

José Rivera, Neoliberalism, and the Outside of Politics

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The question of politics on the stage is increasingly troubled in the contemporary period in the United States by an easy slippage between a psychologically realist fixation on individuated characters with idiosyncratic backgrounds and recognizable motivations, and political thinking that uses individual freedom as grounds for dismantling state support systems — a movement toward neoliberalism. According to David Harvey,

Pursuit of social justice presupposes social solidarities and a willingness to submerge individual wants, needs, and desires in the cause of some more general struggle for, say, social equality or environmental justice....It has long proved extremely difficult within the US left, for example, to forge the collective discipline required for political action to achieve social justice without offending the desire of political actors for individual freedom and for full recognition and expression of particular identities. (41-42)

While Harvey is clear that “[n]eoliberalism did not create these distinctions,” he maintains that “it could easily exploit, if not foment them” (42). Supporters of neoliberalism advocate for “strong individual property rights, the rule of law, and institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade” (64), all highly valued in contemporary US political, economic and cultural conventional wisdom. Harvey argues that a neoliberal state’s

legal framework is that of freely negotiated contractual obligations between juridical individuals in the marketplace. The sanctity of contracts and the individual right to freedom of action, expression, and choice must be protected. The state must therefore use its monopoly of the means of violence to preserve these freedoms at all costs. By extension, the freedom of businesses and corporations (legally regarded as individuals) to operate within this institutional

framework of free markets and free trade is regarded as a fundamental good. (64)

This contemporary political ideology frames the terms of political engagement in a range of political theater emerging from Latina/o voices attempting to both articulate the material conditions of lived existence and give voice to individual and communal identity formations. What become difficult to articulate, and are constantly in danger of being overlooked or becoming invisible, are systemic forms of violence that constitute one form of opposition to social justice for individuals, and more insidiously, the ways in which individual freedoms constitute the limits of the articulation of freedom and social justice.

In an attempt to resist and think outside the logics of neoliberal globalization¹ in order to work for more ethical, equitable, and sustainable lived conditions, many scholars have either called for, or documented the continued presence and resurgence of civil society. For scholars like Frederick Powell and John D. Clark, civil society becomes the tool and means through which social justice can be sustained in the face of the decline or absence of state intervention to preserve the welfare of their citizens in a free market, global economy. This move toward civil society is difficult to represent in theater, since the unification of individuals on-stage often suggests a utopian revolutionary conclusion. Such is the case in José Rivera's well-known play, *Marisol*, which is an explicit commentary on the violence perpetuated by neoliberal economic practice, the rising incidence of homelessness during the Reagan era, and the power of global corporations.²

What seems to re-occur on the political stage, not only in the work of José Rivera, but in a range of theatrical productions, is the return to conversational debate as the mode through which the possibilities of politics can be examined. While on the one hand this debate serves as a democratic practice, much as verbatim theater attempts to do by invoking a polyphony of real voices, it nonetheless predicates political decisions on the free choice of the individual. Though this practice is certainly not problematic in and of itself, this focus on individualized, intimate conversations neglects the possibility of sustained structural analysis that articulates not only one's point of view, but an understanding of the systemic conditions in which an individual operates. As a dramatist, José Rivera demonstrates his acute awareness of this problem of framing political engagement and intervention. In his political allegory about the second Bush administration, *Massacre (Sing to Your Children)*, Rivera employs an epigraph from Gore Vidal to highlight his political concerns,

“We hate this system we are trapped in, but we don’t know who has trapped us or how. We don’t even know what our cage looks like because we have never seen it from the outside” (12).³ His 2006 play *School of the Americas* explores the difficulty of understanding systemic repression and our place in it, along with the struggles of sustaining a revolutionary project in the face of fear and self-interest, through his account of the last days of Che Guevara in a Bolivian schoolhouse awaiting the resolution of his fate.

For a progressive audience, the play’s title ironically invokes the nickname of the Georgia military installation, now re-constituted as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, where paramilitary and military forces from Latin America are trained for counterinsurgency. There are clear records of historic inappropriate training of students in aggressive interrogation techniques and a number of the school’s graduates have gone on to serve as national dictators or been involved in violent repressive acts throughout Latin America, including the assassination of Archbishop Romero of El Salvador.⁴ While there is no direct connection between the School of the Americas and the Bolivian rangers involved in Che’s capture, this reference highlights both the US military training they received and the larger ideological issue of US interventionism throughout Latin America.

