

**HOOKERS, HUSTLERS AND GRINGOS IN GLOBAL BRAZIL:  
The Transnational Political Economy and Cultural Politics of Violence, Desire and  
Suffering in the Streets of Salvador da Bahia.**



*Also including*

**THE GHOSTS OF EMPIRE  
An Ethnographic Novel**

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Submitted by Samuel Paul Louis Veissière to the faculty of Graduate Studies at  
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Department of Integrated Studies in Education

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Cover photograph by the author

*Para meu querido filho Johann Tristan Aaron Pacheco-Veissière*



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### Abstract

This doctoral dissertation is an experimental ethnographic investigation of the political consciousness and radical modes of livelihoods of marginalized “street” populations in a postcolonial Latin-American city, and of their connections with the transnational flows of capital, goods, peoples, and symbols of Global Capitalism.

Beginning in the streets of Salvador da Bahia in this place I call “Global Brazil”, this inquiry presents a focal lens through which to examine how the structural and cultural forces of Late-Capitalism (Jameson, 1994) in a globalized world and the legacy of colonialism play out at the level of local and transnational actors’ lived experiences (that is, for example, how these forces define, ‘value’, shape, hurt, confine, and displace bodies; but also how bodies dodge these forces, use these forces, reinvent themselves, or strategically perform their colonizer/colonized identities in a search for agency) and focuses, among other salient aspects, on the connections, dependencies, exploitation, violence, and desire between “street children”, subaltern women, transnational prostitutes, (sex)tourists, sexpatriates (Seabrook, 1996) and other foreign men and women constructed as “gringo/as” in the context of Global Brazil.

Written as a collage between contemporary social, cultural, and political theory and an experimental ethnographic novel (Hecht, 2006), this project explores, or at best poses certain questions about contemporary forms of domination, survival, and resistance while hoping to shed light on undertheorized aspects of our globalized late-capitalist era by investigating the perspectives of local social actors on the structural, cultural and transnational forces in which their radical livelihoods are embedded.

Finally, as a work of political pedagogy, this investigation is also fundamentally preoccupied with the role of grassroots politics, research, ethnography, and global social actors—such as the author and other ‘academics’— who occupy positions of social, economic, political, and symbolic power, in collaborating with other segments of civil societies to work toward equitable alternatives to contemporary social suffering.

Intertwined with the many faces, voices and stories of this ethnography, thus, readers will encounter the voice, eyes, body, experience, reflections, interrogations, doubts, pains, fears, desire, violence, hopes, defeats, desperations, and resistance of the author, who, as an individual ‘articulated’ (Nelson, 1999) as white, male, gringo, intellectual, transcultural, geopolitically mobile, ethnographer, and flâneur in the context of this story, constitutes a character deeply implicated in the global flows and forces that are the object of this study.

## Resumé

Cette dissertation de doctorat est une enquête ethnographique expérimentale sur la conscience politique et les modes de vies radicaux des populations marginalisées des « rues » dans une ville latino-américaine postcoloniale, et de leurs connexions avec les flux transnationaux de capital, marchandises, peuples, et symboles du capitalisme global.

Commençant dans les rues de Salvador da Bahia dans cet endroit que j'appelle « le Brésil global », cette enquête présente un microcosme des forces structurales et culturelles du Capitalisme Tardif (Jameson, 1994) dans un monde globalisé et examine l'héritage du colonialisme au niveau de l'expérience vécue d'acteurs locaux et transnationaux (c'est-à-dire, par exemple, comment ces forces définissent, valorisent, forment, mutilent, confinent, et déplacent des corps ; mais également comment les corps esquivent ces forces, emploient ces forces, se réinventent, ou performant stratégiquement leur identités de colonisateur ou de colonisées. Cette étude porte, entre autres aspects saillants, sur les connexions, dépendances, exploitation, violence, et désir entre les « enfants des rues », les femmes subordonnées, les prostituées transnationales, les touristes (sexuels), les sexpatries (Seabrook, 1996) et d'autres hommes et femmes étrangers construits en tant que « gringo/as » dans le contexte de cette enquête.

Écrit comme collage entre la théorie sociale contemporaine, la théorie culturelle et politique et un roman ethnographique expérimental (Hecht, 2006), ce projet explore, ou, au mieux, pose certaines questions sur les formes contemporaines de domination, de survie, et de résistance tout en espérant enquêter sur des aspects peu-compris de notre ère globalisée du capitalisme tardif en se penchant sur les perspectives des acteurs sociaux locaux sur les forces structurales, culturelles et transnationales dans lesquelles leurs vies radicales sont imbriquées. En conclusion, comme travail de pédagogie politique, cette recherche est également fondamentalement préoccupée par le rôle de la « grassroots politics », de la recherche, de l'ethnographie, et des acteurs sociaux globaux qui occupent des positions de puissance sociale, économique, politique, et symbolique, dans la collaboration avec d'autres segments des sociétés civiles à travailler vers des solutions de équitables à la douleur sociale contemporaine.

Entrelacées avec les nombreux visages, voix et histoires de cette ethnographie, ainsi, les lecteurs rencontreront la voix, les yeux, le corps, l'expérience, les réflexions, les interrogations, les doutes, les douleurs, les craintes, le désir, la violence, les espoirs, les défaites, les desespoirs et la résistance de l'auteur, qui, comme un individuel 'articulé' (Nelson, 1999) comme blanc, le mâle, gringo, intellectuel, transculturel, géopolitiquement mobile, ethnographe, et flâneur dans le contexte de cette histoire, constitue un caractère profondément impliqué dans les flux et forces mondiaux qui sont l'objet de cette étude.

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Acknowledgement sections are a nightmare for the phenomenologically-minded writer. I cannot, not possibly, not ever, do justice to all the individuals, friends, foes, places, real-life, literary and revolutionary mentors, moments, and chance encounters that have influenced me, the way I “do research”, the way I see the world and want to change the world, and how I try to tie it all in together through what I am and what I do.

Acknowledgement sections are also a nightmare for critically-minded individuals who believe that hierarchies are arbitrary and oppressive, and for whom part of the ritual dictates that they should produce a (sycophantic) vertical-hierarchical list of the names and power-figures that are tied to the writing process and product. I wish there was a way, or the time, the textual space, or energy to write something special for all of you, and I wish there was a way to make a *truly* arbitrary list of names that does not start with *above all* and end with *below all*.

Acknowledgements sections are never called “apologies sections”, but they typically contain—usually sandwiched somewhere in the end before the last *below alls*—apologies to the author’s “loved ones” for the long hours at their desk behind closed doors, the trips abroad, the conferences, the stress, the choice of having pursued further studies and borrowed more money in the face of economic hardship, or their general absence and unavailability.

Ethnographers' apologies are characteristically more creative, to say the least. Thus, somewhere near the end of the 4-page acknowledgement section of Philippe Bourgois' *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, one can read:

Finally, I want to thank my family. I will always be grateful to Charo Chacón-Méndez for immigrating from Costa Rica directly to [Harlem's] El Barrio, where we were married at the very beginning of this research project. Her help was invaluable during our residence in the neighborhood. I apologize for imposing so much anxiety on her when I regularly stayed out all night on the streets, and in crackhouses, for so many years. I hope that it is not one of the reasons we are no longer together. If it is, I regret it profoundly (Bourgois, 2003, pxv)

After this brief passage, Bourgois, who won the Margaret Mead Award for Applied Anthropology for his book (which also launched his successful career as a "public intellectual"), goes on to describe the courageous struggle of his son, born, (partly) raised, adapted, and diagnosed-with-cerebral-palsy-without-medical-insurance in New York's *El Barrio*. Bourgois doesn't seem or seek to redeem himself in his short apology section, but merely—courageously perhaps—poses and exposes the problem of his exploitation of social and individual suffering, including his family's, and of the suffering that he himself has inflicted on others during "his" research. My point here is not to denounce Philippe Bourgois for his exploitation of misery nor to undermine his work, which, in my view, remains an inspiring masterpiece in the depathologization and decriminalization of the most extreme forms of social suffering, and, "methodologically" and politically, a courageous attempt (because it can only be an attempt) to face one's social, civic, and global responsibilities, and "reconnect" with the "human consequences" of one's position of power in the world system. Rather, I wish to express my admiration and gratitude to Philippe Bourgois for his politically inspiring work, and for giving me



the courage to try to pose and expose (without pretending to resolve) the problem of my own position of power in the world system, which, here, might begin with the human misery I have exploited in this study. As Tobias Hecht (whose works also gave me strength and inspiration) reminds us, writing about the marginalized street populations of urban Brazil whom we both studied and exploited, “suffering is what keeps many foreign visitors employed”. Denouncing what he saw as “street children tourism”, he noted that ethnographic research often did nothing more than translate the pain of the powerless into “texts” that benefited above all the researchers. Hecht also won the Margaret Mead Award for his study of street children in Northeast Brazil, but, in what I imagine to be a tortured search for the ethical, shied away from public and academic life.

Here then, without believing in the arbitrary rhetorical device of a “first and foremost”, without pretending that an apology will somehow undo the violence of what I have done, or without seeking redemption behind hollow “thank yous”, I wish to acknowledge the suffering of the real women and men I knew in Brazil (or have known and used elsewhere), but whose lives I cannot pretend to have shared (let alone saved), who are still dying in the streets of Salvador and renting their fatigued bodies to dying gringos in seedy Brazilian motels, German truck-stops and Montreal condos, and whose suffering has provided the “raw material” for a thesis, novel, and research process from which I emerge wrapped in the pompous and mostly violent symbolic halo of a “doctorate”. That is all I can say about this.

Echoing the “family politics” of Bourgois’ research journey, and, I suspect, that of many white male postcolonial ethnographers, I wish to thank my loving partner Fabiana Antas Costa for immigrating straight from Salvador da Bahia to a trailer in the

frozen taiga of Northern Manitoba. I also wish to apologize to her for the studies in the beautiful career of social work that she interrupted to follow my selfish debt-ridden career, and for the many nights she spent scared, pregnant and alone while I was out drinking with hookers, hustlers, and gringos in the global streets of Salvador. I thank her for her love, touch, interest, care, *carinho*, and for bringing me back to life.

I apologize to my beautiful, intelligent, and remarkably sensitive son Johann for not being with him now, for working so much when we still lived together, for making the hard choice of no longer living together, and for not being able to read and sing to him every night anymore. Johann is in my flesh in everything I do, and I couldn't have found the strength to go on in my life and research without him, his intelligence, his resilience, his sensitivity, his sense of humour, his *carinho*, and the sweet scent of his sweaty hair. I will never heal from the pain of his absence. I thank him for giving so much meaning to my life, and apologize for not having fulfilled my promise to his mother, who also supported me in many ways and at many stages of my "journey".

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I've always felt that the *real* meaningful learning that takes place "in Universities" (beyond all the lone reading and writing, the solitary insomniac theory echolalia, and the electrically exciting stuff of ethnography) is the one that takes place

beyond and between classes, over coffee, beer, wine, or walks up the Mont Royal mountain with other passionate grad students. I am therefore eternally grateful for the discussions, critiques and dialogues about our tortured visions with friends and colleagues at the DISE, the Department of Anthropology, and beyond: The “postcolonial”-crew of the Master’s years, where it all began: Valerie Kwai-pun, Rebecca Houwer, Ruweida Shakhshir and Teresa Dejemek; the Research for Social Change-people: Carmen Lavoie, Sean Mark, Allison Gonsalves, Amy Stuart, and Baijayanta Mukhopadhyay; The “Dip and Development”-guys: Blane Harvey and Jonathan Langdon, and everybody at the center for the study of Society, Technology, and Development (STandD), most especially Carolina Pineda, for extending the first hand into the spaces of Anthropology, for all the late-night emails, and the aimless walks, and the inspiring Takeshi Uesugi, gleaner of silences.

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I do not thank the cardiologists, psychiatrists, and all the other MDs (and all the slightly more human people) who only want to talk about serotonin, who have no patience and compassion, and who cannot see what the postcolonial nervous system is doing to us.

I feel that clichés can be appropriate at times, because they often speak to realities and emotions that are probably universal, and thus, like literature and the other forms of art through which they are expressed, remind us of what it is that makes us human. Thus, I end this section with an appropriate cliché:

There will always be a special place in my heart for Tracy B., and for her touch and care that began the process of giving me a new life.

I would not have written a word without her.

And I thank my son Mateus Ernesto Emiliano Antas-Veissière, who was born with this project, for bringing life, meaning, love and beauty in the midst of so much chaos.

