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➲ Jameson, *Buena Vista Social Club* and Other Exercises in the Restoration of the Real

> The ethical primacy of the Other over the Same requires that the experience of alterity be ontologically 'guaranteed' as the experience of a distance, or of an essential non-identity, the traversal of which is the ethical experience itself. But nothing in the simple phenomenon of the other contains such a guarantee. And this simply because the finitude of the other's appearing certainly *can* be conceived as resemblance, or as imitation, and thus lead back to the logic of the Same. The other always resembles me too much for the hypothesis of an originary exposure to his alterity to be *necessarily* true (Badiou 2001: 22).

> Thought of the Other is sterile without the Other of Thought. Thought of the Other is the moral generosity disposing me to accept the principle of alterity, to conceive of the world as not simple and straightforward, with only one truth-mine. But thought of the Other can dwell within me without changing me within myself. An Ethical principle, it is enough that I not violate it. The Other of Thought is precisely this altering (Glissant 1997: 154).

The present global paradigm is built on a new complicity between power and knowledge. In Santiago Castro-Gómez's words, "the present global reorganization of the capitalist economy depends on the production of differences. As a result, the celebratory affirmation of these differences, far from subverting the system, could be contributing to its consolidation" (2002: 269). In other words, Empire thrives on the proliferation of otherness, and assimilation or repression are no longer the favored strategies. The other is now respected or produced for the sake of the market.

In this context, the critic faces an immediate danger. How do we prevent our "progressive" discourse, conceived as a defense of difference, from becoming a means of its commodification? In other words, what if a certain "exhaustion of difference" is precisely the market's dearest script?[1] What if our anxiety to preserve the other's right to its

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1 Moreiras' book of the same title is not at all blind to that danger: "A counterpolitics of the local, insofar as it is itself a result of the movement of global capital is always essentially open to hijacking by the movement of global capital itself: it can be tamed and reduced to a mere mechanism for identity con-

"otherness" is indeed feeding a constitutive need of Empire? How do we avoid the complicity described by Hardt and Negri:

> The structures and logics of power in the contemporary world are entirely immune to the "liberatory" weapons of the postmodernist politics of difference. In fact, Empire too is best on doing away with those modern forms of sovereignty and on setting differences to play across boundaries (2000: 142).

In this sense, the new "universal" called globalization is built as a kind of "cultural radical democracy" that feeds a certain kind of pre-scripted pluralism:[2]

> This pluralism accepts all differences of who we are so long as we agree to act on the basis of these differences of identity, so long as we act our race. Racial differences are thus contingent in principle, but quite necessary in practice as markers of social separation. The theoretical substitution of culture for race or biology is thus transformed paradoxically into a theory of the preservation of race (Hardt/Negri 2000: 192).[3.]

Homi Bhabha has something similar in mind when he finds the most subversive gesture of the subaltern not in the affirmation of difference but rather in the exercise of mimicry, the confusion of identities and limits, the ventriloquism that hides or perhaps dissolves the "real" voice behind.

How can the intellectual know, then, if, when he studies difference as a means to its survival, or as an antidote to the new "universal", he is not really writing the script for "acting the race"? Sometimes the line between the mechanisms of academia and the market is a very thin one. But, if that is so, why not study academic discourse along with the market, and why not consider the continuities between the two?

One of the purposes of this paper is to develop an analogy between the production of otherness in certain theoretical texts and the mass media. If the other becomes an internal necessity for the market and as such its exteriority is conceived and produced within it, perhaps something similar happens to the other as object of study. Sometimes the discontinuity, the difference between the authorized gaze and its object seems conceivable

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sumption, in much the same way as one is prompted to consume products of various kinds. Identity is always open to commodification by the cultural-ideological apparatus of global capitalism" (2001: 279). Nevertheless, Moreiras does not question the potential complicity between his view of an essentially negative "other", the one who always says no to hegemonic interpellation (2001: 125-126), and the mechanisms of that hegemonic interpellation, the functioning of which requires precisely that kind of otherness to offer something that is always new but also to maintain its always expanding logic.

2 Laclau's (Laclau/Mouffe 1985) conception of "radical democracy" makes reference to an alternative political space in which different groups within civil society open up a new strategy for political action, in which "local" interests function according to a certain analogical schema, in which any idea of totality is only conceivable as multiple and heterogeneous. Laclau privileges the alterity of those groups over their mutual articulation. A close critique of Laclau's conception cannot be fully developed here, but is suggested through analogies in the cultural field.