Importantly, the ideological picture of Che Guevara most visible in the sources Rivera acknowledges suggest that rather than any particular form of dogmatic Marxism or Socialism, Guevara’s primary concern was with the violent destruction perpetrated by US imperialist practice.⁵ This focus on the danger posed by the United States is echoed in Rivera’s comment to Lucia Mauro,

“Now is the time to look at what American foreign policy is doing and question why there is so much hatred directed at the United States,” notes Rivera in relation to this play. “I ask, how culpable are we? And are we ever innocent?”

Rivera’s question highlights the responsibility of individuals in the face of government actions they disagree with or disavow. And, in this sense, the other political valence of the School of the Americas comes into play. Explicitly invoking a sense of shared hemispheric experience, rather than calling on issues of security and containment, the pedagogy offered in Rivera’s play, his own “School of the Americas,” focuses on the limits of political critique, the possibilities of revolution, and the spaces between articulation, utopian thinking, and progressive action. In a sense, by suggesting the permeation

of guilt through national affiliation, Rivera calls on his audience to think through the possibilities of transformation and suggests the possibility of a different form of hemispheric responsibility predicated on ethical solidarity and pedagogy of the oppressed, one in which the audience requires instruction. At the same time, refusing any kind of easy solution, he focuses not on the military achievements in the 1959 Cuban revolution but on Guevara's attempt to personally export revolution to Latin America — the last few days of his failed revolutionary campaign and death in Bolivia.

Rivera's first attempt to deal with the life of Guevara was in the screenplay for the successful 2004 film *Motorcycle Diaries*. Charting the consciousness-raising trip of the young Doctor Guevara seeing the life of poor peasants throughout Latin America, the film paints him as a humanitarian coming into awareness of the pain, suffering, and poverty of his fellow human beings. *Motorcycle Diaries*, historically situated before the emergence of Guevara's revolutionary practice, establishes him as a man first and a dogmatic revolutionary second, a difficult practice given the tendency to construct Guevara as an image on a t-shirt, an icon, and to remember him as a symbol of resistance rather than a human being.

The irony of the combination of these two pieces is that the portions of Guevara's life that Rivera does not attend to are the central revolutionary moments — his work with Fidel in Cuba. Rivera leaves out the revolution, and while this allows for greater attention to Guevara as a man and a character, this treatment of politics frames a radical revolutionary committed to collectivist politics as an individual liberal subject whose psychology becomes the subject of inquiry, rather than his revolutionary ideals and politics. On the one hand this makes perfect sense — there are issues of empathy and good character-driven storytelling that can certainly explain this choice. However, there is a larger issue here about the ways in which audience expectation of psychological introspection shifts personal politics into a much less radical form than was intended. Since the massive surge in identity politics from the late 1960s and the broadly invoked feminist argument that the personal is the political, US political drama has become increasingly invested in making political arguments through sympathetic individuals rather than larger systemic critiques, using realism as the primary mode of articulating politics in mainstream venues.

While this can be an effective strategy, the focus on individual psychology has lost its grounding in a shared cultural assumption that the individual experience was merely the concrete materialization of a larger

collectivist political position. Instead, with the fragmentation of identity and rights movements in the 1970s and 1980s, the “personal is the political” increasingly becomes the site for negotiation of personal, not necessarily collective, freedom. In this model, the representation of political engagement is reduced to a negotiation between two individuals in a conversational exchange that allows for disagreement. Because of the immediate presence of two (or more) individuals willing to think, to argue, and possibly to change, politics becomes a form of conversational persuasion. While in many ways this represents an idealized form of liberalism — the free exchange of views will result in a progressive solution — the context in which these conversations can and do take place, the means through which these conversations are circumscribed and concluded, and the limits of political action that emerge from these conversations are all central to the concerns of Rivera’s play and reflect a larger concern about a shift in the twisted landscape of US political thinking — the shift to neoliberalism.