*Foreword/Disclaimer*

As the rather winding name of the doctoral degree for which this thesis/novel was written indicates—Joint *Ad Personam* degree in International Development Education and Cultural Anthropology—the dissertation that follows is an interdisciplinary work that draws upon a wide array of theories and methods from across the social sciences and humanities. While this research project is “bureaucratically” situated between two academic departments—the rather nebulous ‘Culture and Values’ section of the department of Integrated Studies in Education on the one hand, and that of Anthropology on the other<sup>1</sup>—it does not comply, in the strict sense of the term, to the bounded disciplined practices of either field (if “Education” can be said to possess such ‘rules’ at all...). As most interdisciplinary works situated between the institutional cracks of two departments, this thesis may cause scholars comfortably installed within the epistemological and methodological walls of their respective disciplines to proclaim that “this is not a work of Anthropology”, or that “it does not have anything to do with “Education””.

This short foreword, thus, attempts to address these worries before they are voiced by concerned guardians of their disciplines. Here, then, I will briefly explain how my human and political concerns, and my subsequent research areas are situated at the intersection of these two fields of knowledge and praxis that have been constituted as “Anthropology” and “Education” in our universities.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 and 2 for more details on “The Politics of Postcolonial Research and Praxis in Education and Anthropology”

Most Faculties of Education (formerly Teacher's Colleges) primarily cater to undergraduate populations studying to become teachers. The overall "function" of Faculties of Educations, and to a broader extent, of the politico-ideological apparatus of formal schooling, as we have learned from Bourdieu's insights (1977), is to reproduce existing social orders by transmitting and legitimizing dominant forms of knowledge and cultural capital. Many theorists and graduate students in "Education", however—that is, scholars in the field and faculties of education, but who are most often not teachers themselves—working in the tradition of Critical Pedagogy (stemming from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) have long sought to reconcile the visions of critical theory and cultural studies with teacher education in order to produce critical agents and "cultural workers" who do not simply reinforce hegemony, but actively fight against it while working toward the equitable transformation of their societies.

As a result, the growing field of Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Studies in Education, whose graduate programs are often situated in (or relegated to) Faculties of Education, is concerned with the questions of hegemony, culture, and agency that are also examined in Anthropology, Sociology, and Political Science, but has typically drawn scholars who are interested in "applied" social sciences; that is, individuals concerned with praxis, and ways to use the insights of critical social sciences to contribute to the transformation of the world. In this critical tradition in Education, however, many scholars preoccupied with social or cultural transformation are not directly concerned with schooling, but with the many other informal structures in which knowledge and identities are constructed and change takes place. Thus, my colleagues at McGill's Department of Culture and Values in Education, and the Paulo Freire Institute for Critical



Pedagogy have studied such diverse phenomena as the discourse of “development” in Africa, the patriarchal construction of “scientific identities”, learning in struggle through mining displacement, or the collective trauma of child soldiers...

The emerging field of “International Development Education” (Kapoor & Abdi, in press), in turn, unlike the statistically and sociologically-minded discipline of Comparative and International Education, draws upon the visions of Critical Pedagogy, Popular Education (Kapoor, 2004), New Social Movements Theory (Melucci, 1996), and Post-Development scholarship (Fergusson, 1991; Escobar, 1995) to conscientize and mobilize subaltern populations at ground-level, and work toward meaningful change and emancipation outside the formal structures of education (schooling) and development (the State, IFIs). As a critical area of inquiry and practice dedicated to meaningful historically, culturally, environmentally, and individually relevant alternatives to contemporary neocolonial suffering grounded in local visions and priorities, Post/International Development Education most often shies away from proposing universal and decontextualized “models” of alternative development. Ironically, then, scholars from this “radical” branch of “applied” social science, all too aware of their problematic position as intellectuals and outsiders in the communities they seek to empower, often shy away from imposing their own visions through “direct” activism altogether, and merely seek to immerse themselves in the context of their inquiry to document local visions and alternatives, and act as a “linkage” between communities, social movements, and other segments of civil society and government/development bodies. The task of a critical post-development community or popular educator, therefore, closely resembles that of a critically-minded “public” anthropologist.

While I had initially begun my “career” as a researcher working as a sociologist and anthropologist of cultural identity, hegemony and emancipation through ethnographic studies of *schooling*, my personal disillusion with the rigid apparatus of schooling and my desire to work at ground-level alongside education’s, globalization’s and “development’s” discarded entities brought me to Post-Development Education, and hence, closer to the practice of Anthropology “in the strict sense of the term”.

This ethnographic inquiry, which I had originally intended to culminate in a participatory action research project that would empower the marginalized “street populations” of Salvador da Bahia, ended up being almost strictly ethnographic (if somewhat experimentally). This was caused partly by an awareness of the disconnectedness of the visions of change and identities I would have been imposing on “my” research subjects, but also by a cautious skepticism about the hegemonization of social movements by rigid state apparatuses and “disconnected” foreign NGOs, that drew me to the informal spaces of the criminalized streets to probe for *spontaneous* acts of agency and resistance to the structural and symbolic forces of global capitalism. For this reason, most of the theoretical, historical and methodological references in this thesis pertain to varying fields of Anthropology (Anthropology of Brazil, of Globalization, of the Body, of Suffering, of Space and Place, etc..), which, in the end, may leave one to wonder how this project is at all connected to “Education”. Anticipating such a query, thus, I will reiterate that this investigation is *fundamentally* concerned with Education in the sense that it is a desperate search for the possibility of *agency*, of *resistance* to the forces of neocolonialism, and of *meaningful social change*. While it does not and cannot propose “models” of revolutionary social change, or pretend to have orchestrated

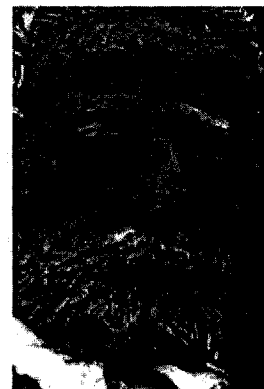
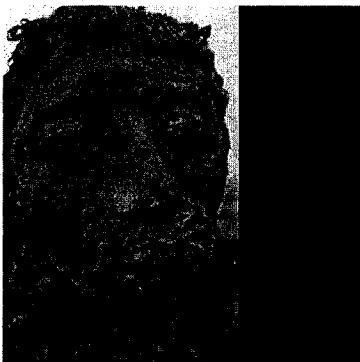
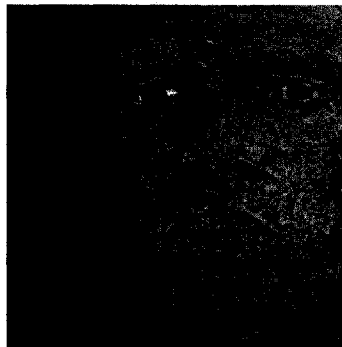
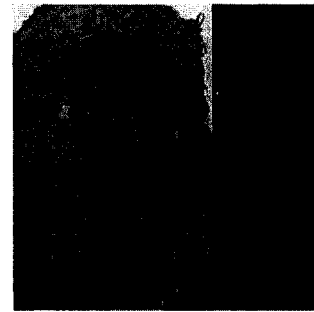
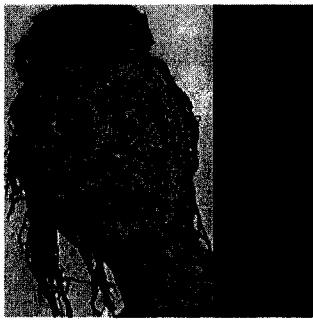
meaningful social change over the course of a year in the field, this project should be read as a case-study on how humans devise survival strategies in the face of considerable adversity, and how, in the exponentially interconnecting world of Late Capitalism, subaltern social actors facing transnational forms of adversity seek transnational strategies and channels of agency. This focus on human strategies, thus, on human learning, on learning in the streets and learning from suffering, is, I strongly believe, pedagogical. In the problem-posing tradition of Critical Pedagogy, therefore, this work of experimental and pedagogical ethnography poses certain questions, poses them in new lights, poses new questions, and even more questions, but it does not and cannot propose easy and universal “answers” to these questions.

Whatever change will result from this project—and the years of reading, talking, thinking, teaching, traveling, probing, feeling, suffering, reflecting, fighting, and living during this project have certainly *changed me*—will occur from the reflections and questioning it will trigger in those who read it, and who dare to feel the pain that bleeds through these pages.

## CHAPTER I

*At the Heart (of Darkness) of the (Ethnographic) Matter*

*Toward an Anatomy of the Postcolonial Nervous System*



## **The Esthetics (and Co-optation) of Suffering**

Black & White photographs by Sebastião Salgado

Earth and Clay sculptures by Ousmane Sow

*Lone faces of earth and clay screaming in crowds of plastic: Modernity's dis/membered body.*

I collided with the man's body late one morning. He was burning under the white sun against a concrete wall, on a busy avenue that winds away from the seafront in the center of Salvador da Bahia. It was still early in the year. The wave of warm carbon-monoxide spring had already begun to wash over the northern hemisphere. In this southern equatorial zone that had never seen frosty mornings and yellowing leaves, foreign-owned department stores with headquarters in the northern hemisphere were already dumping their surplus stock from last years' autumn fashion. Caucasoid plastic mannequins in the apparel store windows of climate-controlled and heavily guarded shopping malls had been dressed with coats, hats and gloves of made-in-China acrylic wool™ that most of the people who walked by would never wear.

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he man was screaming at ghosts that I couldn't see, and hadn't looked up at me or interrupted his screams when I'd sent him crashing against the wall. I was running to the foreign-owned department store, which had been ordered to close its Plexiglas® gates every Sunday afternoon. This new law was a result of the recent victory of local workers' unions in collaboration with the new socialist State and city governments, whose inauguration I had decadently celebrated in the streets among the ecstatic crowds earlier that year. I was trying to get to the store before it

closed its gates to buy Superglue and a pack of nails that I would hammer into broken chairs consumed by termites in the apartment I was about to return to its landlady/

Running under the white sun, I'd been thinking about the shards of broken chairs that had to be fixed and returned soon, and the deliria I was bleeding into the electronic pages of the doctoral dissertation that had to be finished and submitted soon.

The man's body had been propelled against the wall at the contact of my body, but the magical entity to which modern speech refers through the use of the pronoun "he"—a magical entity somehow distinct from the mere flesh of his *body*—hadn't been altered at all by the collision of our flesh; indeed, he hadn't appeared to have *seen* me, nor to have *felt* me.

He was wearing the generic sooty grey blazer that can be seen on the shoulders of lone homeless men the globalized world over. His thick and rough hands, with the black mark of urban filth permanently encrusted under his long yellow nails and in the deep creases of his leathery skin, were wrapped in shredded cotton bands stained with mud and drying blood. The makeshift cart with punctured bicycle tires in which he wheeled around his livelihood of recycled metals, cardboards and plastic lay upside-down against the concrete wall; its contents spilled over the puddles of brown soapy water on the cracked sidewalk. Bushy locks of his beard and hair stuck to his face, which was covered in a thick layer of light-coloured mud, dried and cracked by the sun. The violent red and white of his blood-injected eyes was the only sign of life that pierced through his mask of clay;

...the blood in his eyes, and his screams, of course:

“Can’t you *see*?”, he was screaming, pointing in the distance, “there is my head!”; then throwing his arm and finger in the opposite direction, “and there...my arms!”, and again, elsewhere: “...there...my legs!”.

All around, people with synthetic clothing, fake nails, nylon hair, and plastic shopping bags hurried past. They did not see the man, and he did not see them.

I had run into him: seen his face, heard his screams, smelled his sweat in the mud, felt his hard body against mine: I had almost tasted the salt in his sweat. At this point, it was an expected continuation of the delirious soliloquy that had distracted me as I was running to inscribe my own fantasies, fetishes and ghosts onto the body of this man who screamed at ghosts I couldn’t see.

The earth and clay on his body evoked essentialized fantasies of genesis, of nature, of a bestial humanity stripped of its social meanings and ornaments. And there was the suffering, of course. With the mud, and his eyes, he reminded me of the violent corporeality in the giant figures of earth and clay of Ousmane Sow, the Senegalese sculptor. Sure, it was easy to essentialize this man, and nearly impossible not to romanticize and co-opt the powerful and virile esthetics of his suffering. From this side of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993), the man’s figure suggested the profoundly terrestrial and carnal suffering captured in the black and white photographs of the Brazilian Sebastião Salgado, and closer still, the revolutionary call for an “esthetics of hunger” voiced four decades ago by Glauber Rocha, the architect of Brazil’s *Cinema Novo*<sup>1</sup>, who had originated in the sterile and scorched outback of the Bahian *sertão* (Backstein, 2001). And there was my own

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<sup>1</sup> New Cinema



gringo figure of course, as a vaguely literary Glauber Rocha or Sebastião Salgado trying to “capture”, “expose”, and “combat” this man’s suffering; imagining my way inside his suffering; projecting fears and fantasies onto the body of this man; co-opting, commodifying and, inevitably, *creating* his suffering.

Here I was then, faced with this man, imagining this man, and creating this man: he embodied—or through his dismembered body of scattered limbs (“there, my head....and there, my arms...”), *disembodied*—what I had come here to “expose”; to “combat”, to co-opt, and to create: that is, what the ghosts of modernity had done and were doing to human flesh.

