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Beyond Marcuse: Guevara's Influence on the Revolutionary Erotic in Julio Cortázar's *Libro de Manuel*

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Julio Cortázar's novel *Libro de Manuel* (1973) is a text that has not received the same critical attention from literary scholars as have his other writings. Often referred to simply as Cortázar's 'political' novel and associated with his support for the Cuban revolution, *Libro de Manuel* is in fact a reflection of both Cortázar's commitment to the Cuban revolution, as well as his frustrations with the revolution and his own personal vision of what the revolution should have become.¹ Within the novel, Cortázar employs the erotic as a means of addressing these frustrations with the revolution, such as those regarding authoritarianism and repression, and as a representation of the kind of affect that he believed was necessary to realize the revolution's larger goals of equality and social justice.² In the

¹ Both Steven Boldy and Carolina Orloff address this aspect of the text's political complexity in their respective studies of Cortázar's work.

² "Más que nunca creo que la lucha en pro del socialismo latinoamericano debe enfrentar el horror cotidiano con la única actitud que un día le dará la victoria: cuidando preciosamente, celosamente la capacidad de vivir tal como la queremos para ese futuro, con todo lo que supone de amor, de juego y de alegría... Lo que cuenta, lo que he tratado de contar es el signo afirmativo frente a la escalada del desprecio y del espanto, y esa afirmación tiene que ser lo más solar, lo más vital del hombre: *su sed erótica y lúdica*, su liberación de los tabúes, su reclamo de una dignidad compartida en una tierra ya libre de este horizonte diario de colmillos y de dólares" (Cortázar 8; my emphasis).

studies that have been written on the novel thus far, most scholars have attributed the presence of the erotic in *Libro de Manuel*, as well as its theoretical elaboration, to the writings of Herbert Marcuse, the author of *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and the philosopher who is largely considered to be the philosophical doyen of the European New Left.³ Given the centrality of the erotic to Marcuse's philosophy, as well as the pattern of intellectual and cultural exchange known to exist between the European New Left and the Latin American armed struggle, this scholarly recognition of Marcuse's influence on the erotic in Cortázar's novel is quite apt. However, by looking only to Marcuse to delineate the theoretical basis of the erotic within this text, scholars have also tended to overlook the full significance of this pattern of intellectual exchange, in which Marcuse's writings formed only one part.⁴ In addition to Marcuse, one of the most influential thinkers to shape the political culture of that time was the Cuban revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara, whose *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (1965) was read widely in both Latin America and in Europe, and whose theories had a pronounced impact on the political ethos of Latin American socialism. While not making use of the terms 'eros' or 'the erotic,' Guevara's *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* delves into the relationship between politics and affect in a way that mirrors the relationship between the political and the erotic in Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* and that closely resonates with Cortázar's use of the erotic in *Libro de Manuel*. This article shows that in order to fully understand the significance of the erotic in Cortázar's novel one has to consider both the ideas presented in Guevara's essay as well as those appearing in Marcuse's text, and the way that these related yet variant concepts came together in the political cultures of the 1960s and 70s. Moreover, this article demonstrates that such an understanding of the theoretical complexity of the erotic in Cortázar's text opens the door to a fuller understanding of the role of the

³ Rather than citing Marcuse, Juan Carlos Ubilluz turns to George Bataille's "sacred eroticism" to explicate the theoretical basis of the erotic in Cortázar's novel (Ubilluz 3). Both Carolina Orloff and Graciela de Sola's acknowledge the influence of Guevara's 'new man' in *Libro de Manuel*, but not in relation to Cortázar's elaboration of the erotic.

⁴ A notable exception to this trend appears in Estela Cédola's *Cortázar: El escritor y sus contextos*, in which Cédola directly addresses the role of cultural exchange among the diverse political cultures of the 1960s.

erotic in the Latin American political culture of the 60s, 70s, and 80s and its presence in the socially committed literature of that period.

Cortázar's novel, published the same year as the coup d' état that overthrew Salvador Allende's social democratic government in Chile, narrates the daily lives of an eclectic group of Latin American political activists living in France as they plan the kidnapping of a Latin American ambassador in order to compel the release of fellow political activists imprisoned around the world. A work of pastiche and ironic reflexivity, the novel's composition is depicted within the text itself: the "manual for Manuel" is a sourcebook that the members of *la Joda* compile for the son of two of its activist members.⁵ Intended as both a historical reference-text as well as a political and philosophical guide, the manual contains news articles in Spanish, French, and Portuguese documenting the political protests of the period and the corresponding acts of suppression by military forces, as well as transcribed interviews of victims and perpetrators of torture, and charts enumerating statistics regarding the U.S. military's involvement in Latin America. The manual also contains an account of the members of the *Joda's* activities—their everyday conversations and musings as well as their more overtly political endeavors—documented by *el que te dije*, the unidentified narrator of the text and one of several possible stand-ins for Cortázar himself.⁶ It is these activities that make up the bulk of the novel and in which one finds the characters' personal reflections, which function as political and philosophical metadiscourses within the body of the text. Whereas, in *Rayuela*, the metadiscourse that

⁵ "La Joda" is the name that Cortázar assigns to his particular group of political activists. Literally it translates as both "the gag" or "the prank," as well as "partying" or "screwing around;" (in his translation Rabassa renders it as "the Screwery"). Thus, while, on the one hand, "la Joda" can be read in the sense of something innocuous—as something that is no more than a joke—it also carries with it the sense of something that continually provokes you, as well as of the ludic sensibility that Cortázar framed as part of the erotic.

⁶ The name *el que te dije* translates as "the one I told you about" and functions within the text as an ever-present reminder of the level of subversive activity that occurred within and around the armed struggle. It suggests the political need to conceal this particular character's identity, either from repressive government officials, or from other political activists who might view this character's note-taking activities as counterrevolutionary. It may also be a playful way of suggesting that this character is a stand-in for the author. As other critics have suggested, both Andrés and Lonstein appear as other possible author surrogates.