There is a great deal of historical debate about Che’s failure in Bolivia, and it is clear that there was poor timing, poor coordination with the local communist party, poor understanding of the specific local political situation and, perhaps most ironically, poor knowledge of Quechua, the primary language of the Bolivian peasants Guevara was hoping to organize and lead. These problems, however, are overshadowed in some accounts by a perceived betrayal by Fidel Castro, either through an explicit “set up” or through relatively deliberate neglect. The story of Bolivia is well documented, both because of the haunting questions of causality and motivation, and because Guevara himself kept a diary of the events that has been published in more than one form. The sources Rivera references for his version of Guevara do not make a definitive claim about the causes of the failure, but there is a strong sense of Guevara’s “narcissistic willfulness” as well as Castro’s need to keep him occupied in a project that would, in the end, result in an inevitable martyrdom (Castañeda xv). While some argue that Castro explicitly betrayed Guevara, the general scholarly sense seems to be that he chose to do nothing about the situation, either because of Soviet influence or because of his conscious or unconscious recognition of the value of Guevara’s martyrdom and the lack of a place for his revolutionary energy in Cuba.

The accounts of Guevara’s death are inevitably tied to his iconic afterlife and the reality that his populist legend is at least partially predicated on the timeliness of his execution, just a few months before the start of 1968, the most convulsive revolutionary year of the 2nd half of the 20th century. While

biographer Jorge Castañeda suggests that Guevara's function as cultural icon proved a longer and more visible legacy than his political work, this is in part due to the shift in revolutionary politics toward issues of identity and culture that has characterized the radical movements from the late 1960s and early 1970s as they moved into the 1980s and beyond — an ironic shift toward an iconic figure that is less disruptive to neoliberal politics.

Most of the action of *School of the Americas* consists of conversational exchanges and the most interesting are those between Julia Cortes, an unmarried schoolteacher, and Che Guevara. Cortes asserts her right to see the imprisoned Guevara based on her relationship to the school building (she and her father built it) where he is being held following his capture by the Bolivian army. The other significant characters in the play are Lieutenant Felix Ramos, a historical figure and US-trained Cuban CIA operative (Rodriguez is his given name), and Julia's sister Lucila.

There are several accounts of Julia's encounter with Che, including some in her own voice that emerged in the international press around the time of the release of various biographical films (*Motorcycle Diaries* in 2004 and *Che* in 2009). In one account Julia recalls,

My curiosity had driven me to see an ugly and bad man, but here I encountered an utterly beautiful man. His appearance was a disaster, he looked like a tramp, but his eyes shone. I felt an immense happiness, like a stroke of light. He said that I was very nice and cute. I asked him why he was fighting and he replied that it was because of his ideals. He said that we were wrong to think he was bad while he was there fighting for the humble, the dispossessed. He asked me for food, and I brought him some soup from my place. He was so hungry he ate it all without catching breath. While he was eating, I couldn't stop staring at him. Then they took him outside, and we shared a very intense look. He was staring at me in a fixed manner, but I wasn't able to hold his gaze, it was too intense....Somehow, I couldn't stop staring at him, sideways. At one point he turned around and gave me the look that, today, I still have tattooed on my heart. There was no way I couldn't have fallen in love with him. He was incredibly beautiful, it was shocking. (Schipani)

This account is reflected in much of Rivera's play, though in his account Julia is 31, not the 19-year-old historical figure, and while she does fall in love with Guevara in their brief encounter, she stands on a much more level playing field than this account suggests. The play begins with a radio

broadcast in Spanish setting up Presidente Barrientos's position regarding rural developments and education along with Julia's heated rejection of this followed by an immediate repetition in English, a dramatic technique suggesting that a monolingual audience has been provided a privileged space of translation from which to witness the events. Julia's rejection of the radio's claim that "Reflecting an effort of great personal importance to President Barrientos, the army is also giving out much-needed school supplies in these sadly deprived rural areas" (2) heightens the irony of the play's focus on the process of education and the potential for a pedagogy of liberation that frames the political exchanges in the play. Her exchanges with Lucila set up a desire for something more than she has in the small village of La Higuera as well as her willingness to question the received wisdom of authorities. Her exchanges with Ramos establish them both as individuals grounded in everyday realities yet vulnerable to the charismatic charm of Guevara's idealism.