A man on the edge, on the fringe, in the margin, in the periphery. A man relegated by the symbols and structures of (post)modernity to an outside space of his own inside the outside “public” spaces of a postmodern global city. A man, as Foucault had said of the insane in the early modern period, condemned to live “à *l’interieur de l’exterieur, et inversement*” (inside the outside, and vice-versa, Foucault, 1972); a man who was in fact, not a “residual category” (Scheper-Hughes & Sargant, 1998), a discarded entity, or a perpetual “Other” of modernity, but, as I had come to see, a figure entirely imagined, produced, regulated and mutilated within by the symbolic and structural possibilities of modernity; a being of flesh not simply dismembered by modernity, but also a being that had been *given a body* by modernity: a mechanized, atomized and membered machine made of discrete parts; a machine separate from the metaphysicized stuff its own self, soul and mind; a body separate from other body-machines, other organisms, and separate from the ground

from which it had sprouted<sup>2</sup>; a body-machine coloured, blackened, fetishized and rejected by the apparatuses of colonialism; a body-machine pathologized and schizophrenized by the biomedical epistemological apparatuses that created its schizophrenized ghost-in-the-machine (Ryle [1949] 2000) in the first place.

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<sup>2</sup> See David Le Breton's (2005) *Anthropologie du corps et modernité* for a historical discussion of the construction of the "modern body". See also Donna Haraway (1991) on the postmodern "Cyborg Body"

*Toying with Essence/tialism, Existence/tialism, and a Strategically Humanist Anthropology of the Imagination: Toward a Cartography of Suffering, Domination and Resistance in the Late-Capitalist Global Order*

Like Zygmunt Bauman's interrogations on Modernity and the Holocaust (Bauman, 1989), this study, located within the broad genre of social inquiry, looks at how certain large-scale cultural, symbolic, economic, political and structural projects leave their mark on particular times and spaces. As an investigation with ethnographic ambitions, however, this inquiry is primarily preoccupied with the ways in which such forces play out in the *human existence and lived experience of real people* in particular times and spaces.

This dissertation, then, situated within the wider project of a critical anthropology of modernity (Escobar, 1995), postmodernity (Harvey, 1990), capitalism (Taussig, 1980), late-capitalism (Jameson, 1994), (neo)colonialism, globalization, "the development project" (Escobar, 1995)—or, to sum it all up, what Hardt and Negri (2000) call 'Empire'—seeks to map out, or at best, to pose certain questions about new forms of domination, suffering and (the possibility of) resistance that have emerged in the late-capitalist global order.

As a particular point in time and space, I have chosen to begin this inquiry in the streets of Salvador da Bahia in this place I call "Global Brazil", as a focal point from which to investigate these new radical forms of domination and agency,

to attempt to understand how these forces inscribe themselves in the lives, deaths, hopes and suffering of local and transnational actors, and to probe for the possibility of creative and emancipatory resistance to these forces. By exploring the streets of Salvador, the lives of their protagonists, and the extreme and radical modes of livelihoods that have emerged in these contested public spaces, then, I am hoping to bring to light stories, interrogations, and possibilities that will contribute to the search for a better understanding of and creative alternatives to contemporary human suffering in postcolonial urban contexts.

Thus, as a work of anthropology concerned with human existence and the human *body*, but also as a work of symbolic anthropology concerned with particular forms of *meaning* that animate particular human bodies, this study strives to immerse itself deep in the heart and pains of the human condition by looking at how global flows of goods, capital, peoples, and symbols affects human bodies; that is, how they *create* bodies; how they give meaning and value to bodies; how they shape bodies; how they regulate bodies; how they confine bodies in particular spaces, and how they shift bodies across space; how they fetishize bodies; how they commodify bodies; how they consume bodies; how they mutilate bodies, and how they terminate bodies.

More specifically, then, this study presents stories, reflections and theoretical discussion of the relations of power between particular kinds of global social actors that meet in particular places, and in this case, the encounter between different kinds of gringos—researchers, ethnographers, activists, (sex)tourists

among others—and Brazilians of various class-backgrounds, ages, genders, sexes, and racialized identities.

As a work of political anthropology that interrogates relations of *power* between particular human bodies and groups of human bodies, therefore, this investigation seeks to illustrate the nebulously conceptual notion that abstractions like “capital”, “symbols”, “history”, and “global flows” affect human bodies by looking into how, at the level of *lived experience*, particular human bodies and groups of human bodies affect, shape, confine, shift, fetishize, desire, love, fear, hate, ignore, forget, trample upon, commodify, consume, mutilate and terminate other human bodies.

As a work of political pedagogy desperately obsessed with a search for *human agency*, however, or for the possibility of human agency, and the possibility of conscientization and resistance to the global flows and forces that affect bodies and turn bodies against bodies, this inquiry is fundamentally preoccupied with how individual and collective human agents *understand* such forces, *use* these forces or resist these forces, and *learn* (or attempt) to slip through the cracks of the physical and existential spaces to which they have been confined, and learn (or attempt) to *imagine* and create alternative spaces beyond the realities that oppress them.

Thus, as a work of urban geography specifically, and anthropology of space and place more generally, this dissertation is also concerned with particular *spatial*

dimensions of the global and human forces that are the object of this inquiry, and most particularly with how the tensions between universalism and particularism (that is, the question of what it means for different human bodies with specific priorities to share a general human condition and be part of a wider environment and “living condition” with collective priorities), in this stage of late global capitalism, mediate different and conflicting notions and areas of public and private space, and of a larger *public sphere* (Habermas, 1974)

Finally, as a work of ethnography with phenomenological, but also political, moral, and indeed, ‘literary’ ambitions, this book seeks to enter in a dialogue with contemporary practices and (well-worn) critiques of ethnography (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Asad, 1973; Geertz, 1988): It does so, firstly, by situating itself within a broadly ‘postmodern’ school of ethnography ‘plagued’ by critical reflexivity, cautious skepticism about generalization, and a horrified, guilt-ridden attitude about the colonial legacy and colonizing power of its debunked “ethnographic authority”.

Next, by placing itself within the related field of ‘postcolonial’ ethnography preoccupied with the legacy of colonialism and asymmetrical relations of power, this ethnography, inspired by the works of anthropologist Michael Taussig (1980; 1997), also places the role and culture of the author, and the broader structures of Late-Western Capitalism from which the author originated, at the heart of the inquiry; and thus, hopes to demonstrate how investigating the lives and livelihoods of seemingly distant and ‘exotic’ others provides powerful insights into the cultural

politics of Late-Capitalism and the subjects (including “ourselves”) it produces and who reproduce it (Taussig, 1980).

Finally, in spite of this postmodern and postcolonial stance, I also hope to distance myself, first and foremost, from the paralyzing solipsism of the post-structural epistemological predicament that usually goes along with postmodern ethnographies; and equally importantly, from the (ironically) quasi-positivistic “neutral” and “value-free” moral stance in which many modern and postmodern ethnographers, bound by the very cultural (and, subsequently, moral) relativism that forms the epistemological cornerstone of their profession, imprison themselves.

*Toward an inspired and unrestrained practice of ethnography as (strategically humanist) literature: The lessons of Tobias Hecht and J.M Coetzee/Elizabeth Costello*

Throughout this ethnography, therefore, which I have labeled and fantasized as “experimental”, I have followed, but also departed from the insights of the post-*Writing Culture*<sup>3</sup>-revolution which (in my view rightfully) declared anthropology in general, and its trademark method of *ethnography* specifically as belonging almost exclusively to the terrain of *writing*, and, at best, to a general field we might label ‘literature’ (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1988). Here, then, I am advocating an *inspired and unrestrained practice of ethnography as literature*; that is, a practice of ethnography as a literary exercise informed by theory and fieldwork, and concerned with particular forms of culture (material and symbolic) livelihoods,

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<sup>3</sup> Proceedings of a 1989 seminar edited by Clifford and Marcus, marking the “postmodern” turning point in the tradition of objectivist “scientific” anthropology.

experience, and suffering, but, more importantly, *inspired* first and foremost by the experience of *being human*, and by an ability to use our imagination and empathy to *feel for other humans*, and perhaps, cautiously, to speak for or against other humans, and the broader condition we know as “humanity”.

Terms such as “humanity”, however, or concepts like “being human”, despite their ostensible “reality”, simplicity, (the “plain and obvious” existence of humanity) are, as we know, infinitely complex and slippery, given what we have learnt from the devastating consequences of certain views of ‘humanity’ articulated by certain human groups and imposed on others. One needn’t be reminded of the ‘darker sides’ (Mignolo, 1995) and devastating consequences for many humans on which it was imposed of the Bourgeois, Eurocentric, ‘Western’, Positivist, ‘Scientific’, Mechanistic, ‘Modernist’, Patriarchal, Heteronormative, Colonialist project of the Enlightenment that began its conquest of global realities in the industrializing world of the late 1700s<sup>4</sup>. The universalistic notion of ‘humanity’ as most people understand it today and of the related philosophy of ‘humanism’ are, as we know, intrinsically linked to this project of Enlightenment. Critical voices of this project, beginning<sup>5</sup> perhaps as early as Spinoza and Nietzsche, and continuing through critical theory, feminism, and existentialism until the postmodern and postcolonial explosion of contesting “voices from the ‘South’” and other discursively constituted subaltern spaces, now constitute a theoretical status-quo of

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<sup>4</sup> Or indeed, much earlier, for points of departure, see, Wallerstein (1975; 2004)

<sup>5</sup> I can only refer to those that survive in print, but nonetheless wish to imagine and honour all the lives and voices that have struggled against Empire throughout this hegemonically-constituted abstraction we have called “history”, and whose contributions, if they can never be exposed, ‘studied’ and ‘celebrated’ through the apparatuses of Empire, live on in the struggle of so many of us.



sorts in many intellectual circles. For this reason, it is not my intent to retell the details of these critiques here, other than to delineate my own allegiances to this general school of thought, and to reiterate my conviction that, in this ruthlessly capitalist globalized world which cannot be disarticulated from the political and epistemological apparatuses of the Enlightenment project, the role of ethnography should be to map out, expose and combat the human and natural consequences of this project. What I am attempting to propose about the ‘role of ethnography’, however—about its *moral* and *political*, and not merely methodological role—is that while I believe it may provide a critical and creative window for exploring the human experience in its infinite *diversity*, it should also be fundamentally (but cautiously) concerned with the *universality* of the human condition; that is, with trying to delve into the heart and *soul* (if such a thing can be imagined—or indeed *felt*—from a non-metaphysical perspective) of what it means to be human, to share this condition as well as a larger ‘life’ condition and environment, and subsequently with identifying and defending the collective priorities of this condition. Literature, it seems to me, as a particular art-form which attempts to capture, translate, express and interrogate specific, but also *fundamental* experiential and existential aspects of what it means to be human without being bound to the strict methodological rules, epistemological predicaments and political correctness of ethnography, is particularly well-suited for this task.

Discussing his choice of “ethnographic fiction” and the arrangement of his second book about Northeast Brazil’s street populations into an “ethnographic

novel”, anthropologist Tobias Hecht, whose visions, words and questions have provided a powerful source of inspiration for my own work, elaborates on how, in his view, literature and ethnography are not mutually exclusive categories (Hecht, 2006, p8). If, as he reminds us, ethnography is a form of writing that “relates the findings of fieldwork” (*ibid*), he contends that literature can often be equally methodological or ‘researched’ as indeed, as he points out citing a conversation with Keith Hart, his anthropological mentor, “there are novelists who put more research into making a particular setting realistic than do some ethnographers who might use some half-understood snatches of conversation as the steppingstone to high-theory” (*ibid*). If, Hecht argues, ethnography as a writing form based on what one has observed and participated in, can take one “almost anywhere” (“...into rituals and mundanely events, into gossip and funerals, into the world of work and leisure...”), it reaches its limits in the terrain of the mind; that is, through its inability to penetrate another person’s thoughts. “The portrayal of the mind”, of “mental turmoil”, and of inner existence, concludes Hecht, “is the province of literature”. Literature then, if one is to believe Hecht, can attain realms of the human experience that are forever closed to standard ethnographic methods.

Hecht, however, in spite of the remarkably corporeal dimension of the human experience and suffering he conveys in *After Life*, his ethnographic novel that recounts the complex relationship between a gringa ethnographer and a transsexual prostitute in the streets of the Northeastern city of Recife (*ibid*), does not dedicate much space, in its short theoretical introduction, to discuss what it means and what it takes to be or not to be able to “enter another person’s mind”

and, what seems more disturbing to me, does not elaborate on the (in my view of fundamental importance) related possibilities of thinking and *feeling* oneself into other people's *bodies*, and into the heart of their suffering. In Hecht's defense, his remarkable ethnographic novel, in which he translated a decade of his own moral, political, and perhaps even sexual struggles about his fieldwork in Recife into the story of an equally tortured female anthropologist, provides, at epistemological and methodological, and perhaps even *ontological* levels, a powerful testimony of the human possibility of thinking and feeling oneself into the flesh of fellow humans, into the very flesh of humanity, and into the *living* natural and cultural tissues that connect us all and connect our suffering.