3 In Nelly Richard's words: "Celebrating difference as exotic festival [...] is not the same as giving the subject of this difference the right to negotiate its own conditions of discursive control, to practice its difference in the interventionist sense of rebellion and disturbance as opposed to coinciding with the predetermined meanings of the official repertory of difference" (1995: 221).

in terms of an internal need. Our general hypothesis is that the production of a very particular kind of other is the result of a theoretical (and affective) necessity of certain academic discourses. And, to go one step further, that these "theoretical" needs are analogous to a certain marketing strategy of the global market. What those two spaces have in common is the use of the other as a locus of nostalgia, as the place where the monument can come back to life. Both the intellectual and the consumer[4] turn a loss in the space of the self into a recovery and a hope in the space of the other. Paradoxically then, the hope of the self, its future, depends on the other but only as long as that otherness is scripted by the self.

1. Kant

The dynamic of simultaneous dependence on, and production of, otherness does not begin with its best known modern version, Hegel's dialectic of master and slave. It has, indeed, quite an interesting genealogy. Dussell (1995) and Todorov (1984), from different perspectives, trace its origin to 1492. The discovery of the American other, the anxiety to erase its difference, runs parallel to the production of a difference that gives the agonizing integrity of the self the security of an outside or, in diachronic terms, a previous stage of historical development, one which allows the present to regard itself as more advanced and (eventually) "modern". One step further, and that otherness is internalized as a way to introduce an internal difference that maps the disciplinary action of the state. A rhetoric of "internal colonialism" is introduced to facilitate the "civilizing mission".[5]

It is precisely this new, shifting place of the "native" that Spivak's reading of Kant makes explicit. Deconstructing Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Spivak establishes how the place of the other is simultaneously negated and desperately needed to sustain the whole theoretical schema of the Enlightenment. It is obsessively "foreclosed", that is, expelled from the symbolic universe of the subject despite being a fundamental signifier (Laplanche/Pontalis 1974: 166). Only by means of producing a necessary outside – that "raw man" barely mentioned in Kant and characterized by the presence of affect without reason – can the *Critique of Judgment* establish the limits of the sublime as a territory, the perception of which is linked to pure reason (Spivak 1999: 4-14).

We could take Spivak's reading further and consider how the same schema works in what can probably be considered one of the foundational theories of contemporary globalization or at least certain aspects of it, the *Critique of Pure Reason.* The key moment of Kantian ethics, the "Categorical Imperative", is defined in opposition to the particular and to affect. It is always already necessarily global; indeed, its only substantial characterization is precisely that global reach without the presence of which, it is only an empty

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4 Of course this is not an opposition but a doubling of roles.

5 A premature example of that rhetoric appears in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, where references to the "Indias interiores" [Indies within] are a commonplace in the implementation of the reforms established by the Council of Trent. The native is no longer linked to a geographical otherness. What is implied now, quite simply, is the subject that has not yet been civilized, and does not yet fulfill the requirements of "modern" subjectivity.

functionality as Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) observed. But that "always already" implies both the existence of an outside and its immediate negation once the assimilation/education has been completed. The relationship between the civilized self and the "raw" man can only be one of radical discontinuity.

The natural vehicle for Kantian reason, indeed its essential condition, is the horizon of globalization and the colonial attitude that supports it. At the same time, its underlying necessity is that of what Spivak calls the "native informant", whose only conceivable position is a radical outside that works as a blank space to be filled, that allows a global civilizing project as the necessary script for the technologies of power.[6]

2. Jameson

That radical discontinuity between inside and outside which is sometimes conceived as the first and the third world, reappears in a contemporary text seemingly very different from Kant's, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986) by Fredric Jameson. Here a formal structure similar to Kant's is used with a radically different purpose; it could, in fact, be characterized as its radical opposite. Despite being, arguably, one of the most attacked and repudiated articles in years, its influence is undeniable and, as we will see, its theoretical gestures have been replicated incessantly in some of the most influential works of Marxist Latin Americanism through the 80s and 90s. As in Kant, the other becomes a theoretical necessity in Jameson's argument, at least a very particular kind of other, the one that stays as such without endangering the space of the self, separated by what he calls a "fundamental break" (1986: 67).

Jameson's theory is built, like the Kantian narrative, on a radical discontinuity, an essential difference. But Kant's terms are meticulously reversed. The other, the "native informant", now has a crucial "epistemological privilege" over the self: he is the one who knows, because he is the one closer to the real, still untouched by the omnivorous presence of the symbolic in the first world.[7] Third world writers cannot avoid history, experience. They are condemned to the real in the Hegelian sense:

> The slave is called upon to labor for the master and to furnish him with all the material benefits befitting his supremacy. But this means that, in the end, only the slave knows what

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6 The creation of that void, that "empty continent", has been extensively studied by Eduardo Subirats in a book with that same title, *El continente vacío*. The manufacturing of the necessary otherness to fill that void has been something common to the three modern versions of a global project: the *Orbis Universalis Christianus*, the Enlightenment and the Global Market/Worldwide Democracy (Mignolo 2000: 280). All of them needed an other not only as a negative space against which to define the positivity of the self, but also as the potential pre-subject to be assimilated, the necessary outside needed by the expanding, imperial component of the project.