The play was not well received in its New York premiere (a co-production of LAByrinth and the Public Theater) because of a perception of flawed characterization based on a lack of energy in both the actors and the script.⁶ Matthew Murray, in his *Talking Broadway* review, disparagingly condemns the structure of conversation:

So the only way for a play like this to feel like more than a pro-Communism tract is for a series of juicy confrontations between Guevara and Julia that will render the never-ending argument about the superior political philosophy in fresh theatrical terms. What we get instead is endless speechifying, platitudinous arguments, and semi-tangential digressions that are the stuff of nonfiction novels or uninventive TV series, not live theatre. (For example, arguing about the details of verb conjugation is not a riveting stage activity.) We need something to convince us of the tangible concerns of these people, something to amplify Guevara's need to be heard and the strait-laced Julia's need for expression that can conceivably bring them both together.

Murray's frustration presumes the need for a focus on character, specifically "convinc[ing]" "tangible concerns." While the widespread concern about a lack of energy in the exchanges makes his response by no means unique, what is important to note is both that he presumes that he already knows the terms of the political debate being staged and therefore the argument itself needs "fresh theatrical terms." But, if the argument is not about socialism versus capitalism but rather ethical responsibility and the need for education in the

contemporary moment, the presumption that we already know this exchange forecloses the possibility of meaningful dialogue and thus of education itself.

The ideological conflict about priorities of engagement and the possibility of stepping outside of the imperial logic of US hegemony in the Americas is at stake in one of the moments Murray references — a discussion of verb conjugation — an engagement that Rivera both takes from the historical record and shifts to fit his theatrical needs. The question becomes one of translation and proper pedagogy, illustrating the heterogeneity of the practice of Spanish and metaphorically allowing for the exploration of limits on the possibility of political thinking, obliquely referencing a sense of the outside that Rivera invoked in the Vidal epigraph for *Massacre*. The subject of discussion is an error in Julia's board work and Che feels compelled to point it out as an illustration of the question of her competence as a teacher, presuming that the condition of deprivation of these people is predicated on their ignorance, which is perpetuated by the poor education they receive. The historical exchange, at least as presented by Taibo, is the absence of an accent mark that shifts between a meaningful and a meaningless statement.

Ah, you're the teacher. Did you know that the e in "sé" has an accent in "ya sé leer?" he said, pointing to the chalkboard. By the way, they don't have schools like this in Cuba. This would be like a prison for us. How can peasants' children study in a place like this? It's anti-pedagogical. (560)

This historical exchange has its own metaphorical resonance because without the accent the sentence makes no sense, but with the addition of the accent, the sentence is now translatable, "I already know how to read." Che's critique changes the phrase from an untranslatable series of words, a loose form of illiteracy, to an already acquired knowledge of reading. This powerful transformation gains poignancy if the error is one of ignorance rather than omission. It illustrates the radical change that can accompany a shift in a diacritical mark, and Che's correction becomes a gift of empowerment for the rural Bolivian schoolchildren.

In Rivera's play, the correction is much more subjective and controversial, though the conditions of the schoolhouse are still very much open to critique; according to the stage directions "[t]he room is so impoverished it seems more suited to farm animals than to children" (15). Julia's mistake is omitting the second person plural (*vosotros*) in the imperative conjugation of the verb on the board, *huir*, to escape. Rivera chooses this example carefully: not only is the difficulty of escape materialized in the physical presence of an

already captured Guevara, but he is also spatially confined to this small dark space and his hands and feet are physically bound throughout the majority of the play. In addition, the use of the imperative form, a command form, means that there is no first person declaration, no “I” present in this account of escape, and the action takes place as a command, reflecting the conflicted position of Guevara as revolutionary leader.

Julia’s exclusion of *vosotros* *huid*, you (all) escape, is based on the practice of Bolivian Spanish speakers and the debate that emerges foregrounds regional and national differences in the use of Spanish. To Julia’s response that normal people don’t say that, Che responds that they do in Argentina. But, of course, Che is not in Argentina and in the majority of countries in South and Central America spoken Spanish does not regularly include the *vosotros* form. However, on a more metaphoric level there are two issues. Ironically, *vosotros* is widely used in formal Castilian Spanish, and the question of the use of this form can be seen in some contexts to mark a class position and even, if one wanted to go further, to indicate the legacies of colonialism that Guevara is imposing from the outside as he provides a prescriptive model of Spanish. Secondly, and perhaps less speculatively, in this geography the possibility of a familiar command to a group to escape is not spoken and does not exist within the practice of language. This command “cannot” be issued, and we are instead left with either a formal distancing or the inclusion of all. This digression into grammar is crucial because at the heart of the difficult dialogue in this text is the possibility of thinking outside of the conditions in which we are placed.