After reading, and being profoundly—physically—touched and disturbed by *After Life* when it came out in early 2006 as I was getting ready to go Brazil for my own fieldwork, I had thought of Michael Taussig's body-politic metaphor about human social and political systems resembling the interconnected ramifications of the physiological human *nervous system* (Taussig, 1992), and I'd felt almost distressed about the compelling manner in which Hecht had managed to tap into this postcolonial nervous system, to convey the brutal corporeality of the suffering of others, and, as a human agent caught in the tissues of this nervous system, his own physical suffering.

I had at the time elevated Hecht's experimental ethnographic writing, which resonated with my own moral dilemmas in and about 'the field' and its characters, my relationship with these characters, and the world in which we were all embedded, but also with the experimental auto-ethnographic writing style I was still

developing (Veissière 2005a; 2005b; 2007b) as something of an ideal model. Strangely, eerily even, the unrestrainedly literary, deeply corporeal, but also vaguely aloof tone of Hecht's second book had reminded me of the writings of the South African Nobel Prize laureate J.M. Coetzee, whose works that I had read and re-read almost obsessively also interrogated the postcolonial human condition in deeply corporeal but also dimly aloof ways. The connections and similarities had struck me as so compelling, that I had almost fantasized that the elusive Tobias Hecht, American-born and graduate of Cambridge University who, as the acknowledgement section of *At Home in the Streets* (1998), his first book about the streets of Recife revealed, had finished writing his first opus in South Africa, and the elusive J.M. Coetzee, former professor of literature at the University of Cape town who had recently left post-apartheid South-Africa, were in fact one and the same person.

Early in march 2006 after Tobias Hecht's book had come out, I was surprised, pleased, and almost frightened to notice that the journal *American Anthropologist* had dedicated an issue to the "lessons" of J. M. Coetzee (Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, 2006). The issue, titled "*Cruelty, Suffering, Imagination: The Lessons of J. M. Coetzee*" alluded (perhaps not without a hint of irony) to the "lessons" voiced by Coetzee's alter-ego literary creation, the aging Elizabeth Costello, who, in his last novel at the time, uncomfortably assumed the role of a celebrated postcolonial novelist who travels to different venues around the world to give a series of lectures, or "lessons" on the same ethical, ontological and

epistemological questions that had traversed two decades of Coetzee's oeuvre (Coetzee, 1980; 1983; 1986; 1990; 1994; 1999a; 1999b; 2003).

Before being surprised with that issue of *American Anthropologist*, I had recently re-read *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, and had once more been struck by the profound anthropological concern of the author, and been impressed by his timely moral and political engagement with critical notions of realism and humanism (by way of what the editors of *American Anthropologist* call "sympathetic imagination") that could potentially address some of the human predicaments of the postcolonial human condition. The editors and contributors of that special issue, I was pleased to find out, had seen a similar potential in the works of Coetzee and its culmination through the words of his heteronym (Pessoa [Zenith] 2002) Elizabeth Costello, which they had explored and summed-up with a lot more depth and rigour than my own musings.

Coetzee's work and concerns, the editors argued, were of profound significance to the dilemmas of contemporary anthropology:

For over two decades now, Coetzee has brilliantly taken up questions that have also been at the center of the contemporary anthropological agenda. He has explored the reach of empire and its construction of the barbarian Other (*Waiting for the Barbarians*, 1980); who is empowered to speak and the shaping of the historical record (*Foe*, 1996); existence in the flesh and its relationship to belief (*The Master of Petersburg*, 1995); mortality, fleshly vulnerability, and politics (*Age of Iron*, 1998); and collective guilt and revenge (*Disgrace*, 2000) (Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, 2006, p84).

The editors, who seemed to have found in Coetzee's writings the "grounded metaphysics" I so desperately sought to reconcile with the project of ethnography,

had organized the issue by asking theorists in all four subfields of Anthropology (Sociocultural Anthropology, Linguistic Anthropology, Archeology, and Biological Anthropology) to relate their own work to some of the fundamental questions they had identified in the body of thought developed by J.M. Coetzee. The questions, as posed by the editors, were:

- how do we live in a world of immense suffering?
- what are the nature and extent of human rights and duties toward the other creatures with whom we share the earth?
- what is the nature, value, and ethics of the human capacity for sympathetic imagination?
- at what cost do we elevate “reason” to the place of ultimate human value?
- what does it mean to elevate “embodiment” in its place?
- what, if any, are the ethical limits of representations of cruelty and horror? and
- what are the limitations and possibilities of humanism and science in confronting such issues? (Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, 2006, p85.)

These fundamental questions, it had struck me, formed the ontological, epistemological, ethical, political and methodological basis of the project which I was tempted to call *my life*; or less histrionically, *my struggle*; or, more modestly, *my work*. Indeed, it was a tortured and unrelenting concern for such questions that had brought me to inquire and operate within the general area of social change and ‘culture’ that had taken from the study of education to anthropology. Through an unrestrained literary exercise of an intensely personal form of postcolonial ethnography, I had also come to understand, I had perhaps found *my way* to contribute to the quest to answer these questions, to keep posing these questions in different lights, and to combat the forces these questions sought to expose.

Hecht and Coetzee (or in particularly delirious moments, the *one* person I imagined to be Hecht-Coetzee-Costello) then, if their writing had enabled me to feel the physical pain of being torn, shredded and fragmented within the living tissues of the postcolonial nervous system, had also provided potent sources of inspiration, and perhaps even hope for my own project of contributing to the struggle and *healing* process of the postcolonial nervous system in which we were all implicated, though, as I suspected, with different degrees of responsibility. The glimmer of hope I had identified lied precisely where the teachings of Coetzee/Costello departed from the insights of Tobias Hecht. If Tobias Hecht's promises had cautiously expanded ethnography's reach into the realm of the mind, Coetzee seemed to offer the possibility of imagining and feeling one's way into other human *bodies* and the very stuff of their *being*. I was beginning to realize that it was through an embodied form of Coetzean ethnography that I might be able to reconnect not simply with a general *concept* of humanity, but with its *real*, and *embodied state of being*, and, indeed, with the real substance of humanity.

The lessons of J.M. Coetzee, to sum up, have inspired and empowered my own search for a meaningful way to struggle against Empire on two fundamentally important counts: (i) on the role and possibility of sympathetic imagination, or as I would be more tempted to label it, 'empathetic imagination' to *connect* with the realities of other human beings, and thus overcome the paralyzing solipsism of the postcolonial condition, and (ii), with the strength to strategically universalize the human condition, and be bound to the duty of *questioning* one's position in relation

to the social projects in which one is embedded, and of *morally* questioning the meaning, value, and impact of such projects on the human condition. Coetzee, then, has inspired the way I think and do ethnography in fundamental ways: he has given me epistemological hope (the possibility of seeing and feeling), unrestrained methodological freedom (the practice of literature), and a political project (questioning and *judging* what it is that we, as humans, are doing).

The most compelling, but horrifying example and lesson for postcolonial ethnographers provided by Coetzee, or at least, the one that impressed me the most, is his—or perhaps Costello's—shocking, and I suspect deeply rhetorical comparison of the meat industry with the Holocaust of the Second World War. Coetzee, himself a vegetarian (Fuentes, 2006), placed this scandalous metaphor and explored this theme through the mouth of Elizabeth Costello in two of her eight 'lessons' on *The Lives of the Animals*<sup>6</sup>. The horrifying bulk of the argument, as expressed by Coetzee/Costello, is captured in the following sentence taken from the first *Animals* lecture, titled *The Philosophers and the Animals*:

(a)nd to split hair, to claim that there is no comparison, that Treblinka was so to speak a metaphysical enterprise dedicated to nothing but death and annihilation while the meat industry is ultimately devoted to life (once its victims are dead, after all, it does not burn them to ash or bury them but on the contrary cuts them up and refrigerates and packs them so that they can be consumed in the comfort of our homes) is as little consolation to those victims as it would have been—pardon the tasteless of the following—to ask the dead of Treblinka to excuse their killers because their body fat was needed to make soap and their hair to stuff mattresses with (Coetzee, 2004, p66).

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<sup>6</sup> which had previously appeared in print before the publication of *Elizabeth Costello* as *The Lives of the Animals* (Coetzee, 1999), itself a proceedings, along with comments from anthropologists and primatologists, of a series of lectures delivered by Coetzee himself as part of Princeton's *Tanner lectures on Human Values*.



Here, I do not wish to enter in debate over vegetarianism or for that matter over the disturbing anthropocentrism of which I myself am guilty when I feed from the corpses of other mammals. What I get from Coetzee's shocking comparison, however, is a nagging wake up call to *question* my own humanity and the humanity of the social and political projects, seemingly normal, harmless and ordinary, in which I am implicated. What Coetzee teaches me about ethnography and the wider project of being human, then, can be summed up in these two questions: *What are we doing? What am I doing?*

From reading Hannah Arendt's study of *Adolf Eichmann*<sup>7</sup>'s trial in Jerusalem, one is left with a profound sense of anguish, not, as many would suspect, about the blood-thirsty criminal pathology of the architects and perpetrators of the Holocaust, but rather, when one contemplates the perfectly mediocre bureaucratic efficiency and 'humanity' of such individuals with what Arendt herself termed 'the banality of evil' (Arendt, 1963). Searching further into the bureaucratic and indeed 'modernist' (Bauman, 1989) dynamics of what can perhaps, however, only be called 'Evil', one is left with a violent feeling of frustration about the paradox of this giant modernist machine in which human actors, 'efficient' human actors who perform their task with 'excellence', are caught, but whose meaning and value they seem unable to question; this human machine which is, however entirely human, invented by humans, and operated by humans...

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<sup>7</sup> Lowly engineer who played an instrumental in the logistics of extermination in Nazi death camps

Here, then, the lessons gathered from Coetzee's remarkably detached, and yet deeply grounded gaze, have directed me toward questioning the machines we have created and in which we are implicated:

In the quote below, Costello, replying to academics infuriated by the 'tastelessness' of her comparison, provides a forceful example of this detached-yet-grounded stance:

Is it possible, I ask myself, that all of them are participants in a crime of stupefying proportions? Am I fantasizing it all? I must be mad. Yet I see the evidences. The very people I suspect produce the evidence, exhibit it, offer it to me. Corpses. Fragments of corpses they have bought for money. (Coetzee, 2003, p114)

Costello's terrified alarm call, thus, is to me what an inspired postcolonial ethnographic gaze should be able to produce. Like Conrad's dying Kurtz faced with the horror of humanity, colonialism, and his own doings, I contend that postcolonial ethnography should be animated by a similarly visceral urge to look at ourselves, at what we have done to one another, and at what we are doing to one another, and to scream: "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad, [1902] 1995)

In this sense, the postcolonial sort ethnography I am advocating is not only descriptive and 'educational', but also profoundly *moral*, and, hopefully, pedagogical.

This project, therefore, and most particularly the ethnographic novel that forms the bulk of this thesis, is postcolonial in the sense that it implicates characters that occupy various degrees of colonizing and colonized positions in the world system, but also because of its literary, inspired, and moral, strategically humanist gaze.

*Presentation and progression of the arguments.*

Like the postcolonial nervous system whose anatomy, symptomatology and autopsy are presented in these pages, the arguments, details, stories and characters can be read and interpreted in a variety of ways. In addition, if they are to be presented in phenomenological ways that emulate the human lives in which they are inscribed, they cannot be rendered along an arbitrary problem-solving sequence that presents a set of problems, offers hypotheses to solve these problems, tests these hypotheses, and reiterates the findings in a conclusion.

The stuff captured in these pages, like the human lives it haunts and tortures, is, if nothing else, *messy*. My intention here was primarily to convey the messiness and the violence of complex contemporary global phenomena, and, through particular local, global, and personal stories, highlight the obscure ramifications that connect us all and in which we all share responsibilities, and to pose and provoke certain questions about the meaning and value of these phenomena, and the role we play in perpetrating them.

For the sake of the academic ritual for which this project was developed, but also as a necessary and useful guide to clarify historical and contextual aspects of this study, I included in-depth theoretical discussions of the social, cultural, economic, historical, and political mechanisms that produced the radically different global actors, who, in this book, interact in the streets of Salvador da Bahia, and as such, elaborated in greater depth on the context of the postcolonial “fractured”, and “heterotopic” public spaces of urban Brazil in which the stories take place.

For the sake of the non-linearity of this study (that is, in a spirit of faithfulness toward the ordering of the phenomena investigated in this project), I included these theoretical and historical discussions in Chapter 4, that I located “after” the ethnographic novel that constitutes the bulk of this book. Readers who are familiar with Global, Latin-American, and Brazilian studies, or who wish to get an ‘experiential’ feel of the context before getting into more standard forms of theory, are encouraged to read the novel first, or to refer back to the table of contents and Chapter 4 throughout the novel for specific historical clarifications, or more ‘academic’ theoretical discussion. The second and final part of Chapter 4, reflecting and discussing a concern with the possibility of generating participatory ethnographic initiatives that can empower research participants, elaborates in greater theoretical depth of the concept of “livelihoods” on which this study is partly based, as well as the potential relationship between ethnography, popular education, and grassroots development.