7 Moreiras traces the "epistemological privilege" to Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*. Moreiras' use of the term is not critical. He sees in that element the basis for the essential role that the place of "Lived Experience" has in the "Latin American Subaltern Studies" project. It is precisely that "unrepresentable immediacy" of the subaltern subject that gives the project its political strength, its closeness to materialist strategy (2001: 163-164). Moreiras finds in the other the point of conciliation of Derridian "différance" and Marxist materialism.

> reality and the resistance of matter really are; only the slave can attain some true materialistic consciousness of his situation; since it is precisely to that that he is condemned (Hegel, in Jameson 1986: 85).

It is in this context that Jameson develops the role of allegory as the necessary vehicle of third world expression, an allegory conditioned by a radical closeness to the real. It is, "conscious and overt; implies a radically different and objective relationship of politics to libidinal dynamics" (Jameson 1986: 80).

Jameson has in mind a conception of allegory very distant from the one that we find, for example, in Benjamin, which, in Idelber Avelar's words "is parallel and coextensive with a fundamental impossibility to represent the ultimate ground, a constitutive failure that installed the object of representation as lost object" (Avelar 1999: 15). For Jameson, allegory is the opposite of a failure, indeed it is the vehicle of, at leas, the possibility of objective representation, and, from there, the door to utopia. Allegory is then inextricably tied to the remains of the real, the remains of history. It is a promise of historical restoration or rather the restoration of history itself, and with it, materialist knowledge. Allegory is the form that nostalgia takes in Jameson's conception, the path to the recovery of a privileged "objective" perception of the real.

Paradoxically then, the third world intellectual becomes an epistemological model, a destiny, precisely because s/he remains untouched by the end of history. But that destiny follows a nostalgic script, one that is explicit, for example, in the narrative of a trip to Cuba:

> [...] in the third world situation the intellectual is always, in one way or another a political intellectual. No third-world lesson is more timely or more urgent for us today, among whom the very term "intellectual" has withered away, as though it were the name for an extinct species. Nowhere has the strangeness of this vacant position been brought home to me more strongly than on a recent trip to Cuba, when I had the occasion to visit a remarkable college-preparatory school on the outskirts of Havana. It is a matter of some shame for an American to witness the cultural curriculum in a socialist setting which also very much identifies itself with the third world. Over some three or four years, Cuban teenagers study poems of Homer, Dante's Inferno, the Spanish Theatrical classics, the great realist novels of the 19th century European tradition, and finally, contemporary Cuban revolutionary novels [...] But the semester's work I found most challenging was one explicitly devoted to the study of the role of the intellectual as such: the cultural intellectual who is also a political militant, the intellectual who produces both poetry and praxis [...] as this whole talk aims implicitly at suggesting a new conception of the humanities in American education today, it is appropriate to add that the study of the role of the intellectual as such ought to be a key component in any such proposals (1986: 74-75).

One might object to a couple of things here: the idealization of a Cuban education in which "enlightenment" is never placed into dialogue with its other side, "indoctrination"; or the fascination with a teleological Hegelian conception of history that treats "revolutionary" texts as the last stage of a historical evolution. But what I find more interesting here is the way in which the third world, the socialist third world in particular, becomes the model to fill a "vacant space", that of an "extinct species", the "organic intellectual" in the Gramscian tradition. The space of the other is the space of survival for something that the self has lost. It gives us the promise of a recovery, a restoration:

"What is lacking in the civilized west is found at the heart of 'uncivilized' exterior" [and that adjective should be read positively from Jameson's perspective] (Szeman 2001: 809).

This restoration has a second aspect in Jameson's text: the third world is also a model, since "privatization" has not yet spoiled the sense of community. There is no difference between subject and community. Politics are immanent to that subject while in the first world the hypertrophy of individual subjectivity has killed politics.[8]

We find, then, the same paradoxical structure that we saw in Kant. Jameson has in mind a liberatory project that is universal, "homogenizing" in Aijaz Ahmed's words, where "difference between the first world and the third is absolutized as otherness, but the enormous cultural heterogeneity of social formations within the so-called third world is submerged within a singular identity of 'experience'" (1992: 104). Hence, that universal project requires a fundamental break or discontinuity, a radical alterity imposed on another condemned to stay in that privileged closeness to the real. The possibility of utopia is projected onto the other after its failure in the space of the self. As Santiago Colás (1994: 7) or Eduardo Subirats (1994) remind us, the schema is familiar to those who study Latin America. Again and again, the New World was—and continues to be—the "blank space" that has solicited the writing of utopia.[9]

3. "Testimonio"

In fact, some of the most important currents of Latin Americanism in the last decade tend to replicate Jameson's nostalgic use of the place of the other as "epistemological privilege" and reserve of the real. Take, for example, the corpus of critical writing around the "anti-literary" aura of "testimonio".