Cortázar incorporates is one primarily concerned with writing and literature, in *Libro de Manuel* Cortázar uses the dialogues between his characters as a space to grapple with political philosophy—of how to undertake the revolution, which aspects of society the revolution should address, and how to construct a new society once the revolution has been achieved. In addition, these dialogues serve as a space to grapple with the issues of authoritarianism and repression within the revolution itself. Cortázar wrote his novel following the notorious Padilla case, and following the publication of his controversial “Policrítica a la hora de los chacales.” Like this prose poem, *Libro de Manuel* appears as an attempt to expand the revolution beyond its own, internally established limitations—to transcend the false dichotomy between class issues and those of gender and sexual identity, and to open its intellectual sphere to a wider range of expression and thought.⁷ As such, for Cortázar, Guevara’s discourse of the ‘new man’ served as not only a defining revolutionary emblem, but also as a point of departure; if the revolution necessitated a ‘new’ man, who and what might (s)he be? In *Libro de Manuel*, the erotic forms a significant part of the

⁷ In 1971, Heriberto Padilla, a Cuban poet and essayist formerly perceived as a staunch supporter of the revolution, was imprisoned for expressing views that were deemed counterrevolutionary. Specifically, Padilla had published an essay in which he praised a novel that the regime considered counterrevolutionary (Cabrera Infante’s *Tres tristes tigres*), and criticized another novel (Lisandro Otero’s *Pasión de Urbino*) that had been praised by the regime. In addition, Padilla had published a volume of poetry, *Fuego de juego*, in which he was openly critical of the revolution and in which he celebrated the importance of the individual voice—a viewpoint that was perceived as antithetical to the political commitment required of a revolutionary writer. When over eighty Latin American and European intellectual allies of the revolution, including Cortázar, wrote to Fidel Castro demanding Padilla’s release, Castro gave a speech in which he accused those intellectuals of being “seudoizquierdistas” and “liberales burgueses” and asked them to disassociate themselves from the revolutionary cause, pleading, “No nos defiendan, compadres, por favor, no nos defiendan.” ‘No nos conviene que nos defiendan’” (Castro in “Documentos. El caso Padilla” 119-20). Cortázar, who was greatly dismayed by both Padilla’s imprisonment and Castro’s pronouncement, sent a response in the form of a prose poem to the director of Casa de las Américas, which was subsequently published as “Policrítica a la hora de los chacales.” In his poem, Cortázar denies Castro’s request, writing that “Precisamente ahora cuando / Se me pone en la puerta de lo que amo, se me prohíbe / Defenderlo, / Es ahora que ejerzo mi derecho a elegir, a estar una vez más y / Más que nunca / Con tu Revolución, mi Cuba, a mi manera” (Cortázar in “Documentos. El caso Padilla” 128). Thus, in “Policrítica a la hora de los chacales,” Cortázar reaffirms his commitment to the revolution as well as his intellectual freedom—his intention to write for the revolution from his own individual perspective, despite Castro’s perception that his writing was counterrevolutionary.

answer to that question. It is an answer that was predicated on the role of the affect in relation to politics in both *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* and *Eros and Civilization*, as well as its wider role in both the European New Left and the Latin American armed struggle.

The intersection between the erotic and the political appears as a vital element of the European and Latin American popular cultures of the 1960s and 70s, which were themselves shaped by the confluence of liberation movements taking place at this time in a number of different places around the world. In addition to the Latin American armed struggle and the European New Left, these movements included the Civil Rights and feminist movements in the United States, anti-colonial struggles in Africa, and the Cultural Revolution in China. This confluence of liberation movements led to a period of great intellectual and ideological exchange between these diverse political cultures, among which the Latin American armed struggle and the student movements of the New Left had a particularly formative mutual impact. As Estela Cédola explains in *Cortázar: El escritor y sus contextos*,

la New Left (Nueva Izquierda)...tuvo enorme influjo no sólo en la izquierda tradicional sino también en las costumbres y en la mentalidad generales, tanto en Europa como en el continente americano conformando esta cultura política de masas... [En América Latina] se leían Marcuse y Debray o Mao Tse Tung cuyas obras se difundieron con la misma velocidad que en Italia o Francia, al mismo tiempo que la producción local era muy apreciada en Europa ya que el futuro revolucionario estaba puesto en el tercer mundo. (19, 15)⁸

This process of intellectual and cultural exchange led to the formation of intellectually rich and ideologically variegated leftist political cultures in Latin America and in Europe. As an Argentinian intellectual living in France in 1968, Cortázar was likely very familiar with the political culture of the New Left, which had absorbed the writings of both Guevara and

⁸ While, as Cédola asserts, “puede parecer una simplificación el homologar los conflictos de ambos continentes [Europa y América del Sur]”—and, of course, it would grossly inaccurate to argue that these conflicts were in any way identical—at the same time, “la guerrilla latinoamericana—en Argentina y Uruguay por lo menos—no se entiende sin el sustrato ideológico que estamos analizando” (15).

Marcuse.⁹ While in many ways markedly different—most notably in the relative emphasis that each one places on cultural revolution versus class struggle—the writings of Marcuse and Guevara also contain certain distinctive parallels, including a pronounced emphasis on the role of subjectivity and affect within the political process.¹⁰ In order to more fully understand the parallels between these two texts, it is useful to consider the way in which the connection between affect and politics figures in each of them respectively.

In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse delivers his response to the problem of social repression in which he blends Marxist and Freudian thought to arrive at his theory of a non-repressive, erotic society. In his philosophical framework, Marcuse argues that the repressive forces that Freud claims are necessary to the very structure of civilization, and which Freud defines as the ‘reality principle,’ are in fact *surplus* repressive forces needed to sustain a capitalist economy. According to Marcuse, by relaxing the repression of his sexual instincts, man can regain access to his intrinsic libidinous energy and channel that energy into his work and all of his relationships, thereby creating a new reality principle and the basis of a new, non-repressive society. In Marcuse’s own words:

Non-repressive order is possible only if the sex instincts can, by virtue of their own dynamic and under changed existential and societal conditions, generate lasting erotic relations among mature individuals. We have to ask whether the sex instincts, after the elimination of all surplus-repression, can develop a ‘libidinal rationality’ which is not only compatible with but even promotes progress toward higher forms of civilized freedom. (199)

⁹ See Ubilluz, Boldy, and Cédola for details.