This question of thinking outside returns with the final moment of Che’s visibility on stage at the end of act three where “(*He looks around at the dark, silent school house. The last place he’ll ever know. Stumbles to the blackboard and erases:*) CHE: Vosotros *huid*. (*Black out*)” (60). This erasure and simultaneous articulation is not one of progress, of success, or even endurance, but of escape. This final articulation suggests both a call to the audience to escape, a command from Che that he never gave to his revolutionary *compañeros*, but it can also be seen as an erasure of an attempt to police the process of learning. Perhaps it is this fundamental irony that the play makes visible: the possibility of escape may be non-existent and the act of escape, while potentially a means of self-preservation, would erase a revolutionary legacy. And, there is also the sense of inevitability in his final erasure of the correction based on the readings of Che’s mission in Bolivia as one fated to end in his death.

Jeremy McCarter's review of the production in *New York Magazine* is very aware of this issue about our own conflicted political position and the desire "to be inspired by [Che's] humanity":

That the invitation is accepted so readily might say less about Che than it does about our own beleaguered liberalism. Burdened with Hillary, Kerry, and the uninspiring rest, we embrace someone whose fervency seems a proof of his virtue, no matter how dire the consequences. (McCarter 69)

This sense of political malaise and the desire for a charismatic individual to inspire progressive change, regardless of "the consequences" reflects both a retreat from the implications of radicalism and a desire to step outside the political ambivalence that stymies revolutionary change. This paradox is articulated in a different way, combining Murray's desire for moving beyond a tired political argument with recognition of Rivera's own awareness of the problem he is presenting, in David Rooney's review in *Variety*,

the playwright is unable to expound on Che's beliefs about a Latin America free from economic inequality, from the debilitating division of national borders and, above all, from colonial bondage to the U.S. without slipping into textbook diatribe. Consequently, the human drama lacks intensity. "I know you're passionate about this, Mr. Guevara," admonishes Julia. "But you really need to learn to talk to people like a *person*...not like a speech you give at the Kremlin." While Rivera acknowledges the problem, he takes far too long to overcome it. (Rooney 33)

Rooney's demand is for a human Guevara, which is precisely the risk that worries McCarter, and in the center of it all is the quality of Che's articulation as an empathetic, believable character that the audience can invest in. There is no attempt to make space for the possibility that Che's "failure" as a character illustrates both the failure of his revolution (from a conservative point of view) and the failure of an audience to engage with meaningful forms of revolutionary rhetoric.

Thus, the politically laden conversation becomes the problem of the play, but also, in a sense, the problem that the play makes visible. It may in fact be that these exchanges are not symptomatic of an uneven tone attempting to make political claims personalized, but a representation of the limits of political articulation in the contemporary moment.

In the speech that evokes Julia's chiding, Che argues that "the weaknesses of the plundered people of this continent are exploited by

capitalist thugs in a sick, imperialist dream to homogenize the world — to sell each country, piece by piece, to the US monopolies,” (25) connecting well to the concerns of the dangers of neoliberal globalization. The play goes on to provide a rhetorical platform for Che to articulate concerns with contemporary resonance for a progressive audience: “It’s been my experience the more a country invokes the name of God the more likely they are to torture and destroy their own and other people. You can’t be naïve about the intentions of your government” (31). This speech, ostensibly to a Bolivian about Bolivia, cannot help but resonate with the militarized climate of the United States in 2006 and 2007. Yet rather than arguing about the necessity and timeliness of this particular play as a political allegory, it is important to think about the act of voicing this language of political radicalism in a public, middle class forum — the theater. While the critics in the Public Theater audience were generally dismissive of the efficacy of this rhetoric, in its West Coast premiere, the political radicalism was met with a sense of approval, not cynical superiority, and the call for hemispheric solidarity was more warmly received, recuperating the political without discarding the human. The play was produced at Teatro Visión, a Chicano Theater company in San Jose, California resident in the Mexican Heritage Plaza, home of a 500-seat proscenium theater and in this space, reviewers recognized it as a play of ideas and felt less pressure to condemn the characterization.

In perhaps one of the most telling exchanges in the play, which follows the conjugation debate, Che shifts the terms of education itself,

CHE: Do you teach your children why they’re poor?

(JULIA *pauses, the question has thrown her.*)

JULIA: They’re poor because they’re parents are poor.