Probably the most provocative analysis and criticism of that corpus has been developed by Neil Larsen, who is, paradoxically, one of the most orthodox among the Marxist

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8 If we consider Jameson's theoretical background, we can find still another reason for that "absolute" need of difference and discontinuity between the first and the third world. The role of "objective" knowledge and materialism at the chore of Marxist epistemology suffered in the 60s from the attack of Althusserian psychologism. The "contamination" of Marxism by psychoanalysis, in particular Lacanian thought, implied a radical crisis of identity. Althusser's willful confusion of the cultural and the material, superstructure and infrastructure, meant no less than the questioning of the basis of Marxism. For Jameson, the very identity of Marxism resets in the possibility of the real and within a first world where privatization has caused a hypertrophy of the symbolic, the theoretical need of that discontinuity which has to be projected onto the other, conceived precisely as that remainder of the real that allows a future and a destiny for materialist thought.

9 Jameson's conception of utopia is masterfully developed in "Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse" (1988). By the end of the article, it is clear that, for Jameson, utopia is nothing but the "utopia" of the recovery of history. Utopian discourse is an invocation for historical praxis, a prelude to a "scientific theory of society": "[...] Utopia's deepest subject, and the source of all that is most vibrantly political about it, is precisely our inability to conceive it, our incapacity to produce it as a vision, our failure to project the Other of what is, a failure that, as with fireworks dissolving back into the night sky, must once again leave us alone with *this* history. This is surely the ultimate sense in which 'Utopian discourse accompanies ideological discourse as its converse and designates the still empty place of a scientific theory of society'" (1988: 101). In this sense, Latin America and the third world in general, is conceived by Jameson precisely as the place of utopia, the place for the recovery of history.

thinkers dealing with Latin America and very close to Jameson's positions in many ways. In the introduction to his *Reading North by South*, Larsen characterizes theoretical writing about "testimonio" as the result of a double exercise in nostalgia. First, the aesthetic exercise: the anti-literary obsession of Beverley and others revives a modernist conception of the aesthetic in a moment of crisis. "Testimonio" is systematically opposed to a conception of the aesthetic that limits its boundaries to formalist priorities of high modernism. In Larsen's words:

> The elevation or counter canonization of the testimonial as post literary, post representational and the like, effectively exempts the reader as theorist from questioning his or her own dogmatically modernist preconceptions regarding the nature of the literary itself (1995: 10).

Paradoxically then, the "canonization" of "testimonio" implies the survival of the modernist artistic "aura" by means of its transposition to a kind of "anti-literary aura". In any case, what survives is precisely the fetishistic, aural conception of art. That nostalgic restoration has a second, political moment:

> The testimonial and testimonialista (or what is postulated in effect as this direct identity) certainly look like compensatory projections of the ex-new left reader's own post Vietnam experience of isolation and alienation, cultural but also fundamentally, political (Larsen 1995: 16).

Idelber Avelar links this compensatory attitude with the same revival of the real that we saw in Jameson:

> It is imperative to interrogate that triumphal rhetoric with which testimonio was surrounded during the 80s, especially in the United States and largely, I believe, as an imaginary compensation for the succession of defeats undergone by the left in recent decades. In circumstances of political isolation it is all too comforting to imagine that redemption is just around the corner, being announced by a subaltern voice transparently coincident with its experience and supplying the critical oppositional intellectual with the golden opportunity to satisfy a good conscience (1999: 67).

Along with that "epistemological advantage", Beverley (1993: 74, 80) and Yúdice (1989: 228-229) find in their readings of Menchú the same radical confusion between subject and community that Jameson postulated. Taking at face value Rigoberta's words "I don't own my life, I've decided to offer it to a cause" (1984: 270) and suspending any post-structuralist, post-Demanian suspicion that would probably appear in the consideration of any first world "autobiography", Beverley and Yúdice choose to read Rigoberta as an "accurate" and not symbolic or rhetorical account of her experience.[10] The author/narrator quite simply "is" his/her community, and the private is radically immersed in the political to the point of extinction. Indeed as Larsen points out, the

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[10] In this sense the famous Rigoberta Menchú controversy originated by David Stoll's book in which he questions the veracity of some parts of Menchú's narrative would be an artificial one: Stoll's position is nothing but a necessary supplement of Beverley's reading. It is only possible after Beverley gave priority to the "truth effect", the transparency of language/experience, as the privileged way to read the testimonio. The controversy has been extensively documented in Arturo Arias' volume (2001).

authorial function itself is dissolved in a total lack of distance between representation, personal experience and the experience of the community (1995: 9).[11] Representation, then, becomes pure practice. But, if the "epistemological privilege" belongs to the other, how can the European self share that practical dimension? Again, what we find in the other is a model for the future, a horizon and fetishized possibility of action. To preserve that possibility of practice, analogous to the role of the Gramscian intellectual that Jameson misses in the first world, the reader coming from that first world must keep his distance and respect the otherness of the other.[12] The reader has to acknowledge a limit, the existence of a secret that will not be revealed to him because of a radical discontinuity which makes sharing impossible. But what exactly is the difference between respecting the other and condemning him to his otherness or, one step further, producing that otherness? Despite his critical reading of this gesture, Larsen repeats a similar one at the very beginning of his book: "There is a certain sense in which the act of writing and reading about Latin America from a location outside it, has never required an apology" (1995: 2).