¹⁰ To a certain extent, this emphasis on subjectivity and affect is one that already figures in the early philosophical writings of Karl Marx, from which both Guevara and Marcuse’s writings evolved. As Maurice Cranston indicates in his foreword to *The New Left*, “the Marx these writers [of the New Left] follow is not so much the economist, the later Marx, the author of *Das Kapital*, but rather Marx the sociologist, the author of the early philosophical manuscripts. Their Marx is, like themselves, a ‘Hegelian’ of sorts, a metaphysician, neither a positivist nor a scientific determinist. Their Marx is the philosopher of alienation” (7). For this distinctly humanist Marx, to be communist is not to manipulate or distort one’s subjectivity for the sake of mind-numbing conformity, but to finally discover one’s true self through the realization of the self as a social entity.

Marcuse thus identifies *eros* as the catalyst with the potential to transform society and to “generate” new, more civilized and equitable relationships among men. In such a society, the transformation of affective relations would thus lead to the transformation of social, economic, and political relations, as “the work relations which form the base of civilization...would be ‘propped’ by non-desexualized instinctual energy,” and “the altered societal conditions would...create an instinctual basis for the transformation of work into play” (214-5). In Marcuse’s philosophy, *eros* thus performs the role that is more often accorded to *agape*, and sexual love and love for humanity appear as largely equivalent, with the greater freedoms in the realm of sexual love leading to the formation of a more generous and loving society and culture.¹¹

The connection between Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* and Guevara’s ‘new man’ in Cortázar’s work is not one that has gone entirely unnoticed by previous scholars. For example, Jaume Peris Blanes highlights Cortázar’s pairing of Guevara’s concept of the ‘new man’ and Marcuse’s theory of erotic subjectivity (72). However, perhaps due to Peris Blanes’s focus on Cortázar’s position on experimental writing as exemplified in *El perseguidor*, in his analysis Peris Blanes fails to acknowledge the full extent of the parallels between Marcuse’s and Guevara’s theories, or the way in which these theories come together in works like *Libro de Manuel*. Instead, Peris Blanes frames the relationship between the theories of Marcuse and Guevara in Cortázar’s work as such:

Cortázar relleno el significativo guevariano con el significado que Berbatov, en la cita anterior, daba a la búsqueda de la nueva

¹¹ Marcuse defends his conflation of *eros* and *agape* by turning to the Greeks, writing that “the notion that Eros and Agape may after all be one and the same—not that Eros is Agape but that Agape is Eros—many sound strange after almost two thousand years of theology. Nor does it seem justifiable to refer to Plato as a defender of this identification—Plato, who himself introduced the repressive definition of Eros into the household of Western culture. Still, the *Symposium* contains the clearest celebration of the sexual origin and substance of the spiritual relations... There is an unbroken ascent in erotic fulfillment from the corporeal love of one to that of the others, to the love of beautiful work and play...and ultimately to the love of beautiful knowledge... Spiritual ‘procreation’ is just as much the work of Eros as is corporeal procreation, and *the right and true order of the Polis is just as much an erotic one as is the right and true order of love*. The culture-building power of Eros is non-repressive sublimation: sexuality is neither deflected from nor blocked in its objective; rather, in attaining its objective, it transcends it to others, searching for fuller gratification” (211; my emphasis).

subjetividad por parte de la Nueva Izquierda. Dicho más esquemáticamente, Cortázar marcusizó el concepto de Guevara o se valió del significante de Guevara para legitimar en el ambiente revolucionario latinoamericano una búsqueda que venía de lejos y que era mucho más cercana a la de la Nueva Izquierda que a la del propio Guevara. (89)

With regard to Cortázar's position on experimental, neo-vanguardist writing, Peris Blanes's assessment above is entirely accurate; Cortázar takes a much more liberal, and perhaps *marcusian*, approach to socially-engaged writing and literature, arguing that revolutionary writing is writing that is willing to defy pre-set codes. However, when one considers the political stance that Cortázar asserts in *Libro de Manuel* and the way in which he conceives of the role of affect in relation to politics, Peris Blanes's argument oversimplifies the complex interplay between the theories of these two thinkers in Cortázar's novel. As my close textual analysis shows, the ideas that Guevara presents in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* provide the conceptual scoring that enables Cortázar to weld Marcuse's erotics and Guevara's 'new man' together in his novel, and serve as a prolegomenon to the presence of the erotic in the political culture of the 1970s and 80s in Latin America.

El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba is the essay in which Guevara delineates his foundational concept of the 'new man' of the Cuban revolution. The essay constitutes an attempt to address the role of the individual within the revolution—to reconcile the movement's economic and social goals with the experience of individual man. In *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, Guevara asserts that the individual not only has a role to play within the revolution, but also that the individual's subjectivity and affect are indispensable attributes of the revolutionary project. This argument, while never directly mentioning the erotic or libidinous energy, is nonetheless very similar to Marcuse's, and the process of transformation that Guevara describes as necessary to arrive at the 'new man' of the revolution is in many ways analogous to the process required to produce a non-repressive society in Marcuse's philosophical framework.¹² In this

¹² In addition to the relative emphasis that each of these thinkers places on cultural revolution versus class struggle, one of the principle differences between Marcuse and Guevara is the order in which they envision these changes to occur.

sense, both Guevara and Marcuse make it clear that the ultimate goal of revolution is not only economic equality, but also a radical moral and *spiritual* transformation that would bring man closer to his 'true' nature, as well as to other men. More importantly, Guevara adds to this iteration of the erotic two crucial elements that are not as clearly developed in the work of Marcuse, namely, the understanding of the experience of the social as personally transformative, and an awareness of the undeniable connection between politics and affect. Although, as Peris Blanes asserts, *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* is a text that "lanzaba una crítica durísima a los intelectuales y artistas de izquierdas," it is also a text that acknowledges the issues of revolutionary dogmatism and what Guevara describes as "el de congelar las relaciones con las masas," and that seeks ways of mitigating these tendencies within the Latin American armed struggle (87-88; Guevara 29; 50).