The novel itself is constructed around three “moments” over the course of ten months “in the field” in Salvador da Bahia, and follows the course of my own meanders, flâneurism<sup>8</sup>, encounters, reflections, flashbacks, dialogues, doubts, hopes, desire, violence, joys, suffering, and desperations in the fractured urban spaces of Global Brazil. These “encounters”, though they may appear to occur spontaneously and aleatorily throughout the narrative, are nonetheless situated within a long and arduous process of study that can only be called ‘research’, and results from hundreds of hours of reading, interviews, discussion, participant

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 4.1 for a discussion of ethnographic flâneurism.

observation, and, indeed, participation in the lives whose stories are told in these pages: To be sure, while I could have turned my gaze and reflection on a multiplicity of other characters and events, or for that matter have chosen to find myself and attempt to get lost in entirely different settings, readers should bear in mind that this literary ethnographic format is, in a sense, merely that: a *format*: that is, a carefully chosen and crafted way to report on the process and ‘findings’ of several years of theoretical and field research. Here then, the literary devices such as omniscience, flashbacks, dialogues, soliloquies and playful engagements with different writing genres are, in a sense, employed as rhetorical devices aiming at rendering the complex stuff of human experience with more verisimilitude (Diversi, 1998; 2003). While I would like to believe that the recurrence and interaction of certain key elements and arguments that can be gleaned through a single linear reading of the novel should convey an understanding, some form of sensitivity (and hopefully, a sense of unease) about the fundamental questions that drive this inquiry, I should perhaps assist readers by reminding them to focus their own gaze, throughout the reading, on some of the following questions:

- What are the cultural, symbolic and structural forces that have made us—our bodies—so different, that have given such different meaning and values to our bodies, and that make us experience life, the public sphere, and humanity in such radically different ways?
- How have such “radically different” and “radically excluded” individuals as “street kids” and street prostitutes come to create such

radical livelihoods and search for agency in the streets of Global Brazil?

- What is the role of transnational symbolic, structural and human actors in producing and perpetrating these extreme livelihoods?
- How do the “forces” that shape and hurt us travel through human actors?
- What is the role and origin of *desire* as a driving force behind the flows of these forces and actors?
- Is it possible to link this “desire” to a non-metaphysical human essence and imagine the possibility of human interactions and a process of postcolonial “healing” outside the commodifying and exploitative logic of capitalism?

For the sake of this academic exercise, then, I have scattered titles and headings throughout the novel to enable readers to identify the sequential thread of the story, in which a general interrogation of the human condition is formed by piecing together these forces, spaces, voices, and characters.

The first section, which narrates in a non-linear manner with 48 or so hours of flâneurism in the streets of Salvador and my ‘descent into the anomie of the Late-Capitalist night’, provides an in-depth description of the different forces and characters of this story, while the second part, jumping to a few hours of encounters, reflections and discussions situated half a year after the first story,

presents a (non?) conclusion of sorts by preoccupying itself with the possibility of equitably reordering the forces, characters, and desire that animate this book.

In its playful mixture of genres and (no doubt distasteful) cluttering of clichés, the novel that follows can, as already promised, be read in a variety of ways:

At its most essential and theoretical, it can be read as an in-depth analysis of the historical and cultural foundations of extreme forms of domination that affect people all over the globalized world, and of the subsequent search for resistance, agency, emancipation, and alternatives to domination and suffering.

At its cheesiest, this book can be read as a 'detective-novel' of sorts, where the ethnographer-sleuth attempts to piece together the historical and global pieces of a puzzle of violence and suffering that unfold in the streets of a seedy global neighbourhood, and searches for a human 'key' that will 'solve' the problem of violence and suffering.

At its sleaziest, this novel toys with the erotomaniac clichés of authors like Henri Miller (1934; 1939), Charles Bukowski (1972), or, more recently and closer to the tropicalizing edge of my own stories, those of the Cuban *provocateur* Pedro Juan Gutiérrez (1998; 2000), who have sought a refuge from the alienation of (post)modernity by indulging in lone male flâneurism through the dark streets of disintegrating cities, and the dark corners of their own disintegrating patriarchy.

At its most terrifying and physically painful, this inquiry performs a particularly gory dissection of the living body of the postcolonial condition by

immersing itself into the infected wounds and deformities of what the forces of Empire have done to the human flesh.

At its holiest, most delirious, but perhaps most hopeful, finally, this story also recounts the search for a grounded metaphysics, and a non-metaphysical human essence which may, after all, unite us all.

The story, then, opens in the night streets of Barra, a slightly off-center, vaguely trendy, formerly middleclass and somewhat touristy neighbourhood that follows the coastal bend that connects the mouth of the Bay of All Saints (*baia de todos os santos*) to the Atlantic shore in Salvador da Bahia. As one of Salvador's formerly glamorous "public" spaces, Barra, along with its old port and small beach, has undergone the disintegration and discursive criminalization through cuts in public spending, privatized urbanism, and "talks of crime" that Teresa Caldeira documented in her ethnography of crime and spatial segregation in São Paulo<sup>9</sup>. Thus, echoing middleclass views on what constitutes "public" space and its beneficiaries, a 1996 article from *O Jornal da Tarde*, Salvador's most prominent daily paper, lamented:

Long gone are the times when *o Porto da Barra* [Barra's beach and harbour] was considered the hotspot of Salvador, frequented only by the upper-middle-classes and the Baian intellectuals, who, for quite some time, had made the place their trademark. Today's reality is quite different. With time, the spot transformed itself in a place of gathering for prostitutes, *pivetes*, beggars, and drug users. (*A Tarde*, 30.01.96. cited in Rodrigues, 2001, p98, my translation)

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 4, and (Caldeira, 2000; see also Katz, 2006, on "terror talk" and US urban apartheid).



The stories that follow then, set in the disintegrating streets of Barra in the late-capitalist night, recount the normalized, routinized, and indeed ‘banal’ “everyday violence” (to borrow a phrase from Nancy Scheper Hughes (1992)), of street encounters; the “terror-as-usual” (as Taussig<sup>10</sup> would have it) that unfolds daily—and nightly—in Salvador, not, as one may suspect, in the form of gory and spectacular aggressions in which blood is splattered and bones are crushed, but in infinitely more resilient and perverse acts of capitulations, surrender, and weakness; in the subtle collision of incommensurable livelihoods; in the exploitative convergence of incommensurable forms of despair glossed over under the promise and pretense of eroticism. These are the subtly violent stories between whores, hustlers, and gringos, which, in the end, remain brutally binary and unequivocally exploitative. These stories, witnessed, experienced, lived, imagined and retold from the point of view of a gringo ethnographer, are also, inevitably, the stories of a gringo in the world system.

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<sup>10</sup> In Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2003)

## CHAPTER 2

*Feeling and writing bodies:*

*Insights from critical medical anthropology and my own failed activism for an engaged, embodied and pedagogical ethnography of suffering*

*My body is made of the same flesh as the world.*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1962 (cited by N. Scheper-Hughes, 1994)

In the previous chapter, I explained how Chapter 4—which readers are invited to read before, after, or as a “conversation” of sorts with the ethnographic novel that follows—explores in greater anthropological and ethnohistorical depth the formation of the postcolonial spaces and social actors that are the focus of this inquiry. Thus, while taking pains to situate these spaces within broader (post)colonial and (late)capitalist histories and structures, it looks more specifically into the “Brazilian” realities that are captured in this ethnography, and, through a review of Brazilianist anthropology as well as more general works on space, place, and (post)development, offers a specific but theoretical case-study of the legacy of colonialism and global capitalism into postmodern Brazilian urban contexts. Through a deconstruction of what I term the “fractured cartographies of race, class, gender and childhood in the postmodern Brazilian cities”, then, Chapter 4 reiterates in more abstract and generalized theoretical terms the central questions about domination, conscientization, resistance, and agency that drive this investigation.

“*The Ghosts of Empire*”, in turn (the purposefully clichéd title of my ethnographic novel), takes the reader at the experiential heart (of Darkness) of this ethnographic matter. By inviting readers inside the lived experiences and living tissues of real human bodies, the living tissue that connects human bodies, and my own lived experience entangled in this human tissue, it explores different layers of the embodied realities of these postcolonial spaces (what I term the postcolonial nervous system) and highlights the fundamentally *transnational*, *co-constructed*,

and *asymmetrical*, but also *human* and *painful* characteristics of these postcolonial spaces.

In an effort to further *materialize* the grounded and carnal anthropological visions that inspire this experimental work, this chapter takes up where the previous section left off around concerns with human *bodies*, the Coetzeean insights on *knowing bodies* and *speaking for* or even *against* bodies, and my call for an inspired and unrestrained practice of ethnography as (strategically humanist) literature. Here, I wish to expand on this notion of a humanistic literary ethnography obsessed with human bodies and *the human body*, and to advocate for *embodied* and *engaged* forms of ethnographic writing as a form of activism, or, in many situations, as what is perhaps one of the only ethical alternatives to activism or even a more desirable alternative to politically unexamined and philosophically uninformed activism.

Before elaborating on the ethical, political, and “grounding” role of ethnography, however, I should perhaps delve deeper into the anthropological notion of “bodies” from which it draws its inspiration; more specifically I will discuss key insights from a critical-phenomenological/existentialist feminist tradition in Medical Anthropology into the connections between social, political, and individual “bodies”, and the epistemological and moral possibilities for ethnographers working within that tradition (Lock, 1993; 2002; Lock et al, 1997; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Scheper-Hughes, 1979; 1987; 1992; 1994; 2002; 2007; Scheper-Hughes and Wacquant, 2002; Young, 1995; Comaroff, 1985; Ong, 1987; Taussig, 1992; Martin, 1987; Haraway, 1991)

*Feeling, connecting, and writing the three bodies: Lessons from the embodied anthropology of Nancy Scheper-Hughes*

The writings of the Berkeley anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes have provided an endless source of inspiration for my own work; not least from *Death Without Weeping*, her classic study of mother love, child death, hunger and suffering among displaced sugar-cane cutters in a Northeast Brazilian shantytown (Scheper-Hughes, 1992), or for her immense contribution to Brazilianist, feminist-existentialist and medical anthropology that have proven invaluable to my study (see Chapter 4), but more generally for her insistence on the “epistemological promise” of her phenomenological concern with and attention to the human body, and her relentless call for a commitment to “the primacy of the ethical” in anthropology (2007, in Lock and Farquarh).

From her early work on the production of mental illness in rural Ireland (1979) through her Brazil years to her current research on global organs trafficking (Scheper-Hughes, 2002, in Rosaldo & Inda; 2002, with Loic Wacquant), Scheper-Hughes has elevated her concern with the human body to the center stage of her inquiries, and sought to restore the centrality of the body in cultural anthropological thinking through a critical dialogue between medical, social/symbolic, and political anthropology (1994, in Borofksy). While she has always described herself as

working within the tradition of medical anthropology<sup>11</sup>, she has continually argued for a critical paradigm that challenges the reductionist “clinical” physiological and psychological visions that have plagued that sub-discipline, and called for a cross-disciplinary approach to (re)connect individual human bodies with the social and political “bodies” studied in other subfields. In her own words, then, her medical anthropological gaze:

...grazes the body’s surface and then moves outward to catch the play of metaphor, figures of speech (tropes) and symbolic meanings within the web of exchanges within the “three bodies” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987)—the representational *body social*; the controlling bio-power forces of the *body-politic*, and the not-unrelated but self-conscious, more or less alienated attribution of meanings to the individual and existential *body-personal*. (1994, p231)

She argues that the “critical medical anthropological body” to which she draws our attention is to be situated at the intersection of the “three bodies”, and the three theoretical approaches that have traditionally (but regrettably separately) focused on different bodies. As such, she calls for a “working synthesis” between existentialist phenomenology (that looks at the individual body-self), cultural/symbolic anthropology (concerned with the social body), and critical theory, especially as it pertains to Gramscian notions of hegemony and Foucauldian visions of bio-power (the body-politic) (ibid, p232; see also Chapter 4 for a discussion of various notions of hegemony).

In my view, this critical synthesized tradition, to which I have aligned myself and hope to contribute, does not only seek to rescue arbitrarily constituted

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<sup>11</sup> from which she draws her preoccupations with and anthropological focus on the body—“the body: mindful, nervous, consuming, commoditized, fetishized, laboring, anguished, or disciplined [but also subversive]” (1994, p230)

subfields of inquiry from their own reductionist solipsism, or simply to “throw in” a phenomenological ethnographic dimension to render the abstract stuff of systems, symbols and hegemony in more contextualized and “compelling” forms, but rather, or in addition, carries the hopeful promise of *the possibility of resistance* to fuel the ongoing debate over human agency with which most fields of social, anthropological, and pedagogical inquiry are concerned.