Why should it? What Larsen reveals here is the very same "epistemological privilege" we found in Jameson. Natives are better positioned to know because they are closer than we are to the real. But doesn't that gesture force the native to a locus of "objectivity"? He becomes responsible for the survival of a discontinuity—between the symbolic and the real, super and infrastructure—that is theoretically necessary and which is now projected as radical distance between self and other, subject and object of knowledge; a discontinuity that safely separates epistemology and hermeneutics. The dramatic questioning of that separation closes Aijaz Ahmed's chapter on Jameson: "Jameson's is not a first world text; mine is not a third world text. We are not each other's civilizational others (1992: 122). Although the proposal of a theoretical alternative exceeds the limits of this discussion, Walter Mignolo gives us an interesting idea of what such an alternative would be like in his concept of "border gnoseology":

> The goal is to erase the distinction between the knower and the known, between a "hybrid" object (the borderland as the known) and a "pure" disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject (the knower) uncontaminated by the border matters he or she describes. To change the terms of the conversation it is necessary to overcome the distinction between subject and object, on the one hand, and between epistemology and hermeneutics on the other (2000: 18).

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11 See also Beverley (1993: 76).

12 And that is exactly what Doris Sommer using Levinas (but also Spivak before her) theorizes in her new book about the aesthetics of resistance: "Secrets can cordon off curious and controlling readers from the vulnerable objects of their attention. Secrecy is a safeguard to freedom, Emmanuel Levinas argues, against Hegel who ridiculed it; it is the inviolable core of human subjectivity that makes interaction a matter of choice rather than rational necessity. 'Only starting from this secrecy is the pluralism of society possible'" (1999: 119). A similar idea can be found in Moreiras: "Going so far as to speak, in speaking to us, the very unsayability of what must remain unspoken is what makes Menchú's word an epistemologically privileged text in the tradition of Latin American testimonio. I would claim that the secret, in Menchú's text, stands for whatever cannot and should not be reabsorbed into the literary-representational system: the secret is the (secret) key to the real as unguarded possibility" (2001: 228). Yet another version of the same idea would be Glissant's conception of "opacity": "The opaque is not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and to be accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence" (1997: 191).

4. Wenders

The interest in the restoration of the real, the fascination for the "truth effect" in Latin America is by no means a gesture limited to academia. Marketing strategies addressed to first world tourists picture that same Havana visited by Jameson as a space of nostalgic recovery. In an essential article about photographic representations of present-day Cuba, Ana Dopico refers to a touristy image in which ruins and sentiments are presented in the foreground. Cuba becomes a historical theme park, a museum of the Cold War years and a paralyzed revolution. Cuba is now a "political fantasy", a "nostalgic commodity" where "Cuban subjects are constituted as consumable images by the gaze of desire or of pity, the gaze of solidarity, the gaze of the uncanny" (2002: 453). Slavoj Zizek has taken that reading one step further. The Cuban image is that of a "dialectics at a stand-still": "Do we not encounter in Cuba [...] a kind of negative messianic time: the social stand-still in which 'the end of time is near' and everybody is waiting for the miracle of what will happen when Castro dies, and socialism collapses?" (2002: 7).

Cuba is for Zizek the perfect example of the radical paradox that sustains what, borrowing Alain Badiou's concept, he calls the "passion for the Real", the twentieth century obsession for "delivering the thing itself":

> [This passion for the Real] culminates in its apparent opposite, in a theatrical spectacle [...] If, then, the passion for the Real ends up in the pure semblance of the spectacular effect of the Real, then, in an exact inversion, the 'postmodern' passion for the semblance ends up in a violent return to the passion for the Real (2002: 9-10).