As in *Eros and Civilization*, in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* the influence of Marx's early writings is readily apparent. Like both Marx and Marcuse, in his essay Guevara defines the prevailing problem of contemporary society as man's alienation, asserting that "la última y más importante ambición revolucionaria...es ver al hombre liberado de su enajenación" (29). Also like Marcuse, Guevara foresees man's freedom from alienation resulting in an increased capacity for self-expression and in a more organic—perhaps even erotic—relationship to his labor, writing that the revolution will lead to "la reapropiación de su naturaleza a través del trabajo liberado y la expresión de su propia condición humana a través de la cultura y el arte" (30). However, whereas Marcuse locates the catalyst for the transformation of man's subjectivity within the imagination and the libido, Guevara locates it in man's realization of his true nature as a profoundly social being. Building on Marx's understanding of man as a "species-being," whose true nature is to be with "the whole of mankind"

Whereas as Guevara foresees the revolution facilitating these moral and cultural changes, Marcuse argues that the moral and cultural changes he prescribes must take place prior to the armed struggle. As K. L. Julka asserts in "Herbert Marcuse's Messianic Humanism: Politics of the New Left," Marcuse "subscribes to the views of cultural revolutionaries that 'revolution in perception', a radical change in consciousness, is the 'first step in changing social existence'" and that if "taken up after the revolution, attempts at transforming society would be infructuous" (19).

(Marx as quoted in Jha 544), Guevara argues that man's becoming aware of his social nature will amount to "su realización plena como criatura humana, rotas todas las cadenas de la enajenación" (30). Thus, for Guevara, as for Marx, to become socialist is not to distort or suppress one's subjectivity, but to finally discover one's true self. Man's new awareness of himself as a social being will be realized primarily through his work, which rather than as a means of survival, he will perform as "una cuota por el cumplimiento del deber social" (31). However, Guevara envisions this performance of labor as more than a mindless fulfillment of each man's obligation to society; he views it as a means of attaining access to one's true self through the realization of the self as a social being. For Guevara, "el hombre, en el socialismo, a pesar de su aparente estandarización, es más completo; a pesar de la falta del mecanismo perfecto para ello, su posibilidad de expresarse y hacerse sentir en el aparato social es infinitamente mayor" (29). According to Guevara in the socialist system of labor, man

empieza a verse retratado en su obra y a comprender su magnitud humana a través del objeto creado, del trabajo realizado. Esto ya no entraña dejar una parte de su ser en forma de fuerza de trabajo vendida, que no le pertenece más, sino que significa una emanación de sí mismo, un aporte a la vida común en que se refleja. (31)

The relationship between man and his socially committed labor that Guevara describes here is highly reminiscent of Marcuse's vision of libidinally-stimulated labor and personally-fulfilling, erotic activity. For Guevara, unlike the socially-alienated labor performed in a capitalist society that results in man's depletion, the socially-committed labor that the revolutionary performs will allow him to give of himself and, in giving of himself, to understand his true nature. Thus, in seeing himself reflected in his labor, alienated man will undergo a transformation of his subjectivity, thereby becoming the 'new man' of the revolution in a process that echoes, if not mirrors, the formation of a non-repressive, erotic society in Marcuse. Guevara's vision of the social as a personally transformative experience, I argue, is a central component of Cortázar's elaboration of the erotic in *Libro de Manuel*.

Another aspect of Guevara's essay that ultimately feeds into Cortázar's elaboration of the erotic in his novel is Guevara's assertion that love is an essential component of the revolutionary endeavor: "Déjeme decirle, a riesgo de parecer ridículo, que el revolucionario verdadero está guiado por grandes sentimientos de amor. Es imposible pensar en un revolucionario auténtico sin esta cualidad" (48). In his essay Guevara encourages his fellow revolutionaries to idealize their love for the people and "hacerlo único, indivisible" (48). In pointing to love as an essential component of the revolutionary project, "a riesgo de parecer ridículo," Guevara identifies not only subjectivity, but also affect as an important aspect of this political process (48). For Guevara, it is social love, or *agape*, that is the motivating force behind revolutionary action. In addition, just as Marcuse promotes *eros* as a means of alleviating the repressive forces in society, in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* Guevara promotes "el amor a los pueblos" as way to keep revolutionaries from becoming overly dogmatic or authoritarian in their approach—writing that

hay que tener una gran dosis de humanidad, una gran dosis de sentido de la justicia y de la verdad para no caer en extremos dogmáticos, en escolasticismos fríos, en aislamiento de las masas. Todos los días hay que luchar porque [sic] ese amor a la humanidad viviente se transforme en hechos concretos, en actos que sirvan de ejemplo, de movilización. (49)

By delineating this connection between politics and affect Guevara's essay transcends a limited, dualistic understanding of politics as motivated primarily by reason and intellect, and instead celebrates the way in which our political beliefs and actions are grounded in our individual, affective experience. Moreover, by establishing a connection between politics and love, Guevara lays the groundwork for the intersection of the erotic and the political in both Cortázar's novel and in the cultural superstructure of the armed struggle. Clearly, the love that Guevara refers to in his essay is not the erotic sexuality that one finds in *Eros and Civilization*, but rather *agape*—"[el] amor a los pueblos" and "a las causas más sagradas" (13). Nevertheless, by identifying love as a necessary component of the formation of the Cuban new man, Guevara pairs love and political action in a way that will be taken up by Cortázar and subsequent artists and

intellectuals in their cultural and discursive articulations. Whereas, in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, ‘el amor’ is clearly an asexual love, in later discursive articulations, such as Cortázar’s *Libro de Manuel*, this difference between erotic love and love for the people is not so clearly defined—or, rather, erotic love and love for the people are conflated within a larger erotics of liberation and aliveness that bears the impact of both Guevara and Marcuse’s thought.

