May 8 and only then did he draw the twenty portraits and maps of the caves.

The point of this overview is not to try to determine who “betrayed” Che Guevara. Trying to ascribe Che’s failure in Bolivia to any one individual, let alone one drawing, is as impossible as it is misguided. Rather, the overview highlights how the accusations leveled at Bustos because of the drawings have been deployed as part of a wider process of constructing a particular historiography of the Latin American militant left, not least in terms of a quasi-Christian narrative of sacrifice and betrayal. As the Argentine philosopher Oscar del Barco, who subsequently denounced political violence, wrote to Bustos (2013, 326) in a letter: “Your arguments are valid, rationally valid, but the Left, *that* Left, is not interested in rationality; they would rather you had died and not come out alive.”⁹ Such comments highlight the difficulty the left has when processing the revolutionary past and the armed struggle of the 1960s and 1970s. For that reason, sources that do not fit so readily with the dichotomy of hero and traitor are often ignored, notably the interview with Bustos published in 1971 in *Punto Final*, in which the Argentine tells his side of the story. Those keen to present Bustos as the traitor rarely cite that interview and ignore the expanded version of his defense set out in his later autobiography. Laurence Debray (2018, 85), for example, clearly read Bustos’s account, evident in her reference to his description of morning coffee in the camp (Bustos 2013, 286) and that he carried with him Cortázar’s *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (Bustos 2013, 293); but she, like so many others, ignores Bustos’s explanations for the drawings.

Sketching Che

Although González and Sánchez Salazar (1969, 144) suggest that Bustos volunteered to draw the twenty portraits on April 23, just days after his capture, Bustos himself explains that he drew them some twenty days after his capture, once his cover identity had been blown, to verify the fact that he was an artist. He sustained this position in various sources, including the interview with him published in *Punto Final* in 1971, his comments in Anderson’s biography of Che published in 1997, the interviews with him in the 2001 *Sacrificio* film, and in his own autobiography, originally published in 2007. As he states in the latter, following the collapse of the Frutos identity his interrogator instructed him to “draw something, damn it. Draw a guerrilla!” (Bustos 2013, 343).

In his accounts, Bustos defends his drawings on the grounds that he did nothing to put the guerrillas in danger because he drew only people that the Bolivian military already knew to be involved in the conflict.¹⁰ Moreover, precisely because he felt that drawing the guerrillas would do them no harm, he claims that behind his apparent collaboration lay an attempt to protect his network of contacts in Argentina. When in Bolivia, Che had stressed to Bustos that Argentina was his ultimate target. Although the authorities suspected Bustos of deeper involvement with Che than he let on, they never appear to have established that he was Guevara’s main contact for Argentina, a country which, as

⁹ Del Barco sparked a polemic debate in 2004, following the publication of a letter he wrote to the Argentine magazine *La Intemperie* in response to an interview with former militant Héctor Jouvé, who recounted the execution of two members of the ill-fated 1964 Salta campaign. In his letter, Del Barco argued that no one, including himself, should have contributed to armed militancy, evoking the principle of “no matarás” as the basis of co-existence. Bustos (2013, 168), who had given the coup de grâce to one of those killed, later wrote in his autobiography that Masetti’s order to execute the nineteen-year-old Nardo meant that “the fascist mentality had triumphed and struck another fatal blow to our liberating utopia.”

¹⁰ Gott (2017) supports Bustos on this point in his obituary for the Argentine: “Sketching the faces of the guerrillas was not going to assist in their capture; the military had already captured all their passports and knew exactly who was in Guevara’s band.”

Bustos (1971, 25) noted in 1971, was itself under the rule of an authoritarian right-wing dictatorship at the time of the Bolivian conflict.

Bustos's subterfuge relied on drawing two people among the twenty who did not exist. According to Bustos, the drawings sent the authorities on a wild goose chase that gave his genuine contacts time to prepare themselves for the inevitable. The first fake portrait was Andrés, a supposed Bolivian contact that he and Debray cooked up in a quiet moment soon after being captured: "Sitting on a bench in the corridor, Debray used the apparent normality of our situation to ask me to help invent a contact in La Paz that we could both use. Standing in front of him, as if we were discussing lost cows, I said off the top of my head: 'Thin, tall, high cheekbones, big eyes, black hair, slightly Indian-looking, name of Andrés'" (Bustos 2013, 324). The second was a supposed Argentine contact, christened Isaac Rutman. In the account provided to the Bolivian military cited in Jay Mallin's (1969, 186–187) book, Bustos refers to this phantom on several occasions, explaining that only Rutman knew about his trip to Bolivia and that it was Rutman who organized his false passport. The figure of Rutman simultaneously allowed Bustos to play down his own importance in terms of Che's interest in Argentina, also claiming (falsely) that other Argentines had visited Che's camp. Writing in 1969 González and Sánchez Salazar (1969, 82–83) made clear their suspicions about the veracity of these figures: "The authors have enough information to assert that the intermediary called Andrés does not exist, being only an imaginary person created to put the authorities off the track. We have similar doubts about the existence of Rutman, but we are not certain enough to make a categorical statement that he is a fictitious person." Their cautious statement suggests that Bustos's subterfuge was at least partially successful.¹¹ Many years later, in an article published in 2001, the Argentine journalist Miguel Bonasso verified that the portrait of Rutman was in fact a portrait of a mutual friend, Isaac Shusterman.¹²