*Bodies as sites of resistance: Looking, feeling and writing beyond hegemony*

Examining how individuals are caught in the play of symbolic and structural forces by paying minute attention to living bodies, or, as Scheper-Hughes would have it, “thinking with the body”, or even, as I have tried to propose, *feeling* with the body<sup>12</sup>, as I will argue, can also lead to critical insights into the power of bodies *over* or *beyond* structural and symbolic forces.

Such insights, however, are far from being dominant in most social and anthropological thinking. The place of the body in most social, cultural and symbolic anthropology, as Scheper-Hughes (1994; 2002) reminds us,—and not coincidentally, that of agency—has remained marginal, and still for the most part relies on structural-deterministic notions of body praxis and practice. Indeed, most practitioners of cultural anthropology subscribe to structural and dualistic notions of

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<sup>12</sup> Scheper-Hughes herself also argued for a *felt* form of *embodied knowledge* as a way to know and feel for the Other and overcome the terrifying solipsism of the post-structural epistemological condition. In light of this, her words often give me faith in the rhetorical project of using ‘realist’ and ‘naturalistic’ devices to convey particular—and politically important—forms of truth: She writes: “...I am often pulled along roughly by the people of the Brazilian shantytown of Alto do Cruzeiro to come closer, to look, touch, probe an angry, inflamed wound or a badly set bone jutting out at a ridiculous angle from beneath a torn pants leg” (1994, p230). This sort of writing strikes me—physically—as being particularly “real” and “true”.

*embodiment* as the way in which humans “inhabit” their bodies and “use” them through restrictive culturally-prescribed somatic tactics. Such a view echoes the by now classical notion of “habitus” (literally “inhabiting” one’s body and position in the world) as expressed by Marcel Mauss, and later developed by Pierre Bourdieu (Mauss, 2007 [1934]; Bourdieu 1977; Scheper-Hughes, 1994; 2002). Most of political anthropology, in turn, has expanded such deterministic notions with the rather gory Foucaultian insights on how culture and hegemony inscribe themselves on the body, confine the body, and hurt the body.

At any rate, the problematic notion of agency, that is, of human agents’ conscientization of and actions over the structures in which they are embedded, is often left out of contemporary structural and post-structural cultural theory, so that, as she noted, human agency—or lack thereof—is typically conceptualized as Bourdieu’s classic (and absurd) “Chaplinesque image of Algerian peasants whose body movements are determined by their insertion into a particular cultural, technical, and productive order” (Scheper-Hughes, 1994, p231; Bourdieu, 1977; 1990)

What I hope to show in this book, is that while embodied ethnography does indeed capture how individual human bodies act as sites on which culture, hegemony, and bio-power<sup>13</sup> inscribe themselves, and as the fleshly conducting thread that transmits painful (often deadly) electrical shocks through the social and political bodies of the postcolonial nervous system, it can also show how bodies acts as *sites of struggle and resistance against bio-power*, and often manage to disentangle themselves from the forces into which they have been thrown.

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<sup>13</sup> The three terms will gradually emerge as synonyms throughout the next chapters



The larger question of whether such “disentanglements” actually lead to “higher” or “wider” channels of agency, or simply to different or more complex “transnational” forms of oppressive habitusses within the late capitalist world system will for now remain open, and will be examined phenomenologically throughout the next chapters. Let us for now look at Nancy-Scheper Hughes’ notion of “the subversive body”, and the role of critical medical anthropologists in identifying acts of resistance where others would have merely seen domination or individual pathology.

The body as conceptualized in her critical tradition, as we will see, in contrast with the rather mechanical Bourdieusian notion of having one’s possibility of movement and *being* confined within a structural-symbolic assembly line, is infinitely more resilient and “naturally subversive”. The body, she maintains, “refuses to conform to epistemologies that traffic in opposition and dualisms or in reductionist and radical materialisms” (1994, p232).

In my own fieldwork in the streets of Salvador, armed with similar convictions, I paid careful attention to different, flexible, and changing forms of body-praxis, especially as it pertained to the cultural performance of gendered, sexualized, and racialized identities. Thus, I couldn’t help seeing very creative forms of resistance in the body-praxis tactics of many subaltern women, who, while physically remaining in the marginal spaces of urban Brazil, consciously *departed* from the discursive—but painfully *real*—spaces of neo-colonial Brazilian culture/hegemony where they would have had to “whiten” their *negra* identities in order to gain “access” to “social mobility” or “respectable marriages”, and instead

learned to accentuate their (locally rejected) *negritude* and became “beautiful” and “desirable” in the eyes of Gringo (sex)tourists<sup>14</sup>. Thus, I show that by “consciously” entering the transnational sexscape (Seabrook, 1996; Brennan, 1994), or “gringoscape” in which they are the object of desire, these women also begin a process of “leaving behind” the narrow and demeaning habitus in which they were confined. In *Ghosts* and Chapter 4, while staying away from the presumptuousness to propose definite answers and solutions, I pose in greater depth the question of whether such tactics are “truly” liberating and legitimate acts of “creative” social agents, or simply constitute transnational traps into more or equally demeaning hegemonically-engineered neocolonial forms of sexualized and racialized identities. While I shall momentarily leave aside the question of whether resistance is at all possible, or whether all acts of subversion irrevocably become cannibalized by what I later come to term the “all-encompassing Cosmos” of late-capitalism and neo-colonialism (Empire), I can nevertheless affirm that a minute attention to body-praxis can indeed reveal that individuals do become conscientized to the cultural and economic forces that confine them to oppressive habitusses, and do struggle in many creative (albeit often painful) ways to refashion themselves as a result.

A critical-feminist medical anthropological gaze, it seems to me, is particularly well-suited to discern such acts of resistance. I have already outlined the project of critical medical anthropology. At this point, I will speak in more details to the notion of “feminism” that inhabits my inquiry. While I am forced to

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<sup>14</sup> (See *Ghosts*, Part 1, and Chapter 4 for a more theoretical discussion of gendered and racialized cultural performance in postcolonial Brazil)

admit that the “feminist” notion that “a woman’s body is a site of struggle” has now become a mandatory and increasingly commercial cliché from graduate seminars to art-school critique sessions to mainstream film and TV, there is nevertheless important political meaning to be gleaned from that axiom. By aligning myself with a “feminist” tradition here, I am not interested in citing a long list of names, schools, and “waves” in feminist thought, or to reinforce patriarchy by pledging allegiance to an essentialized “feminine” epistemology. Rather, the term “feminist” as I use it in the context of this study is a reminder that I am acknowledging the oppressive effects of a long and continuing history of patriarchy paired with capitalism (Overall, 1992) on woman’s bodies, identities, and “mobility”. I am also acknowledging that, while I am thoroughly opposed to essentializing differences between men and women and am particularly attune to the universalizing nature of human suffering, I believe that women of the postcolonial condition most often occupy more “difficult” and subaltern positions because of the roles to which they have been relegated by the patriarchal logic and structures of Empire. I am also very attune to the painful worsening of many women’s realities in countries of the Global South, where generations of forced migration of men to fuel the soulless machines of a failed and by-now shifted-to-China industrialization, and the erosion of public services caused by the neoliberal “structural readjustments” of late-capitalism have left weakened, toiling single women with no resources at the head of disintegrating extended families (Torres et al, 1997; Escobar, 1995; Moulin & Pereira, 2003). By referring to myself as a feminist in this study, then, I am calling attention to the condition of women in the neocolonial landscape I am mapping out

and in relation to the other transnational and transhistorical, landscapes that become apparent in my study of the streets of Salvador. Thus, by posing certain questions about women's body praxis and practices of struggle, I am hoping to shed more lights on the dynamics of domination and resistance in the late-capitalist global order.

Other "feminist" medical anthropologists concerned with similar question about global capitalism, patriarchy, and women's body praxis have for quite some time raised interesting debates about domination and resistance. More specifically, many such scholars working within that critical tradition have helped broaden our understanding of suffering and resistance beyond the reductionist, individualist, psychologizing and pathologizing (or criminalizing) discourse of medicalization, and have also identified clinical-medical (and increasingly corporatized) regulations of suffering as new forms of oppression. Thinkers like Nancy Scheper-Hughes (looking at schizophrenia, "nervous illness", hunger, and grief in Brazilian shantytowns), Margaret Lock (analyzing the "discovery" of menopause in Japan), Aiwah Ong (examining oppressed female worker's spirit possession "attacks" in multinational Malaysian factory floors), Emily Martin (deconstructing the medical invention of PMS to control certain women's socially unacceptable behaviour), have showed us how "illness" or "abnormal behaviour" can be conceptualized as creative forms of body-praxis to respond to oppression, but also how the medical apparatuses of Empire are quick to appropriate and regulate these forms of resistance (Scheper-Hughes, 1979; 1992, Lock, 1988; Ong, 1987; Martin, 1987).

During my fieldwork in Salvador, I was particularly interested in following Scheper-Hughes insights into what she terms “nerve illness” (*doença dos nervos; ataque de nervos*), a phenomenon she noticed in shantytown people’s creative (but painful and distressing) way to respond to their subaltern position in the postcolonial nervous system, and about which she wrote extensively (1992; 1994; 2007). Witnessing and tending to the bodily complaints and metaphors employed by downtrodden women and cane workers in the Pernambucan favela she calls “*Alto do Cruzeiro*”, she began to think of bodies as “battlegrounds”, and sites through which the oppressed dramatized protest and resistance. Inspired by earlier (but often clinical) work on the phenomenon of oppressed women’s *nervos*, *nervios* or *nevra* attacks throughout the pan-Mediterranean world and diaspora<sup>15</sup>, she began to think of illness and nervous attacks as one of the “weapons of the weak” identified by anthropologist James Scott (Scott, 1985; see also Chapter 4):

James Scott (...) has noted that while powerless social classes are rarely afforded the “luxury of open, organized political activity”, the aggrieved often do put up a remarkable assortment of resistances, including, “foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on” (...) To these weapons of the weak, the critically interpretive medical anthropologist would add those somatic tactics and “remedial institutions” that appear with great frequency in our chosen domain: (1), witchcraft, sorcery, evil eye, and counter sorcery, (2) trance and possession illness; (3), nervous frenzy, and (4), organized rituals of reversal and of fantasy play.

Here, I will not preoccupy myself with the fourth “weapon” which Scheper-Hughes points to, and by which she refers to (and seems to concur with) the Brazilian social

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<sup>15</sup> See for example, Margaret Lock and Pamela Dunk’s (1987) study of “broken nerves” among Greek Canadian women

anthropologist Roberto Da Matta's classic analysis of carnival as a ritualized "reversal" of the Brazilian social pyramid which enables the "lower" classes to "play powerful" and "vent out" their social frustrations (Da Matta, 1979). Debunking this theory is not the object or intent of my study here, but I will nevertheless express my belief that Da Matta's outdated and methodologically aloof (i.e., not sufficiently ethnographic) analysis cannot be applied to the present political landscape in which Brazilian Carnival, with its astronomically expensive maximum-security luxury *camarotes* and *abadas* (private and gated street and indoor carnivals) and the violent anomie of "public" street carnivals mirrors Brazil's recent late-capitalist social segregation trends of maximum security privatized gated-communities and "disintegrated" "criminalized" public space ethnographically documented by Teresa Caldeira in her study of crime and segregation in São Paulo (Caldeira, 2000; see also Chapter 4). What concerns me here is both the subversive language of somatization through "nerves" and "illness", and the cannibalizing ability of various apparatuses of Empire to reclaim and regulate the "battleground" bodies of rebellious women.