One of the central ways in which the erotic figures in *Libro de Manuel* is as sexual liberation, which, as I have suggested, is more closely related to the theories of Marcuse and the political culture of the New Left than those of Guevara and *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*. One prime example of *la Joda*’s orientation toward sex and sexuality appears in Lonstein’s defense of masturbation to *el que te dije*. In this dialogue, Lonstein claims that the taboo against masturbation, or onanism, is one of the many forms of oppression that the revolution must overcome if it is truly interested in enacting social change. In his panegyric on the subject, Lonstein asserts that

la Joda, para darte un ejemplo a mano, se propone como una empresa de liquidación de fantasmas, de falsas barreras, con toda ese vocabulario marxista que a mí me falta pero que vos ahora mismo agregarás mentalmente a la enumeración de errores y lacras sociales y personales que hay que liquidar, y si es así yo entiendo que debo aportar una contribución paralela, porque defender la legitimidad del onanismo no solamente vale por eso, que no es gran cosa en sí, sino porque ayuda a las otras muchas fracturas que hay que practicar sensaltro en el esquema del ántropos. (224)¹³

Along the same lines as Marcuse’s valorization of the libido in *Eros and Civilization*, Lonstein’s discourse celebrates the idea of sexual liberation and expresses the need to eradicate sexual taboos, as well as the need to do away with sexual repression in general. However, from this dialogue it is also clear that Lonstein views masturbation as not only a means of pleasuring himself, but also as an act of integrity and self-knowledge

¹³ In spite of his criticisms of *la Joda*, Lonstein is also very much involved in the group; as *el que te dije* recognizes “Lonstein estaba más al tanto de *la Joda* de lo que hubiera podido imaginarse dada su tendencia iconoclasta y a veces francamente reaccionaria” (105). It is he who cares for Manuel when *la Joda* kidnaps the ambassador.

reflective of a deeper level of honesty and self-awareness necessary for the revolution to realize its goals—for Lonstein, to practice onanism is “[mirar]...de verdad la cara que [te] propone el espejo de cada mañana” (226). To reclaim one’s right to practice onanism is thus to assert one’s right to know oneself intimately and to reclaim the dignity of this particular sexual act.¹⁴ Moreover, here, as in Marcuse’s theorization of an erotic non-repressive society, the liberation of the libido appears as the psychological shift that will serve as a gateway to other social changes— “[que] ayuda a las otras muchas fracturas que hay que practicar sensaltro en el esquema del ántropos” (224). As Boldy argues, for Lonstein “sexual liberation...is thus not just a luxury of the revolution, but a necessary condition to its lasting success” (165-6).

Sexual liberation thus appears within Cortázar’s novel as a prerequisite of the revolution. However, sexual liberation in and of itself is not the only component of the erotic that the characters in *Libro de Manuel* promote as an essential part of the revolutionary ethos; rather, as in *Eros and Civilization*, in *Libro de Manuel* the process of erotic transformation that the characters envision involves a reorientation of the libido “from sexuality constrained under genital supremacy to the eroticization of the entire personality” (Marcuse 201). The erotic transformation that these characters foresee is thus one that will lead to great freedom in the realm of self-expression and thought, as well as in that of sexuality and sexual practices. This broader vision of eroticism and of its wide-reaching implications is evident in *el que te dije*’s interior monologue in which he contemplates the connection between the type of language used by

¹⁴ Lonstein’s defense of onanism in particular is noteworthy in that masturbation represents the first, and perhaps the most fundamental act of self-indulgence. Unlike most sexual practices, which involve two or more people and in which the focus tends to be on sharing pleasure with another person as well as experiencing pleasure oneself, when practicing onanism, one is, by definition, only concerned with one’s own personal pleasure. In this sense one could view onanism as a profoundly individualistic act, and certainly as one that runs counter to a political structure in which all self-interest must be sacrificed for the good of the group. Therefore, by including the taboo against onanism among “la enumeración de errores y lacras sociales y personales” that the Joda must overcome in order to realize its goals, Lonstein joins Guevara and Marcuse in suggesting that any future project of the social must not disregard the role of individual and his or her personal/intimate needs, not to mention the role of desire itself (224).

revolutionary leaders and the type of political systems that they tend to establish once in power. In this passage, Cortázar establishes a complex dialogue between Guevara's discourse of the revolutionary new man and Marcuse's erotics of liberation, in which we can perceive the intricate fusion of *eros* and *agape* described above.

As mentioned, and as Boldy also asserts, one of the functions that is proposed for the erotic in *Libro de Manuel* is to deter the "recurrence of repressive structures in society after the revolution" (Boldy 185). In his interior monologue *el que te dije* identifies Marcos's way of speaking as a reflection of the erotic nature of his personality, and as an indication that he would be less likely to revert to an authoritarian form of governance were he to attain political leadership. To this end, *el que te dije* clearly distinguishes Marcos's manner of speaking from that of the other members of *la Joda*, as well as from that of his historical predecessors, whose rigid political discourse *el que te dije* views as indicative of their authoritarian political tendencies:

O sea, pensó el que te dije..., que a la hora de escribir un texto con significado ideológico e incluso político, el rabinito [Lonstein] deja caer el idioma oral que le es propio y te saca un castellano de lo más presentable. Extraño, extraño. ¿Qué haría Marcos si los azares de la Joda lo llevaran un día a ser eso que las tabletas asirias llamaban jefe de hombres? Su idioma corriente es como su vida, una alianza de iconoclastia y creación, reflejo de lo revolucionario entendido antes de todo sistema; pero ya Vladimir Ilich, sin hablar de León Davidovich y más de este lado y este tiempo Fidel, vaya si vieron lo que va del dicho al hecho, de la calle al timón. Y sin embargo uno se pregunta el porqué de este pasaje de un habla definida por la vida, como el habla de Marcos, a una vida definida por el habla, como los programas de gobierno y el innegable puritanismo que se guarece en las revoluciones. (88)

From this passage it is clear that, just as Lonstein views onanism as a reflection of personal integrity and self-awareness, *el que te dije* views Marcos's manner of speaking as a reflection of Marcos's integrity, as well as his openness to alterity and his sense of alliance with the common man. In addition, by describing Marcos's way of speaking as "un habla definida por la vida," *el que te dije* not only characterizes Marcos's speech as free from taboos; he also associates Marcos with a ludic, life-affirming eroticism—a manner of speaking and thinking that is in touch with the ever-changing

flux of human existence (88). This becomes even clearer as *el que te dije's* monologue continues, and as he enters into dialogue with Guevara's iconic essay:

