

The motorcycle diaries movie review example

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Scene 14: June: A Dance Party at the Colony (Start: 1h 33m 37s - End: 1h 38m 49s)

In the 2004 film *The Motorcycle Diaries*, a young Ernesto "Che" Guevara (Gael Garcia Bernal) goes on a cross-continent trip on a beaten-down motorcycle with his friend Alberto Granado (Rodrigo de la Serna) to see the sights and be one with the land before settling down. Over the course of the film, Ernesto and Granado learn a great deal about themselves and the rest of South America, including some of the economic and social inequalities that would eventually spur Ernesto into action as one of the leaders of the Cuban Revolution. The film is a poignant, reflective and joyful piece, with powerful acting from Bernal and wonderful cinematography from Eric Gautier - these elements and more all combine to create the narrative climax of the film, occurring during Ernesto's birthday party at the leper colony in San Pablo that they end up in.

The scene takes place in the rural setting of the leper colony, in the modest yet spacious main lobby of the clinic from where Ernesto and Granado have been working to help the lepers. At the beginning of the scene, raucous mambo music is playing diegetically, and the camera pans over everyone joyously dancing along; this takes place on the north end of the river in the colony, where everyone who is well off and takes care of the lepers get to live. Everyone is dressed in white and pastels, to indicate their health and overall happiness, and the whole room has a warm orange glow from the lights above them. The lighting is low contrast, with few shadows, to indicate the brightness of the event that they are celebrating. This bright lighting reflects off the white clothes of everyone to create a cheery and festive

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atmosphere, despite the fact that the scene takes place in night, the stars occasionally peeking through the windows of the room. The cinematography has a very shallow depth of field, keeping most everything in relative focus compared to each other; this helps to create an inclusive atmosphere where everyone can be seen, and everyone is a part of the celebration.

The scene, as with the film, takes the point of view of Ernesto, demonstrating his lack of comfort with the excitement and revelry of the crowd, foreshadowing his eventual comfort as a leader and inspirer of men rather than one of them. Ernesto, all throughout this party, is merely sitting and chatting, while Granado is reveling along with everyone else. Ernesto's seated position indicates that he is dissatisfied with the experiences he had seen so far, and is almost disturbed by the revelry that is happening while people are segregated and suffering on the other side of the camp. The camera is at a high angle on him, to make him seem smaller. Granado encourages Ernesto to dance with a girl who is interested in dancing; however, Ernesto clumsily attempts to get her to tango at Granado's suggestion, which is the dance he learned from Chichina earlier. Eventually, he stops and everyone laughs at him, leaving him visibly awkward and uncomfortable. This further shows the rift he feels between himself and these people, as he feels embarrassed that he was tricked by Granado. However, he seems to shrug this off; at the same time, the audience can pick up that his mood does not match the spirit of the party.

Immediately after, Salles smash cuts to the singing of the Birthday Song by everyone else, panning around the nurses and revelers, all dressed in white

and crowded around Ernesto. This particular cut seems to juxtapose Ernesto's forced revelry and embarrassment with the gratitude he feels when he is more or less officially honored by these people. He still behaves meekly, a stark contrast to the liveliness of the people around him; he remembers the plight of the lepers, and cannot shake it. However, the people around him prove grateful for his efforts, and so they give him a raft named "The Mambo Tango." Ernesto's gratitude is clear, after noting that the people do care about his work with the less fortunate, and so he makes his speech.

The speech that follows, where Ernesto turns his birthday toast into one of his first political speeches, is heartfelt, powerful and solemn. Noting that "the only affectionate resource we have is the word," he decides to convey the change in attitude he has experienced as a result of his travels. Here, he shows that he is extremely touched that they would give as much for his birthday as they would each other, giving him "this magnificent display of affection by celebrating [his] birthday as [they] would celebrate one of [themselves]." The cinematography and direction makes the scene itself seem like the political speech it turns into; the camerawork has a slight handheld effect, with some unstable movement as it focuses on the characters. Ernesto is in the middle of a circle of people, all clustered around and focusing their full attention on him, eager to listen to what he has to say. They laugh when he jokes, they stare in awe when he makes a point; the entire speech proves that he has the kind of charisma and likability that would eventually lead him to become such a revolutionary figure in South American politics. Ernesto is even self-effacing when he discusses this,

providing a very ironic foreshadowing for his future leadership - he states that "our meager personalities prevent us from being spokesmen of your cause," when he would prove to do just that, and his personality would be far from meager.

The ultimate thesis of his speech is delivered with solemn conviction by Bernal, to the deep appreciation of his audience. He states that his travels have left him with the impression that all of Latin America is united as one race, and should not be divided with these arbitrary markers; this kind of solidarity leads him to toast to Peru and all of Latin America. The camera frequently cuts away from closeups of his earnest face to those of the stunned crowd, and a deeply affected Granado in particular. The most poignant moment of the scene comes right after the speech, where the crowd is in stunned silence after he toasts, not a sound made. Since the preceding part of the scene showed just how boisterous and loud they were, the fact that Che's ideas and words moved them to this silence shows just how effective they would be. Their silence is followed by a toast and boisterous applause.

Immediately after this, the camera pulls back to a wide shot of everyone applauding to Ernesto, then an insert shot of someone starting the record player once again, followed by closeups of more dancing. This demonstrates that, while the people were deeply affected by his words, they would not let that serious moment damper the party. With that moment, the scene ends.

The primary tools at work in this scene are Salles' expert camerawork and blocking and Bernal's performance. The juxtaposition of the awkwardness of

Ernesto during the boisterous dance scenes and his comfort expressing his political opinions once he had everyone's attention showed just what mindset Ernesto was at that point. Given his experiences, he was a changed man, no longer seeking a carefree and fun trip through South America, but recognizing he had a greater responsibility to bring the peoples of Latin America together in equality and freedom. This speech, on his birthday of all days, hammers home this desire to grow up and change things for the better, and provides the emotional climax of the film for good reason.

Works Cited

Guevara, Ernesto " Che." The Motorcycle Diaries. 1993. Print.

Salles, Walter. Dir. The Motorcycle Diaries. Perf. Gael Garcia Bernal, Rodrigo de la Sena. Focus Features, 2004.