In his comments, Bustos claims that the portraits were strategic, as they diverted his interrogators away from sensitive information, and that they had no value as intelligence because they bore little resemblance to his subjects. Despite the apparent contradiction in his position—he also claims that drawing the portraits made no difference as his interrogators already knew who was there—his second point would appear to be ratified by the daughter of Camba, one of the guerrillas in Che's group. In the documentary film about Bustos, she claims angrily that Bustos's drawing looks nothing like her father. Albeit to different ends, Bustos (2013, 343) agrees with her point in his autobiography:

I drew a "guerrilla" who looked more like a tramp. The impact was as instantaneous as the image was useless; the power of the virtual was more real than the bloody actions they had taken part in . . . Managing more than just a coincidental likeness would be a miracle anyway, and that boded well for me. A good draughtsman can repeat from memory a face he has drawn numerous times, but he cannot make a faithful copy of faces that rush in and out of his memory in chaotic situations. I drew what they might find recognizable: beards, a certain look, recognizable features, the order was not important.

Bustos, like his accusers, sees value in his drawings only as evidence, in his case, as evidence of his political subterfuge. But his claims hide another reading of these images, one that rests on seeing them as art and not just evidence. The drawings reveal Bustos's eye for detail, the grace of some of his lines, and the care with which the draftsman created

¹¹ Arnaldo Saucedo Parada's (1987, 53–54) account also includes references to Bustos speaking of both Rutman and Andrés.

¹² Although he was trying to protect his militant contacts, Bustos might, at the same time, have been putting the unwitting Shusterman into danger.

them. There are several traits in Che's portrait, for example, that clearly capture his physical appearance, not least the muscular forehead, something, as Kalfon reminds us, that the CIA had identified as a noteworthy facial trait. But for all their likeness, these are not "identikit" images, as Juan Martín Guevara (2017, 6) described Bustos's portrait of his brother. Marcos's wistful gaze as he smokes his pipe; the hatching and shading of Mono's hat, which makes it seem to wave in the breeze; the hint of a smile on El Chino's face: all these portraits have an aura of intimacy, even affection. Perhaps the most accurate reflection on the portraits was provided by a friend of Bustos, presumably Carlos Alonso, in an anecdote Bustos revealed during a 1997 interview: "Un pintor amigo mío, gloria de la pintura argentina, a quien encontré en Madrid en los años 80, me decía que él veía un sentimiento de homenaje expresado en la confección de los dibujos, Carlos sentía que los había hecho con amor, que no estaba ante algo sucio" (Padilla 1997).¹³

What, after all, is a faithful drawing other than one that contains recognizable features, that captures a certain atmosphere, and that is invested in tracing the subject? A drawing is not a mimetic copy but an image that exaggerates certain qualities and eliminates others in a process that compromises the body of the draughts person. Bustos (2013, 345) wrote:

Drawing Che would be both risible (pretending the drawings were a weapon against the guerrilla is nothing more than that) and a commitment, not only of memory but also of emotion. . . . The drawing was a rough sketch. The important thing was not the outward appearance but the inner strength, which I was unable to capture. It looked more like a hungry poet and bore no resemblance to Ramón, or to what he represented. Yet he was considered the success of the guerrilla drawings.

Bustos here not only questions the verisimilitude of the image in terms of Che's physique but also sets out what he felt it failed to communicate about Che's personality. Bustos critiques his own drawing less for its failure to look like "Ramón," than for its failure to capture "his inner strength" or "what he represented." He regrets, it would seem, how his drawing failed to capture the figure of Che as the symbol of revolutionary heroism.