Preguntarle a Marcos alguna vez si va a olvidarse del carajo y de la concha de tu hermana en caso de que le llegue la hora de mandar; mera analogía desde luego, no se trata de palabrotas sino de lo que late detrás, el dios de los cuerpos, el gran río caliente del amor, *la erótica de una revolución* que alguna vez tendrá que optar...por otra definición del hombre; porque en lo que llevamos visto el hombre nuevo suele tener cara de viejo apenas ve una minifalda o una película de Andy Warhol. (88; my emphasis)

In this passage we clearly see both *el que te dije's* critique of the authoritarian tendencies within the armed struggle, as well as his belief that taking a more erotic approach—a more flexible, grounded, and open approach—to governance could have the potential to curb these tendencies.¹⁵ By referring to this element of the armed struggle as “el gran río caliente del amor,” as well as “la erótica de una revolución,” Cortázar alludes to Guevara's assertion of the connection between politics and affect in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, in which Guevara frames love as a means to offset repressive tendencies within the Cuban revolution. However, whereas Guevara's text focuses only on “el amor a los pueblos,” or *agape*, *el que te dije's* claim about Marcos's discourse incorporates the notion of *eros* and sexuality as further antidotes to these repressive tendencies, echoing the function of the erotic as it appears in Marcuse. By creating a metadiscourse for *el que te dije* that resonates with both Guevara and Marcuse's texts, Cortázar conflates the concepts of *agape* and *eros* in *Libro de Manuel* so that, within the novel, these two appear as one and the same. Moreover, in asserting this role for eroticism within the armed struggle, Cortázar both revises and reasserts Guevara's discourse of the revolutionary new man, advancing Marcos as the iconic example of the *new*, new man—the *erotic* new man who will work to liberate people, not

¹⁵ Cortázar's is not the only text in which the erotic is used to offset the authoritarianism sometimes found in revolutions; as Arturo Arias asserts in “Gioconda Belli: la magia y/(d)el erotismo,” in Belli's *La mujer habitada* “el erotismo, marginalizado de las practicas discursivas de la novela centroamericana, confronta aquí las rigideces ideológicas que informaron el anterior discurso, generando una fusión entre vitalidad erótica y vitalidad política” (314).

only from social and economic oppression, but also from their own internal oppression—the oppression of their true, erotic nature.

It is true, as Peris Blanes argues, that Cortázar's focus on both sexuality and experimental literature in the above passage constitutes “una forma audaz de afrontar las crecientes tensiones entre la vanguardia cultural y la vanguardia política revolucionaria que, desde finales de los 60, iba a desconfiar y a sospechar de las corrientes experimentales en la literatura y el arte” (89). Guevara himself is clearly opposed to “[el] arte decadente del siglo XX,” and, although he makes no mention of sexuality in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, he was also known to have spoken out against non-heteronormative sexuality and sexual practices on other occasions (Guevara 40).¹⁶ In this sense, Cortázar's celebration of experimental sexuality and literature as revolutionary, in the spirit of Marcuse, represents a clear divergence from Guevara's views as expressed in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*. At the same time, it is important to note that, in pairing Marcuse's erotic subjectivity and Guevara's new man to get at the issue of political dogmatism in this text, Cortázar is not only legitimating “una búsqueda que venía de lejos,” as Peris Blanes argues, but also addressing issues that Guevara himself wrestles with in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, and in a way that is highly reminiscent of Guevara's own response (89).¹⁷ Moreover, in *Libro de Manuel* the concept of the erotic appears in relation to issues of literary and artistic expression. Yet Cortázar also links his elaboration of the erotic to the concept of *agape*, or “amor a la humanidad,” that, in his essay, Guevara identifies as an essential attribute of “el revolucionario verdadero” (Guevara 49, 48).

¹⁶ “El capitalismo en cultura ha dado todo de sí y no queda de él sino el anuncio de un cadáver maloliente en arte, su decadencia de hoy” (Guevara 40). “The place is Algiers, and the time is 1964. According to the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo, and as recounted by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, when Ernesto ‘Ché’ Guevara saw a volume of Virgilio Piñera's *Teatro completo* in the Cuban embassy, he hurled it against a wall. ‘How dare you have in our embassy a book by this foul faggot!’ he shouted to an astonished (and, at that time, fairly closeted) Goytisolo” (Quiroga 104).

¹⁷ Cortázar identifies Marcos's iconoclastic way of speaking as erotic because it reveals his integrity and his sense of alliance with the common man. These are the same personal attributes that Guevara claims are necessary “para no caer en extremos dogmáticos, en escolasticismos fríos, en aislamiento de las masas” (49).

In addition to the Joda's members' willingness to risk their own lives to liberate political prisoners in other parts of the world, perhaps the clearest example of *agape* in the text, and of its connection to *eros*, appears in Oscar's recurring preoccupation with a news story he has read about a group of adolescent girls who tried to escape from a reform school in La Plata. In Oscar's memory of the story, details from the account itself combine freely with details from his own imagination, merging to create a highly stirring and sensual scene:

todo eso volvía con una luna llena que hacía brillar los cascotes de botellas en lo alto del muro, el camino de tierra que se perdía hacia la ciudad, los camisones blancos, era otra vez la fuga, el envión contra las puertas, los gritos y las risas histéricas, como en el patio de doña Raquela la luna llena era un llamado imperioso, una pulsión que exorbitaba el aliento, la piel, las felpas de la voz, todo se volvía agazapamiento y látigo, una posesión irrechazable ceñía las cinturas y los vientres y el brillar de los ojos en los rincones con jazmines, contra la tapia por la cual habían saltado las muchachas enloquecidas de publicidad de los clubes vecinos, las enamoradas en un solo abrazo, velando la una por la otra, besándose en la sombra, casi desnudas. (127)