That reciprocal paradox is at the very heart of what has probably been one of the most successful "representations" of Cuba by mass media in the last decade: Wim Wender's *Buena Vista Social Club* (1999).[13]

Wenders' documentary turns into a fascinating object of study if considered in the context of his artistic development. The German director is by no means a blockbuster specialist who would film a predictable advertisement for the American tourist industry, but rather one of the most respected arthouse directors alive, an essential name in the New German Cinema movement that includes Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Margarethe von Trotta and others. Alongside his movies, Wenders has a long list of theoretical articles that reveal a very particular approach to cinematic principles. BVSC is not a radical departure from Wenders' interests; rather, it establishes a fascinating dialogue with his previous films and theoretical writings. If there is a constant obsession in his work, it is precisely the relationship between cinema and the "truth effect", the "ethical

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[13] Some of its after-effects could also be considered along these lines, for example Schnabel's *Before Night Falls* (2000). Schnabel, one of the most important "stars" of the visual arts in the 80s shot this film after his first feature, *Basquiat* (1996), in which he portrayed the tragic life of another great contemporary painter unable to survive his stardom, his becoming-symbol. It would be interesting to develop a parallel reading of Basquiat and Reinaldo Arenas in these films as elegiac figures of a "real life" unable to survive in oppressive "symbolic" systems (either that of the market or Castro's Cuba); which is precisely the world in which Schnabel has thrived.

responsibility" to "present" rather than "represent" reality. Wenders grew up in a post-war German society that, according to him, had lost the faith in its own images. All his work can be read as an attempt to recover that faith. In response to the question "Why do you make films?" Wenders once answered: "[Balázs, one of the fathers of film theory,] talks about the ability (and the responsibility) of cinema 'to show things as they are'. And he says cinema can 'rescue the existence of things'. That's precisely it" (Graf 2002: 4). It is not that BVSC is an exercise in restoration; it also, and perhaps mainly, shows that for Wenders, the very meaning of cinema is restoration, the recovery of a reality whose truth has somehow been lost.

Things turn more complicated when Wenders feels disappointed by the loss of reality that he perceives when traveling through the USA and Japan. While shooting *Paris, Texas* or *Tokyo-Ga*, two of his masterpieces, he cannot but portray a sense of loss and nostalgia. But the reason why those geographies do not feel real anymore is because they do not look like John Ford's or Yasujiro Ozu's movies. They have lost the essence that the old masters knew how to freeze.

Hence Wenders' films exist somewhere between the faithful depiction of reality and its nostalgic re-production. His radical refusal of history, of the possibility of a diachronic development rather than a necessary progressive dissolution of "reality" is parallel to his marginalization of the story, the narrative dimension that according to him betrays the truth of images. Film's purpose is never to "tell" but rather to "show" (Graf 2002: 4).

The radical contradictions that sustain Wenders' extraordinary career are never more apparent than in BVSC. When he travels to Cuba his disposition is analogous to what we saw in Jameson. If the American critic sees in the third world the possibility of recovering a certain proximity to the real and the ideal of the organic intellectual who was linked to it, and if Jameson's Havana school gives an image of the restoration of utopia, Wenders too tries to fill a void, and to save the truth of images from extinction.

The documentary is explicitly centered in an exercise of restoration. Ry Cooder travels to Cuba in search of the authentic, in this case, "authentic" Cuban music. His role, in this sense, is similar to that of other characters in Wenders' movies, for example the sound technician in *Lisbon Story* who anxiously records the "real sounds" of the city while waiting for a film crew that never arrives. Nevertheless, from the first shots of the film, that exercise of restoration is presented, in a perfect illustration of Zizek's idea, as an ironic spectacle of itself. Images of Compay Segundo (one of the musicians) guiding the film crew in their search (or rather pretending—in a very explicit way—to do it), are intermingled with shots of a theatre in Amsterdam, where the (European) public is waiting for the musicians to appear.[14]

What Cooder finds, with the "help" of Compay, or maybe what he *wants* to find, are ruins. The "Buena Vista Social Club" does not exist anymore, but its traces remain in the wrinkled faces and the hyper-expressive voices of half-forgotten masters. Cooder and

[14] The film was shot roughly two years after Ry Cooder's trip to Havana. The documentary is then, at least partially, a fictional one. The musicians are "acting" an encounter that happened months before. In the case of Compay, that "acting" is full of "choteo" cubano. He quite often "mocks" his own acting, giving the crew what they ask for in a very ironic and explicit way. The same ironic game is explicit in the very means chosen by Wenders to shoot the "documentary". He uses digital video and systematically enhances the colors to give a brighter image of Cuba.

Wenders are not interested in a present contaminated by American pop music and blasting rap in the streets; what they are after is a fetishized past that can turn history into present. From thereon in, one cannot distinguish restoration from the manufacturing of authenticity. The other is simultaneously represented and produced, and the "performative" aspect of the film is there for anyone to see. Tourist Cuba lives off the compulsive imitation of its own authenticity. Ninety-year-old musicians are beginning to proliferate not only in Cuba but also on the international concert circuit.

The Cuban image becomes the locus of a transhistorical experience where past and present come together, where old sepia postcards suddenly come to "life" with all its aura. But of course that aura is now nothing but the trace, the burn of technology on the body and the image of the other.