The story of Mississippi, the improbably-named, prematurely-aged member of a Salvador family around which much of my fieldwork ended up radiating in the second part of my year in Brazil, illustrates this complex cannibalizing logic and the resilience of the body amid the crushing forces of Empire:

Mississippi, like several of the most rebellious sisters in a dispersed family of 15 children, was said to "manifest" (*ela manifesta*), or be periodically "possessed" by demons or evil spirits who "manifested" themselves through her

body in times of crisis. As the daughter of an alcoholic failed public servant who had fallen out of grace with the more affluent and “educated” branches of his family, Mississippi had grown up “treated like a servant” in the house of her physically and sexually abusive rich uncle, who, in her view, “had only become a judge because his brother [her father] had supported him through his studies”. Two generations later, the judge’s offspring, who still benefited from his wealth and influence while maintaining next to no relations with Mississippi’s father’s poor and “disgraced” branch, insisted that, like their father, Mississippi and her sisters’ misery was only the result of their own moral shortcomings—despite the judge’s endless efforts to assist them—and of biologically inherited traits from their “disgraceful” [*desgraçada*] mother who had caused her husband’s downfall. After a brawl with her uncle over attempted sexual abuse in late adolescence, Mississippi returned to live with her mother and three sisters in a semi-favela home in Salvador’s poor periphery. In her early twenties, she frequented Salvador’s intellectual and bohemian circles, and, living with an affluent restaurant owner and part-time drug trafficker in Barra (then a vibrant bohemian neighbourhood), she provided regular financial help to her sisters and nieces from the family’s struggling branch. After the restaurant owner passed away, Mississippi followed some of her “bohemian” friends to Rio de Janeiro for increasingly long periods of time, until she eventually left for Europe, where she would spend close to half a decade between Portugal, Spain and Italy while reporting to have been “supported by rich lovers”. While in Europe, she would make regular appearances in Salvador, and always returned with gifts, expensive clothes, and “lots of gold jewelry”. During her years

abroad, she maintained a two-bedroom apartment in one of Salvador's middleclass seaside districts, and sent regular money wires to one of her recently divorced sisters who stayed in her apartment with two of her daughters, another younger sister who had also "passed through the judge's disgraced paws". Shortly after announcing that she was expecting a child and would be settling down in Spain with her "husband", Mississippi returned to Salvador, aged, worn out, childless, and penniless. She explained how she had "fallen down a set of stairs" and lost her unborn child, but would not discuss the event further. Years later, she still remained silent about her European "disgrace", but the whispered truth that had pieced itself together and become part of the family's history, was that her husband-lover-protector-pimp-pusher had pushed her down the stairs in a fit of rage, and had turned her over to the Spanish immigration authorities who had deported her back to Brazil. Upon her return, after she'd given up the middleclass apartment she could no longer afford and moved with her sisters and nieces into more "humble" quarters reluctantly surrendered by her sister's former husband, Mississippi, who had reportedly "been free of demons" since her favela days with her mother, started "manifesting again". All those years ago after fleeing from her abusive uncle, Mississippi's "manifestations" had been interpreted and regulated within the lexicon of *Candomblé*, and remedied by *pais* and *mães de santos*<sup>16</sup> through conversation with the *Orixás* deities and/or Catholic Saints who had manifested themselves through her body. Upon her return from Europe in the late 1990s, following her family's and many of Brazil's "Black" and urban poor's conversion

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<sup>16</sup> *Pais* and *mães de santos*, literally Saint's fathers or mothers, are high priests of the *Candomblé* Afro-Brazilian religions who mediate between the people's and spirit world (see Bastide, 2000; Verger, 1957; Daniel, 2005)



to neoconservative (tel)evangelical churches and their subsequent rejection and loathing of anything related to *Candomblé*, and syncretic or progressive Catholicism (see Burdick, 1992; 2005), her ailment had been seen as “the work of demons”, and been spectacularly cured by frenzied pastors (often recent converts themselves) who had “brought the demons out of her” and summoned the cleansing manifestation of the Holy Spirit in church before hysterical audiences. Later, by the time I met her, Mississippi had, like many of her relatives and counterparts, “left” and “entered” a plethora of evangelical churches after brawls with pastors or fellow churchgoers, and was by now interpreting her suffering within biomedicalized metaphors of “diabetes”, “blood pressure”, and the “rotting” of her kidneys. I was at the time searching for similar numerical quantifications and clinical quick-fixes for my own suffering, and, after recent developments in my hypochondriacal performance of grief and quest for “medical answers” following my recent divorce and separation from my son and an equally violent immersion in Salvador’s diseased nervous system<sup>17</sup>, had purchased a digital blood-pressure monitor which I used compulsively. Mississippi would often make appearances at my apartment and request to take her blood pressure. Most days, however, she was, much like myself, disempowered by the machine’s (and the priests of the medical faith’s) inability to discern, explain, and address her suffering. Much like myself, in addition (but through more decrepit “public” channels), she relentlessly sought answers and biomedical quantifications of and solutions to her ailments and remained convinced, though exasperated doctors and family members had long since tired of giving

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<sup>17</sup> Which, over the course of a year in Salvador, brought me to emergency rooms in three occasions where I begged for tubes in my veins and nose and digital machines strapped to my arms and chest to explain and “cure” the physical suffering that was taking me apart...

credit and validity to her complaints, that she suffered from chronic “high blood pressure” and “diabetes” that would soon prove fatal. In the eyes of most her sisters and nieces, however, the roots of Mississippi’s suffering remained “spiritual”. The presence of “demons” in and around her life, they insisted, had also manifested itself through her inability to secure a lasting relationship with a caring and providing husband, and the ominous “fact” that all the men with whom she had lived had suffered painful and premature deaths. When I met Mississippi, then in her early forties, I was told how she had already “killed off” three of her men who had died of “cancer and heart attacks”. She was then struggling to preserve her rapidly dissolving ties with a middle-aged shop-owner from a working class neighbourhood in the periphery, who, as it was whispered to me, was desperately attempting to “get rid of her” after having “fed, clothed, sheltered, provided for her, and put up with her drama” for close to five years. I was told how, like most of her family members, Roberto, her overworked partner, could no longer bear to live with her constant “attacks” and complaints, and how he had been forced to keep her away from his store because of the “embarrassment” caused by her constant habit to call ambulances. Not much later, a mere three weeks after Roberto had “finally managed” to send off Mississippi to live with her mother (now 77 years old) in the same semi-favela home, he died of a massive heart attack while driving to his shop on a Monday morning. Other versions of Roberto’s unexpected death, murmured behind the muffling sound of evangelical TV shows, had it that he had died in bed with his young mistress while reaching orgasm. In any case, all knew that, far from being something she could have desired or conspired against through *Macumba*

black-magic, Roberto's death had been a violent *coup-de-grace* for Mississippi, who still subsisted on his weekly stipend, and was desperately hoping to resume her relationship with him. Here was, at any rate, yet another proof that Mississippi's life was surrounded in a halo of demonic work, and that all around her would be condemned to joining her in her endless suffering.

I, for my part, equipped with what I hoped was a critical-feminist existentialist medical anthropological lens and a general empathetic outlook fueled by the personal connections I could draw with Mississippi's bodily struggle, could not help admiring (while painfully empathizing with her grief) her resilience, creativity, and sensitivity. If it was perhaps "true" and "regrettable" that the accompanying pain of the complex halo metaphorically premised as "demons" that surrounded her did indeed implicate and contaminate all those around her, I was, precisely for that reason, almost pleased to notice the unmistakable call of resistance and protest in Mississippi's spectacular body praxis. Thus, amid a world of callous anomie, numbing trans-fat food obesity and right-wing evangelical TV shows, here was a body—a person—who was not slowly, silently and privately arching under the weight of blame-the-victim biomedical neocolonial capitalism, but who was loudly exploding and pointing to the nervous system that tortured her and her numbed peers. Mississippi's body and suffering, like that of her pretty niece who had later ended up procuring the favours of rich lovers in Switzerland and Italy, and who, while being possessed by the spirit of *Yemanjá*, had resisted the pastor's exorcism by lifting her miniskirt with spread legs and confronting him with the vision of her shaven pussy, had proved too resilient for the faith-based quick-

fixes of neoliberal Evangelism and clinical biomedicine, and remained, for all to see and *feel*, a nagging and taunting vision of the diseased status of the postcolonial nervous system.

Through the story of Mississippi's response to the forces that oppress her, I have argued about the possibility of resistance, but have also tried to make an epistemological, methodological and *human* point about the possibility of discerning, knowing, translating, and perhaps combating the suffering of others through a critical-medical-feminist ethnographic gaze inspired by empathetic imagination. Thus, faithful to Ruth Behar's premise and promise of being a "vulnerable observer" (Behar, 1996), I have also imagined and felt my way into the ethnographic subject matter, and have as a result written myself—my ever changing, responsive and vulnerable self—into the text. The ethnographic voice—my voice—that produced the novel and study that follows, therefore, is inevitably "autoethnographic", in the sense that it connects to the subject matter "the personal, the cultural, and the political" (Ellys & Bochner, 1996). This part autoethnographic, part literary, always vulnerable, and hopefully empathetic voice, as I have not tired to argue, should be seen and heard as a rebellious call against the paralyzing epistemologies of postmodernism that have proclaimed the impossibility to know or speak for the other. Once more, I pay my dues to Nancy Scheper-Hughes who, now over two decades ago, eloquently preached against the same demons:

I grow weary of these postmodernist critiques, and given the perilous times in which we and our subjects live, I am inclined toward a

compromise that calls for a “good enough ethnography”. The anthropologist is an instrument of cultural translation that is necessarily flawed and biased. We cannot rid ourselves of the cultural self we bring with us into the field anymore than we can disown the eyes, ears and skin through which we take in our intuitive perceptions about the new and strange world we have entered. Nonetheless, like every other master artisan (and I dare say that at best, we are this), we struggle to do the best we can with the limited resources we have at hand—our ability to observe carefully, empathically, and compassionately (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p28)

*Cooptation, activism, and the necessary but never-quite good enough  
comprise of ethnography*

While I will not shy away from my allegiance to Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ call for a good enough ethnography, and, echoing her “weary” reaction to the usual postmodern debates, do not wish to paste into this study a well-worn debate over the question of objectivity, I should perhaps speak to the important political dilemmas with which ethnography and ethnographers are faced in the context of “postcolonial” research. I should note, therefore, that ethnography as a “scientific”, political, or “humanitarian” project, especially the “postcolonial” branch of ethnography, has almost always failed to produce positive change in the lives of those who are being “researched”. Critics have often called attention to the fact that ethnographic investigations usually remain within the realm of the descriptive, never travel beyond elitist academic circles, and produce no tangible change in the lives of the marginalized individuals whose lives are being “theorized”, while

scholars gain academic prestige through the misery of “their” research subjects (Villenas, 1996; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Hecth, 1998). Commenting on his own fieldwork with the street children of Recife, Tobias Hecht (1998) remarked that “suffering is the stuff that keeps many foreign visitors employed” (p17), and pointed to a phenomenon he labeled “street-children tourism” which fed an “industry of researchers that treat street children as raw material there for the taking, [and translate] the anguish of real children into [documents] that benefit above all [themselves]” (pp. 18-19).

In light of these risks and what I regard as the intolerable co-opting logic of the ethnography of suffering, I have often called for “the moral imperative of praxis” and the necessity to make research “applied and relevant” to the downtrodden, and, when faced with the impossibility of doing that in a meaningful manner, have often mocked postcolonial research or argued against it altogether (see Veissière, 2006; 2007, reprinted in appendix 1 and 2 on *the politics of postcolonial research and praxis*).

Thus, I have for the longest time been preoccupied with reconciling insights from critical pedagogy and popular education with the project of ethnography, and with the urgent task of reinventing a “participatory ethnography” aimed at empowering the subaltern<sup>18</sup>.

Before returning to Brazil for a year of fieldwork in Salvador, I had theorized and fantasized at great length about a grounded and participatory

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<sup>18</sup> see Chapter 4 for a broader discussion of participatory ethnography in the context

ethnography of marginalized street livelihoods that would trigger a revitalization of civil society and equitable transformation of the public sphere from below<sup>19</sup>.

Such preoccupations drew me into a deeper study of the interaction of street children and population with NGOs and researchers in the first part of *Ghosts* and in Chapter 4, and of the role of NGOs in reinforcing hegemony, but in the end, no such revolutionary change occurred from my inquiry. In fact, I had, by the time I got to Salvador, found myself compelled—ethically compelled—to rethink my position as a researcher-agitator, and had been struck by a wave of caution and humility that had forced me to shy away from my intended revolutionary proselytism. While I was still committed to research and to the possibility of participatory research in the tradition of critical pedagogy (that is, in the words of Paulo Freire (2000) as a (collaborative?) act of reading the word and the world in order to change the world), I had become unconvinced that my own visions of change would be appropriate or even desirable in the context I so desperately sought to transform<sup>20</sup>. Before questioning the possibility of critical pedagogical ethnographic research, however, let us briefly examine what such a position entails. The words of Fátima, a character in Tobias Hecht's *After Life*, the ethnographic novel that provided some of the inspiration for my own work, best capture the essence of the role of researcher-educator preoccupied with a critical exploration and transformation of reality:

If you go into a community and ask people what they need, they will tell you a soccer field. That's what they feel they need. But if you

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<sup>19</sup> I had even written and defended my comprehensive evaluations as a preparation of this “revolutionary” possibility

<sup>20</sup> see Ferguson, 1994, on a similar dilemma about “what is to be done?”, and “by whom?”

engage them in a process of reflection about their lives, they will see that what they really need is to vaccinate their children, cover up the open sewerage lines, reduce the incidence of domestic violence. As an educator, *um educador*, someone working in the tradition of Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, one's job is to help people distinguish between one sort of need and another. (Hecht, 2006, p174)

Such a philosophy—that of the critical researcher *educador*—has always animated the way I teach and do research. Yet, after experiences of researching, teaching and wanting to bring about change in postcolonial contexts, I also found that this attitude carried potentially dangerous amounts of pretension. In fact, I found that we should exercise extreme caution in idealizing the position of the dialogic critical educator and recognize the inherent condescension, and even danger of such a pedagogical philosophy. Indeed, as I came to realize, if one's role is to “guide” others beyond deceptive or oppressive aspects of social reality, it follows that one must claim some form of superior knowledge of social reality. This rather arrogant posture, as James Scott would remind us, is necessarily grounded in presuppositions of “false consciousness” that deny social actors all authority over their own realities and priorities (Scott, 1990, p70). The inherent arrogance and moral slipperiness of critical pedagogy, thus, is something with which I have been battling for quite some time, and that has, of late, caused me to alter the way I position myself in the field.