This story readily lends itself to an erotic interpretation—a tale of young women's desire and budding sexuality leading them to perform an act of transgression—, and the way that Oscar envisions the young women's escape further highlights these erotic elements. As such, at first it appears that Oscar is drawn to the story only because of its erotic quality. However, as one reads on it becomes clear that Oscar's fixation is also due to the way that the story ends—with the young women's violent capture and return to the reformatory. He cannot help but imagine them

corriendo entre las sombras de una calle llena de agujas y amenazas, aullando histéricas sin saber de qué, de luna llena y carnaval, de deseos sin respuesta, hasta estrellarse contra los brazos de vecinos oficiosos o de bomberos joviales que las levantaban como plumas hasta el primer arañazo que les abría la cara y entonces la cachetada dura del macho, el sosegate, porquería, a vos lo que te hace falta es un fierro bien caliente, aquí se las traigo, teniente, la pucha que están alzadas las potranquitas me cago en dios. (128)

What was a story of erotic and sexual awakening here quickly turns into one of repression and physical and sexual abuse, and the young women's escape from the reformatory shifts, from a flight of fancy, to one of escape

from conditions of social and economic oppression—escape from “ciento noventa y seis muchachas amontonadas en una capacidad para ochenta y a la espera de otras cincuenta y seis mujercitas entre luna y luna” (130-1). In this passage Cortázar thus suggests the way that sexual repression is frequently linked to issues of social and economic exploitation; the fact that these young women live in an reformatory that is more than one hundred percent over capacity makes it much more likely for them to be exposed to physical and sexual violence, and much more difficult for them to do anything about it. Moreover, through Oscar’s concern for the wellbeing of these women, Cortázar suggests that concerns regarding sexual repression may also spring from *agape* and can also be related to concerns regarding socioeconomic wellbeing. For Oscar, who cannot banish these thoughts from his mind, the images of these young women are what fuel his decision to participate in the Joda. His appreciation for these adolescent’s erotic desires, his grief at seeing them repressed, and his ambition to create a social system in which they would be liberated from this repression constitute a clear instance of *agape*—the “amor a la humanidad” that, for Guevara is central to the revolutionary project, thereby expanding organically on the ideas expressed in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (49).

A final parallel between Guevara’s and Cortázar’s texts appears in their regard for the social as a personally transformative experience, which Cortázar also links to his elaboration of the erotic in *Libro de Manuel*. This veneration of the social, while present throughout the novel, appears most clearly in the passage in which the characters gather in Lonstein’s apartment to observe the growth of his phosphorescent mushroom, shortly before putting into effect their plan to kidnap the Latin American ambassador. In this passage Cortázar clearly connects this experience of the social to the experience of the erotic, and to the goals of the revolution itself.

The passage on Lonstein’s mushroom emerges in the novel as both a metaphor for the erotic, as well as a metonymy of the erotic society that the revolution should be working to achieve. For Lonstein, this mushroom—a “*lapsus prolapsus igneus*”—is a source of great pride and not

a small degree of fixation, as he brings it up again and again throughout the text (180). To the question of the status of Lonstein's mushroom as a metaphor for the erotic, one could argue that there are clear literary parallels between Lonstein's interest in onanism as a revolutionary practice and his fascination with his 'mushroom,' which Cortázar describes as a "vertical cilíndrico violáceo / cabezón pero no demasiado / inevitablemente fálico tópico / fosforeciendo débilmente bajo / el estímulo verdoso fotofílico" (180), and whose growth Heredia (another *Joda* participant) compares with "lo que me pasa a mí cuando veo una buena minifalda" (182). In addition, the *Joda*'s act of going to Lonstein's apartment in order to watch his mushroom glisten in the moonlight closely resembles the kind of pagan rituals performed by practitioners of erotic mysticism, in the manner of Georges Bataille.¹⁸ If one accepts Lonstein's phallic mushroom as a metaphor for the erotic, it is clear that Lonstein also considers the erotic to be an intrinsic part of the revolutionary endeavor, as he explains to *el que te dije* that "cosas como la luna llena...mi hongo que crece y las menores que evaden de un reformatorio, andá a explicarles a tipos como Gómez o Roland que también eso puede ser la Joda" (106). In suggesting that "tipos como Gómez o Roland"—the more stereotypically dogmatic members of the *Joda*—would not readily comprehend the value of Lonstein's mushroom, Cortázar again opposes the erotic to revolutionary dogmatism within the text (106).

The relationship between Lonstein's mushroom, the revolution, and the experience of the social appears even more clearly the night that *la Joda* assembles in Lonstein's apartment in order to watch the mushroom glow. As Oscar notes in free indirect discourse, this strange, fungi-centered

¹⁸ In *Sacred Eroticism*, Juan Carlos Ubilluz establishes Cortázar's familiarity with the "sacred eroticism" of Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski, who themselves founded the Collège de Sociologie, a "community of knowledge dedicated to the study of past and present manifestations of the sacred," and Acéphale, a "secret and ritualistic pagan society" (10). As Steven Boldy asserts, in its fullest incarnation *eros* represents "the tendency towards complete oneness with the world" (186), and, according to Ubilluz, followers of erotic mysticism take part in this sort of nature-based rituals "for the sake of re-experiencing an intensity that [has] been lost in the process of individuation/socialization" (27). As such, this incident in the text may be an allusion to this and other nature-based spiritual groups and practices.

gathering ends up serving as a sort of sacred rite prior to the Joda's kidnapping of the ambassador:

Era realmente como una ceremonia, Oscar se apretó contra Gladis que se dormía dulcemente de pie como un caballito, encendió un cigarillo a respetuosa distancia del hongo y se dijo que desde ese momento hasta el viernes...las cosas iban a andar rápido y calientes, en todo caso el hongo y Lonstein y la condescendencia más bien extraña de Marcos no le molestaban, al contrario, había como una alianza inexplicable pero no menos sensible, un encuentro momentáneo y por eso quizá [sic] precioso de tantas cosas divergentes o que muchos creían divergentes, Gómez por ejemplo, el hombre de acción que se sentía perdiendo el tiempo, o Heredia que se torcía de risa, pero a Oscar le hacía bien ese absurdo con luz verde y mediciones al milímetro. (181)