CHE: They’re poor because they’re in a system that keeps them poor. And you’re part of that system!

JULIA: Are you saying I keep my children poor?

CHE: If you don’t teach them how their lives are manipulated by the *yanqui* imperialists, if all you do is apologize for the crimes of your government —

JULIA: I don’t have time to teach them about systems. I teach them how not to die every day.

CHE: Even when it’s the system itself that’s killing them?

(JULIA *takes a breath in order not to lose her temper.*)

JULIA: That’s all fine rhetoric sir — but it’s not the reality here. (21-22)

This exchange clearly illustrates the “limits” of political rhetoric. In the space of survival, there is no time for systemic analysis, and yet this very refusal to analyze the conditions under which we live results in the perpetuation of those systems. Julia’s impatience, while more pragmatic than most, reflects a general refusal to engage in systemic thinking regardless of the potential value it may hold, in part because this act of systemic thinking may lead back to forms of responsibility that are better left underexamined.

In a space where Che’s language is not dismissed, except very seriously by the play itself, one can begin to sense a critique of the practice of reception in which certain forms of political rhetoric are no longer possible. While this is not a surprise in the overall shift away from the valuing of effective oratory in political leaders, the suspicion of excessive passion in the delivery of political messages, and a movement toward increasing moderation of vocabulary outside of reductive binaries of histrionic talk radio, there is a real question about the function and place of this rhetoric.

At least one answer, easily supported, is that it serves as a symbolic reminder of the possibility of revolution, but this very articulation stems from a middle class space in the US. Ironically, Daniel James could write in 1969 that, “Che ‘lives’ in the West almost exclusively. His appeal is confined largely to the hated capitalist lands, principally the affluent ones lacking a ‘countryside’ suitable for guerrilla action” (304). But this invocation of the symbolic seems potentially dangerous for a progressive project because of the difficulty of articulating a way of thinking outside that allows for a persuasive critique of neoliberals’ co-optation of rights discourse, in which the free market of ideas is itself invisibly manipulated when it suits the needs of those invested in order to provide a symbolic outlet for progressive rhetoric without any meaningful change. In addition, by focusing on the end of Guevara’s life, his death and silencing, Rivera runs the risk of presenting an already failed revolution.

Yet, there are legacies from this failed revolution, not only the narrative of the play itself and its own possible intimations of the future, but a nearly contemporaneous material manifestation of Che’s legacy in Bolivia that further illustrates the ambivalence of progressive action in a neoliberal space: La Ruta del Che, a development project proposed at the beginning of the 21st century to help alleviate poverty in rural Bolivia. Money provided by the British government’s Department for International Development and administered by the Bolivian subsidiary of the humanitarian non-governmental organization Care International was intended to improve the economic conditions of the indigenous people in the area by formalizing

and profiting from the informal tourist trade of individuals attempting to retrace the route of Che Guevara and his guerrillas.⁷ A thorough analysis of the economic legacy of this transformation of Guevara's revolutionary failure into a tourist attraction is beyond the scope of this project; however, the very logic of the development project echoes a central shift in the mode of doing politics, toward collaborative efforts between private, state and civic institutions, while clarifying the difficulties of attempting to intervene locally in development projects. In the museum that was created in La Higuera the name CHE is used as an acronym for the various facets of its project designed to help with the eradication of rural poverty, one of Che's goals: Cultura, Historia, Eco-Tourism. The shifting of revolution into these three goals is symptomatic of the shift in progressive politics in the 21st century and reflects the very crisis that the play itself explores. Che's name becomes a slogan that generates widespread support to foster economic development without fundamentally restructuring the systems of power and exclusion that have created the historical inequalities that sustain this poverty. Revolution becomes culture. Revolution becomes history. Revolution becomes eco-tourism. One can learn about what happened in an ethically responsible way without ever having to actually do anything. Instead, what is offered is help with local development provided by outside international donors, ironically offering a potential sense of ownership to the indigenous people who did not perceive a need for Guevara's intervention during his lifetime.

The legacy suggested by Rivera's play retains this same level of ambiguity. There are two paths to chart here in continuing Che's route toward revolution. The first, and most predictable, is the progressive optimism of Julia's decision that "a great school is going to be born right here" (67) despite the radio's announcement of a disinvestment in rural education, a step backward from the initial pledges at the top of the play. Whether this new school will resolve the conflict over the nature of education that is framed by the debate between Che and Julia is not clear, though the optimism of liberal progressive thinking means there will be better education, even if the children are not taught "about systems." One can hope that the new floor can provide the ground for consciousness raising and the development of a future revolution, even if that future is not historical.