But something more is restored than the past image of truth. If Kant saw in affect vs. reason one of the essential components of the "raw man" vs. the "civilized man", if Jameson finds in the native a reserve of passion, a "passion for change and social representation"[15], it is no coincidence that Ry Cooder privileges hyper-expressive voices and genres. There is a reason why Wenders portrays the apotheosis of the musicians in the concert given at the Carnegie Hall in New York as a radical invasion by affect of the cold and distant space of the Hall usually dedicated to classical music. Suddenly the blacks and whites of the classical orchestra are substituted by the flashy touches of color in the clothes worn by the Cuban musicians. Suddenly the strictly codified behavior of the classical stage is forgotten behind the spontaneous warmth and tears, and a sense of family intimacy—the intimacy promised by Ibrahim Ferrer, one of the musicians, after inviting the camera and the spectator behind it into his most private space, his home: "Quisiera que conocieran lo que soy, como soy". A promise of real intimacy is also present in the tourist brochures analyzed by Ana Dopico: "Viajar a Cuba no es soñar, aunque lo parece [...] sino ir derecho a un mundo de contrastes, emplazado en una naturaleza única y maravillosa. Es conocer a gente simpática, sus anhelos y realidades. No es imaginar (2002: 462).

The other's presence, then, is identified as an invasion of affect, not an imaginary but a real one. But if that affect is, in the film, essentially a product of consumption, in Jameson (and Vattimo) it is nothing less than a path for political agency. The other is conceived as a supplement that provides what is missing in the self, a passion made possible, in the third world, by closeness to the real, and denied to the first world by the omnipresence of simulation and privatization. The problem is, of course, that passion now becomes either an economic or an intellectual commodity, and in any case it is integrated into the dynamics of commodity fetishism, the system of value production driven by the market.

Authenticity and affect become the places of their own simulation. They are no longer "discovered" but rather produced, either by the nostalgic first world citizen trying to experience again what he has lost or by the third world citizen, giving to the tourist what he asks for in return for survival.

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[15] Interestingly the same fascination with third world passion (which includes Spain as a European margin never really integrated in the processes of modernity) reappears in the opposite extreme of the political spectrum, Gianni Vattimo's postmodernism. In his prologue to the Spanish edition of his *Transparent Society*, Vattimo finds in Latin passion the antidote to "Weberian" rationalization and the protestant ascetic ethics of capitalism (1990: 68).

5. Margolles

The extreme consequences of that production of otherness as a reserve of affect and of the real are illustrated in the work of Teresa Margolles, one of the most important and acclaimed young Latin American artists working today. All her work uses real human remains to invite radical, gut reactions in spectators confronted with the paradigmatic locus of the real, the corpse. A good example of her work is a piece entitled "Burial" (from 1999, the same year as BVSC): behind the appearance of a minimal cement block, what we "really" have is the atrocious proximity of a stillborn child. Our position as spectators is at once conditioned by the certainty of the presence of the Real and its simultaneous symbolization as Real.

Margolles became famous some years ago on the American art scene thanks to the exhibition of a piece in ACE, one of the most prestigious Art galleries in Los Angeles. Under the title "Tongue" she displayed a real, forensically preserved, pierced tongue belonging to a Mexican youth who had died of an overdose. In front of the piece, a short narrative explained that she had bought the tongue from the teenager's mother in exchange for the expenses of the burial. Margolles takes the "truth effect" that Beverley finds in testimonio to its unbearable extreme. What the visitor to the gallery contemplates is the radically preserved reality of the corpse turned into auratic, artistic fetishism.[16]

The media response to these pieces and to Margolles' work in general makes constant reference to a certain kind of "exemplarity". Here are just two examples, one from a PAC [Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo] catalogue, the other one from a review article that appeared in *La Reforma*, one of the leading Mexican newspapers:

> Were one to look for a truly specific kind of art practice coming from the so-called third world, Margolles would be a perfect example.[17]

> Few times when writing about an exhibition, one has the sensation of witnessing a work destined to be a reference. Among other things it points to the level of sophistication reached by contemporary artistic practice in Mexico City. It attempts to intervene in a context highly charged both socially and politically through works that, at the same time, establish a dialogue and question the frontiers of art in a global context.[18]

But what is Margolles's work really "referring" to? What is the content of its "referentiality"? Isn't this the other side of the exemplarity that Jameson and Vattimo find in

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16 Margolles' work brings up very different references in Mexico or Spain on the one hand and in USA on the other. While in a catholic context the tradition of "ex-votos" and "reliquias" is an immediate reference that suggests a social use of religious imagery, in USA the immediate antecedent would be the Body Art developed in the 60's and 70's (and its aftermath art dealing with AIDS in the 80's) in which masochistic attitudes were used as a sort of shock therapy applied to the self in opposition to the invasion (or the ignorance) of the private by the "society of spectacle" (of course all those references would overlap for a good part of the public in every place). To develop all these references falls beyond the limits of the present text.