As Oscar observes, in this strange, almost surreal, ceremony we see the coming together of the personal, the political, and the erotic—of “tantas cosas divergentes o que muchos creían divergentes”—which, as Oscar suggests, are in fact not divergent at all (181). As was the case in Lonstein's defense of onanism and *el que te dije's* celebration of Marcos's iconoclastic speech, here the erotic and the political are not depicted as two separate spheres, but as ones that are necessarily intertwined. In this passage, we also see a clear link between the experience of the erotic and the experience of the social. Oscar's sense of the significance of this ‘ceremony’ is due, not only to the fact that it brings together seemingly divergent issues or concerns, but that it brings together individuals with different interests and perspectives, among whom the erotic serves to “irrigate the social bond” (Ubilluz 315). In describing this gathering as “una alianza inexplicable,” Oscar registers the degree to which the mystical eroticism of this ceremony emerges, not just from the mushroom itself, but also from a profound experience of the social—from sharing in the act of watching the mushroom grow (181). Therefore, as in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, in *Libro de Manuel* the social appears as an experience that is both profoundly freeing and personally transformative. However, just as Cortázar extends the notion of *agape* or compassion to address issues of sexual repression and abuse, to the notion of the social as personally transformative, he adds the concept of alterity, suggesting that a true experience of the social occurs where there is also diversity, intimating that it is precisely the experience of

unity in diversity that makes the shared experience of the social all the more satisfying.

Again, it is important to note that Cortázar does not promote Lonstein's erotic ceremony as an *alternative* to the armed struggle, but rather as a necessary *component* of the fight for economic and political liberation that is already underway. This understanding—that the revolution is in fact incomplete without the erotic—appears in Lonstein's insistence during this mystical ritual that “no se debe perder de vista del hongo, vos me entendés” (182). *El que te dije* responds to Lonstein's assertion with some thoughts of his own:

La verdad era que el que te dije no entendía gran cosa, pero Lonstein lo seguía mirando con una insistencia irónica, y al final fue como si el que te dije y Oscar cada uno por su lado estuviesen comprendiendo mejor lo que pasaba (y Marcos también, pero Marcos lo había entendido desde un principio, desde la llegada de Lonstein a la Joda, de lo contrario el rabinito no hubiera tenido acceso a algo que en la praxis le iba demasiado grande)... En esa comedia idiota había acaso como una esperanza de Marcos, la de no caer en la especialización total, conservar un poco de juego, un poco de Manuel en la conducta. (182-3)¹⁹

This passage reads as a continuation of *el que te dije's* reflection on Marcos's iconoclastic speech. Here again we see that, among various members of the Joda, the erotic—here metonymized in the viewing party for Lonstein's erotic mushroom—is perceived as a safeguard against entrenched modes of thinking. As in his previous appraisal of Marcos's speech, *el que te dije* links the experience of the erotic to the virtues of imagination and creativity—this time to the playfulness and innocent wonder of childhood represented in the figure of Manuel. Also, as *el que te dije* continues, the erotic emerges as not only as necessary component of the revolution itself, but also as a metaphor for the kind of future society that Marcos and Oscar are fighting for. According to *el que te dije*, here we see that guys like Marcos y Oscar are involved in the armed struggle in

¹⁹ Marcos's desire “de no caer en la especialización total” resonates with Guevara's assertion in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* that “el freno mayor que hemos tenido” with respect to institutionalizing the revolution, “ha sido el miedo a que cualquier aspecto formal nos separe de las masas y del individuo, nos haga perder de vista la última y más importante ambición revolucionaria que es ver al hombre liberado de su enajenación” (Cortázar 183; Guevara 29).

order to be able to bequeath to children like Manuel this erotic vision of the future:

Capaz que tipos como Marcos y Oscar...estaban en la Joda por Manuel, quiero decir que lo hacían por él, por tanto Manuel en tanto rincón del mundo, queriendo ayudarlo a que algún día entrara en un ciclo diferente y a la vez salvándole algunos restos del naufragio total, el juego que impacientaba a Gómez, *la superfluidad de ciertas hermosuras, de ciertos hongos en la noche, de lo que podía dar todo su sentido a cualquier proyecto de futuro*. Desde luego,...poca gente de la Joda, de todas las grandes y pequeñas Jodas de la tierra comprenderían a tipos como Marcos o como Oscar, pero siempre habría un Oscar para un Marcos y viceversa, capaces de sentir por qué había que estar con el rabinito a la hora de pasar al ambiente para ver el hongo. (183; my emphasis)

For Marcos and Oscar, it is the erotic—the pale, unearthly beauty of “ciertos hongos en la noche”—that gives meaning to their vision of a just future society and that inspires them to believe that this future is possible (183). Moreover, to be able to create such a society, both Marcos and Oscar know that they must not lose sight of the erotic even as they carry out the armed struggle.

As I have argued, despite the scholarly tendency to attribute the iteration of the erotic that Cortázar elaborates in *Libro de Manuel* solely to Marcuse, this iteration of the erotic also shares important attributes with Guevara’s conceptions of *agape* and of the social in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*. Moreover, the multi-faceted iteration of the erotic whose presence I have delineated in *Libro de Manuel* appears not only in this text; it is one that, over time, came to occupy a distinct place in the political culture of the armed struggle, emerging in the works of Gioconda Belli and Ana Istarú in Central America; Carlos Fuentes in Mexico; and Cristina Peri Rossi, Luisa Valenzuela, Eduardo Galeano, and Diamela Eltit in the Southern Cone.²⁰ In texts such as Luisa Valenzuela’s “De noche soy tu caballo,” Eduardo Galeano’s *Días y noches de amor y de guerra*, and Gioconda Belli’s *La mujer habitada* and *Línea de fuego*, the erotic appears as that which infuses the region’s political struggles with meaning—the erotic, or life force, as the liberated antithesis of the oppression the

²⁰ The pairing of eroticism and politics also appears in the political writings of Ernesto Cardenal, whose fusing of politics and sensual, natural imagery clearly influenced the work of Gioconda Belli.

revolutionaries are fighting against, and an integral part of the era's "spirit of hope for change" (Beverley 105). By analyzing the influence of Guevara's *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* in *Libro de Manuel*, it becomes clear that Cortázar's text was not an isolated instance of projecting foreign influences onto an unrelated Latin American reality, but rather one whose sources can be found in both autochthonous and non-autochthonous texts, thus making the case for a broader historical analysis of the revolutionary erotic in the Latin American political culture of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.

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