Despite Bustos's lament that his drawing was a failure, however, its grounded, everyday intimacy, created even midst the pressures of captivity, is precisely what makes it so important as an alternative to the aura of heroism and sacrifice that surrounds Che. The lines on Che's taut face trace the rigors of being on the ground. His hair is oddly cut short down the middle while long on the sides. Neither bald in disguise, nor covered by a star-studded beret, nor unkempt in the image of the sacrificial hero, Che's hair in this image is neither flattering nor heroic. And rather than smoking a cigar, as he often does in more heroic photographs of him taken in Cuba, here he smokes a pipe, the guerrilla's friend, as he used to say, when other forms of tobacco were unavailable. Bustos, in lines impossible to see in most reproductions, even includes the wisps of smoke rising from the pipe's bowl. This portrait should, then, be welcomed as the affectionate trace of the "hungry poet" midstruggle captured by another revolutionary body undertaking a "commitment of emotion."

Bustos's comments highlight the messiness of doubt produced by the interpretive ambiguities of drawing, which provide a different form of portraiture to the apparent indexicality of the photograph. In that sense, they echo Michael Taussig's (2011, 2) reflections on drawing in *I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own*, not least his observation that drawing "is a seeing that doubts itself, and, beyond that, doubts the world of man." Taussig adds: "Could it be that the photograph is implicitly assumed to be a magical way of capturing the spirit of the dead, while the drawing is understood to be but a timid approximation offering no more than a squint-eyed view such

¹³ Carlos Alonso himself made several paintings of Guevara's deathbed scene. These are discussed by, among others, Mestman (2010).

that, unlike the photograph, it cannot so easily be appropriated for sympathetic magic?" (12). Bustos's drawing, in those terms, is less susceptible to the "magic" that circulates around Korda's *Guerrillero heroico*, the photograph wielded as capturing the heroic spirit of the freedom fighter.

Drawing meant many things to Bustos. In captivity he made other drawings in addition to those of the guerrillas. While Debray, according to José Luis Alcazar (1969, 265), taught French following his sentence, "Bustos pinta retratos (ocho dólares cada uno)." And in the fact-based novel *El espesor del pellejo de un gato ya cadáver*, the Cuban exile Celedonio González (1978, 54–55) writes: "Las paredes de la celda están completamente cubiertas de retratos hechos por el argentino con personajes que se quedaron grabados en su imaginación de artista. No se conoce todavía de quiénes son los retratos." The only example of these portraits that I have seen is in Daniel Arturo Oropeza Echeverría's (2017) book *Che: La guerrilla final*, a half-profile portrait of Subteniente Totti Aguilera, supposedly produced during Bustos's early days in captivity. It is a formal portrait, drawn, as far as one can say such things, with a whole lot less love and intimacy than the other drawings are. For Bustos, then, drawing was something to teach Cubans as part of the revolutionary struggle; it was a way to capture his experience of being in Bolivia; it was a tool to convey information (whether to aid or hinder his captors); it was a means to earn money in prison; and it was a way to pass the time and decorate his cell, if González's novel is anything to go by. But it was also an expression of revolutionary affect.

Bustos's drawings push against the notion of a past fixed in or around one image. Multiple drawings on the same subject only exaggerate the need to address variations around a single theme. Taussig (2011, 13) writes of his notebook drawings that they "butt against realism, with its desire for completeness. [They] are suggestive of a world beyond, a world that does not have to be explicitly recorded and is in fact all the more 'complete' because it cannot be completed." It is in that sense that Bustos's sketches function beyond an indexical relationship to documentary evidence, instead encouraging us to move beyond dichotomies of heroes and traitors and to seek out alternative understandings of what constitutes revolutionary art.

When referring to his stay with Bustos while researching his biography of Che, Jon Lee Anderson (1997, 747) noted that the artist's more recent painted portraits lacked faces. In an obituary for Bustos, Anderson (2017b) commented on how the Argentine fell silent when he asked about this lack of facial features and that he saw the paintings, "some of which had empty idea bubbles, like vapor, formed over them," as an attempt "to communicate something about his relation to the past." In the introduction to Bustos's autobiography, Anderson (2017a, xvi) clarified the point, suggesting that the faceless images are "a testament to Bustos's cauterized existence, symbolic of an extreme and long-lasting pain." Such faceless portraits are a rather symbolic gesture for a man so vilified for drawing twenty faces. Blank faces and solitude, what had once, Debray suggested, been the downfall of the guerrillas in Bolivia, were what was left Bustos, ostracized by so much of the revolutionary left. Maybe, then, Bustos's drawings, which themselves bear the traces of his body, might also be seen as revolutionary art, not in the manner of Argentine artists working in the late 1960s following Che's death, but in the way that his body as well as those of the people he was drawing was invested in the struggle and the way that those bodies generated networks of affect. They are a reminder that the wider discourse and ideal of heroism and sacrifice papered over a gamut of revolutionary failings, deceptions, and altogether less glorious but equally meaningful deaths.

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