The second, and more tortuous path involves the embodied personal legacy of Guevara himself and its effect on Felix Ramos, the CIA operative. Stemming from the recognition that the most influential people in one's life "have the power to change the way you breathe" (44), Ramos begins to echo Guevara's wheezy, tortured breathing at the close of the play. This passing

on of symptoms reflects Ramos's respect for Guevara (even as he condemns Castro for his betrayal of the ideals of the revolution). The last moment of the play, following Julia's promise to restore the school is the stage direction: "*(FELIX looks at her, his asthma loud and getting louder, as if to suffocate him.) (Fade to black)*" (67). The transfer of Che's asthma to Felix serves a number of functions. On one hand, Felix's grudging admiration for Che demonstrates the difficult ambivalence for liberals fascinated both by the charismatic revolutionary and the ideals he attempted to put into practice, but who are nonetheless troubled by both autocratic and narcissistic self-practice and the legacies of the "successful" Cuban revolutionary. Metaphorically the revolutionary spirit has passed from Che to Felix as he begins to understand and respect Che's sensibility, while demonstrating the tension between a conceptual idealism and the limits of a physical body. And, once again, the nature of the transmission itself has a metaphoric significance. Asthma as an incurable condition that flares up based on a range of individual genetic and environmental factors suggests the internal quality of the conflict going on, its mystery, and the ways in which allergens can result in self-defeating aggravation. A man's breath is being cut off — the breath of life. The disease cannot spread through contact this way — it is in its most psychological realist form merely a psychosomatic transference, but in Rivera's realism the transmission happens.

This break from the otherwise carefully crafted realism of the text serves partially as a counter to the iconicity of Guevara's legacy. Instead of the famous revolutionary head on the t-shirt, we hear the tortured breathing of a body struggling for air. This tension between iconicity and human desire is present in the poster advertising the Teatro Visión production, in which a woman's right iris contains a common revolutionary headshot of Guevara, suggesting both the presence of his iconicity through the visual and the real history of Julia Cortes's lived experiences. The tortured breathing highlights this tension and suggests the possibility that neither revolution nor an understanding of systemic politics is fully articulable. Or, perhaps this legacy of tortured breathing embodies a paradox we must struggle with in the search for an outside to the frame of contemporary political discussion. Since asthma cannot be cured, where are we left? Is it possible to escape or step outside? Is the attempt itself the beginning of a transformation?

NOTES

1 These two terms are often linked together. Globalization has primarily been fostered in the contemporary period through the “free” trade of goods and the use of globalized labor pools and multinational corporations that extend beyond the bounds, and in most cases wield tremendous influence over, individual nations.

2 For a detailed reading of this play and economic violence see Rossini 120-128 and Westgate.

3 See Svich for more information.

4 See School of the Americas Watch <http://www.schooloftheamericaswatch.org/>; according to the U.S. General Accounting Office Report (GAO/NSIAD-96-178), “Although the School trains the majority of Latin American students that come to the United States for Army training, primarily because the curriculum is taught in Spanish, it provides a small percent of the training that the Army provides to foreign students from around the world. Virtually all of the 745 students attending the School in 1995 represented their countries’ military or police forces, with few civilians attending the School. Country representation in the student population typically reflects the dominant U.S. interests at various points in time” (3).

5 Rivera acknowledges two biographies, Castañeda and Anderson.

6 I was unable to see the production in New York, but I did see the West Coast premiere in San Jose, CA, which did not appear to suffer from these issues to the same extent.

7 See Tobar, Zeppel, 82-83 and “Project Completion Report.” According to the latter, “Fundeche, the organisation perceived to be created in order to ensure the sustainability of the project is still pending legal registration. This has been due to the slow process created by the consultations with local public bodies, which in turn have had their representatives changed due to new elections (delaying the process even further). Fundeche will now be established by the private sector that has been involved in the project from the very beginning, which has a vested interest in ensuring that services along the Che Route are developed to a sufficient standard so that there is more tourist inflow” (3). The rest of the report is rather telling about the nature of success as articulated by this project.

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