17 *Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo*. In: <http://pac.org.mx/slg/8/source/2.html> (7/2005).

18 Medina, Cuauhtémoc: "Respirando Espíritus." In: *La Reforma*. <http://www.reforma.com/editoriales/articulo/168662/default.htm> (7/2005).

the third world? The other is able to negotiate a privileged placement in the global market as long as it presents itself as the "Real thing", preferably if that surplus of reality is presented as the synchronic juxtaposition of the signifier and the referent of the other's radical violence, the perfect antidote to post-structuralist fluctuations and to the ubiquity of the symbolic. But of course, the ultimate subversion of Margolles' work is that the real is presented precisely as an obscene signifier of itself or rather its absence, its radical confusion with the symbolic. The object of her pieces is located not in the real itself but in the libidinal economy of the fascinated gaze. We want to *see*. But contemplating the excess of the real is nothing but the strategy chosen by blindness. This dynamic has been masterfully described by Slavoj Zizek:

> [...] we should abandon the standard metaphorics of the Real as the terrifying thing that is impossible to confront face to face, as the ultimate Real concealed beneath the layers of imaginary and/or symbolic veils: the very idea that, beneath the deceptive appearances, there lies hidden some ultimate Real Thing too horrible for us to look at directly, is the ultimate appearance—this Real thing is a fantasmatic specter whose presence guarantees the consistency of our symbolic edifice, thus enabling us to avoid confronting its constitutive inconsistency ('antagonism'). Take Nazi ideology: the Jew as its Real is a specter evoked in order to conceal social antagonism—that is, the figure of the Jew enables us to perceive social totality as an organic Whole (2002: 31-32).

Isn't this the place sometimes reserved for the colonial other and its difference? Isn't this radical outside of the real, this fantasmatic specter that gives homogeneity to "our" symbolic space and finally "preserves" the security of its (artistic, political) frontiers?

A piece presented by Margolles at the P.S.1 in New York takes us one step further. In the context of a collective exhibition entitled "Mexico City: An Exhibition About the Exchange Rate of Bodies and Values", Margolles is represented by "Vaporization". The work consists of an empty looking room in which the spectator is immersed in a diffused light and a misty environment of vaporized water. When we read the corresponding explanation, we realize that the foggy mist is composed of water used to wash corpses in the Mexico City Morgue, of course conveniently disinfected to avoid any kind of contagion. This is as far as we can get to becoming the other. It impregnates our clothes, we breathe and internalize it but, still, the limits of consumption are safe. Its death is not going to touch us. This is a pure simulation of "sharing", but it could work as the deictic of another real "sharing", that in which we cannot separate the other from ourselves and vice versa, that in which the horror of the "real" is not the monopoly of the other. It is in this sense that Zizek puts into dialogue the representations of death in the space of the other (Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq) marked by the explicit, the gruesome and those in the space of the self (How many corpses did we see on 9/11?) (2002: 13). For Zizek, as for Alain Badiou, the ethical position is precisely the one that makes no distinctions, the one that asks not how could it happen here, but quite simply how could it happen anywhere? The only space for thought and moral responsibility is a global space. The respect for difference implies its contextualization in a global mechanism, and constant interaction with it.

In Margolles' pieces, the other is not represented but rather presented as mutilated body. The other becomes the real, but at the same time that reality is presented as its own unbearable aura, as its infamous symbolization. Margolles' brutal shock therapy to "civilized" ethics for the sake of art is the ultimate postmodern gesture but also its criticism.

The ethical responsibility for the other implies the need to read Margolles precisely not as a work of art,[19] in a symmetrical gesture to that of Stockhausen who scandalously asserted that 9/11 should be read as the ultimate work of art.[20] Responsibility begins in dreams, in the symbolic. To accept Jameson's idea of closeness to the real is to maintain, dangerously, that status of difference and the frontiers of art, and to believe in a "fundamental break" between the real and the symbolic. In that scenario the other does not have the "epistemological privilege" of closeness to the material world, but rather becomes the real itself for the intellectual or aesthetic "enjoyment" of western eyes. The silent and atrocious proximity of unbearable injustice is wrapped distantly and comfortably in the artistic aura. Reality now has a place in museums.

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[19] To read it only as such would be not only partial but also irresponsible. Her work would be nothing but a reification/fetishization of protest, which indeed is its most immediate danger.

[20] Zizek interprets Stockhausen's gesture referring to 9/11 as the affirmation of the ultimate "spectacle" that reveals our "reality" as submitted to a dominant fiction and not as the "reality shock" that marks the end of an "age of irony" (2002: 11). The terrorist attack would then be nothing but the confirmation of the ubiquity of the symbolic, a trace of the final erasure of the real.

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