When, two months before leaving for Salvador, I traveled to the “Canadian” Arctic to teach Inclusive Education to pre-service Inuit teachers, I initially thought I would use the seminar as a critical platform for generating revolutionary pedagogies of social inclusion and postcolonial healing grounded in Inuit epistemologies. At first, I treated the students' demand for more “western” biomedical typologies of



difference, diagnostic tools, clinical professionals and remediation techniques as one of the “false” needs whose demystification it was my duty to facilitate. Yet, as the seminar progressed, I found that I, a stranger and an intellectual, could not impose my own fantasies about (post)modernity, “tradition”, and Inuit identity on a group of people with *real* experiential and intergenerational knowledge of their communities and priorities. In the end, I continued to create spaces to explore theories and practices beyond what *I* considered to be reductionistic and ahistorical approaches to inclusive education, but I also came to terms with the fact that I had to teach and learn from what the students and community demanded and considered relevant.

My experience in Nunavut, which showed me that critical pedagogy is as much about “guiding” as it is about listening, reflecting, and constantly readapting one’s position, also caused me to reconsider my position as an “activist” ethnographer committed to “action” research, and as one who, in the end, was entering the field with *a priori* ideas about how subaltern Brazilians experienced oppression, and an equally *a priori* agenda about getting them to mobilize against “oppression”. Beyond the utterly utopian dream of revolution I was carrying with me into the field, was also the more problematic notion that I had set out to impose my own decontextualized fantasies of social change onto people who would perhaps not welcome them, or whose lives could be disrupted as a result. What was the point, it now seemed to me, of playing Che Guevara and rushing into activism, when there was so much I needed to learn, feel, and find out, and when it was surely not my place to insert myself artificially into the lives of those I fantasized as

“subaltern” and conduct what would remain “my little experiment” in which I would perform the role of yet another white, western male “expert” and “authority”, this time on revolutionary social change, and on the “revitalization” of a “civil society” to which I was a stranger? Hadn’t Che himself, as a perpetual outsider, “failed” in his mission, and ended up causing unnecessary violence and his own death because of his failure to grasp the indigenous visions and priorities of the Bolivian underclass, and his insistence on imposing a historically and culturally decontextualized notion of mobilization along Western-industrial constructs of class and proletariat? (see McLaren, 2000)

In the end, then, I continued to believe in a pedagogical ethnography of suffering motivated by the imperative of critical praxis, but I entered the field with the caution and humility of stranger with an open ear and heart.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### ***THE GHOSTS OF EMPIRE***

#### **An Ethnographic Novel**

# ONE

*A Journey into the Anomie of the Late Capitalist Night*

Salvador, July 2006

*Time, Space and Bodies in the Night Streets of Barra: An introduction*

I

Human misery gets to one.

Months “into the field” and the streets, characters and stories only get scarier. I had assumed that the opposite would happen, that people and places would get friendlier and familiar as I got to know them, and yet, the deeper, wider, and longer I look, the more I realize that I don’t understand the slightest bit about the streets, about the night, about human misery, about the human condition, and about myself. Everyday, I unlearn what I’ve learnt the day before, and find out how fragile, how partial, and how temporary things are, and, painfully, how vulnerable and naive I am. People whose respect and trust I thought I’d gained turn aggressive in the blink of an eye, red eyes craving crack, swarming around me with cupped hands, tugging at my clothes, exhibiting festering wounds.

Last night, after handing Gabriela a ten-*real* note and seeing her off in a taxi:

I am walking home by the old Barra port. Discouraged by the sight of nocturnal beach loiterers from my initial intention to go for an evening swim to fight off the debilitating hangover which I paranoiacally suspect was triggered by a foreign substance introduced in my drink by the group of whores I spent the night

with. A streetwalker I haven't seen here before accosts me as I am about to cross the street.

I am too tired and dazed to attempt to work my way to a non-transactional conversation with her, but not cranky enough to brush her off with my customary, "sorry honey, I am married (or when I get really angry about so much prostitution because of my gringoness, my semiaggressive "sorry I am gay") The girl, dark black, mid-to-late twenties, snotty nose, denim miniskirt and, surprisingly, on a day when Brazil is playing in the world cup, a blue top. She comments on it after the usual wherufroms to which my half-crankiness prompts me to reply "from around here". She doesn't challenge my claims, but points to her blue top and boasts:

-“See, I am not wearing yellow today, cuz I don't give a shit about Brazil... Brazil, Brazil, Brazil. I am sick of this cheering-for-Brazil-crap. I am happy France won.”

I wonder if someone already told her I was "French" (though I always take great pains to explain that I was born in France, and spent a little under half my life there but do not feel any ties or affinity with that place). I am also mildly interested by the fact that she at least claims not to be patriotic, which is something I have been doing a lot of thinking about and planned to research more intensely: Namely, what I call the "spectacle of nationalism of the oppressed". After witnessing the power and violence of hockey as a way to legitimize the Canadian nation and engineer the desire of Canadian nationalism among the Inuit of Nunavut, I arrived in the disintegrating Northeast during the soccer world cup, puzzled by the jingoistic display of flags, often shaven, hip-hop-style, into children's hair, and the

omnipresent green-and-gold. The Green and Yellow of the national flag, which, as Ana reminded me, represent the Green of the forest, and the Yellow of that deadly metal; a flag to celebrate colonial plundering; the extraction, exploitation, pollution and exhaustion of men, women, and soil. Why, after all, did masses and masses of nameless people whose “state” and “nation” didn’t so much as abandon them but in fact exercised direct and brutal violence over them cheered, hoped, loved and cried in the name of this magical “Brazil”? For a moment, I thought I had found the answer to the puzzling question of the absence of violent revolution in Brazil. Hegemony and racial hegemony<sup>21</sup> perhaps, but how and through what networks did it permeate everyday assumptions? For a moment, I thought I knew: soccer, it seemed to me, was an immensely powerful (I was tempted to say “biopowerful”) matrix of hegemony...but not tonight, I am neither in the mood nor creative enough to bring up the topic with the girl who is now performing the role of a street whore.

-“Do you wanna go out with me tonight?”

I feel, as usual, ill at ease and angry at being the target of her attention for such reasons, angry at the lack of other alternatives for her, but thankfully, not angry at my own desire, which, tonight, is non-existent. I am also, as ever, paralyzed by my impossibly absurd position as “ethnographer”. It strikes me, as it has struck me many times in the past month, that the whore and I are operating on not-so-dissimilar modes. We are both at different ends of street-livelihoods, but our livelihoods are interdependent nonetheless. We both see in each other potential clients and tangible commodities from which we can sustain our livelihoods, and

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<sup>21</sup> Hanchard, 1999

(dare I say it?), generate meaning and capital. If we are at both ends of a continuum, however, one is subordinate, and the other brutally dominant.

I display another one of my tricks to slip away from the girl without angering her while exerting my claims over this bit of city space.

-“Do you know Marinalva? Have you seen her around tonight?”, I interrupt her. (Marinalva is an old(er) woman, meaning a woman probably in her early to mid forties, but who has taken quite a beating from poverty, violence, alcohol, drugs, and *a vida*<sup>22</sup> as a *garota de programa*<sup>23</sup>. Marinalva, like many night women who hang out by the Porto da Barra, has lived and worked in Europe, in her case four years in Germany; brought there as the mistress of a sex-tourist *coroa*; fallen back into *a vida* in a long and sleazy series of brothels after things didn’t work out. Marinalva only rarely picks up Johns these days, but operates as somewhat of the Madame of the Porto da Barra, procuring clients for younger girls in exchange for a percentage of their *programa*)

-[Puzzled look]. “Yeah why? Did you fuck her? Are you in love with her?”

-“No, we are just friends”, I reply, which may or may not be, but probably isn’t true. I’ve spent several nights drinking beer and chatting with Marinalva and some of her friends and colleagues on the old stone parapet of the Porto da Barra. On top of her extremely sharp sense of humour, Marinalva also struck me as exceptionally lucid and aware of the mechanisms of economic oppression that force girls to fall into *a vida*, and its exploitative mechanisms.

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<sup>22</sup> ‘The life’, meaning life as a prostitute

<sup>23</sup> Literally, “program-girl”. *Programa* is a popular euphemism for a “pass”, or session with a prostitute. A *garota de programa*, then refers to prostitutes, or more colloquially and pejoratively, *putas*.



-“Of course it’s fucking exploitation, what the fuck else do you think it is?” she told me when I first met her after I inquired further about her comment that, unlike their European counterparts, *Bahiana* street whores usually didn’t have pimps.

- “But”, I’d asked, “do pimps really offer protection, or is it more like exploitation?”.

-“Don’t fool yourself, kid” she’d replied, “protection is a man who cares for you and provides for you. A son of a bitch who sends you out in the street to suck cock doesn’t protect you, he fucking exploits you”.

So I’ve grown to like and respect Marinalva, though I can’t say or know that she feels the same about me. She has, after all, asked me precious little about myself, and, though she recognizes me and waves at me whenever she sees me, and has on a few occasions protected me from aggressive beggars (“Can’t you tell he’s not a gringo? He’s a *gaúcho* [citizen of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil’s southernmost state with many descendants of German immigrants], he’s Brazilian and suffers like the rest of us! Now fuck off!”), I am pretty sure she doesn’t know my name. So I’ve been using her name as a territorial marker, and have also been planning on—but have not yet dared—interviewing her about her transnational experience of being expected to perform a sexualized version of Brazilian *negra* identity (Another acquaintance, an attractive Black woman who works at a shoe store and is about to travel to Germany recently told me “you wouldn’t believe the trouble I had to obtain my passport. People at the federal police automatically assume that all Black women traveling to Europe are prostitutes”).

-“Well I haven’t seen her anyway” retorts the girl, her smile gone. “Could you help me out with a *real* or two so I can get some dinner?”

Weak, hurried and guilty, I search my left pocket, in which I always keep loose change for such occurrences or for more forceful demands, but in the haze of my hangover, I came out ill-prepared and instead pull out a ten-*real* note [about \$5]. Big mistake. But there is no going back. I hand it to her. Her face lights up as she picks up the bill, and she lets go of a loud happy shriek as she throws her arms around me and kisses me on the mouth. Her screams attract the attention of the three crack addicts I thought I knew, and whom I had sent off with a few centavos, apologizing, when I had been walking Gabriela to her taxi—which I paid for—a few minutes ago. One of them, permanently clad in a generic baseball cap and hoodie sweater, always reminds me of the *Scream* painting by Edvard Munch, with his rather ghostly and almost undulating way of hovering around the same strip of sidewalk. This time, he seems unusually energized as he flies over towards us, followed by two other shadows who seem to have materialized from nothingness.

-“How much did you give her”?, he demands loudly and anxiously, “give me!, give me! GIVE ME!”, he moans, echoed by his companions who are now grabbing my clothes. I had previously been so convinced of the cap-and-hood-guy’s inoffensiveness that it takes me a second to even start getting scared. Meanwhile, the girl has thrown herself between us to push the guy away. “Leave him alone you fucking dog! Get the fuck away!” she commands. But the other two boys restrain her, and hoodie punches her in the shoulder, producing a blunt *thud!*.

-“We’ll beat the shit out of her, aright?”

It all happens too fast for me to think, and I shove my arm between hoodie and the girl, but rather shyly and not nearly as hard and far as I should.

-“Stop that shit”, I beg, practically throwing loose coins at them. I’ve got about forty *reais* on me, but I am not even quite sure in which pocket, and the girl is screaming:

-“leave him alone!”.

For a moment, I wonder if all four of them are involved in an elaborate scam to rob me, as I find the girl’s willingness to defend me a little strange. Or not? Am I stupidly naive or unforgivably distrustful, paranoid even?

-“It’s okay” I reassure her, “I know them, it’s all cool, no worries, just go”.

Hoodie grabs the back of my neck and drags me aside, beginning to walk.

-“yeah, it’s all cool, let’s go for a walk”.

I let myself get carried away, barely looking back at the woman and two other guys who each go their way. I am scared, but as I look at the crowds of passers-by by the hospital in the direction of my apartment, I realize that nothing terribly bad could happen at this time. And yet, trying not to stare at the pus-filled pockets and loose straps of pink flesh that dangle from the scrawny left leg he painfully drags behind, a little voice inside my head is whispering “what if he pricks you with a dirty needle? What if he rubs his pus in your face? What has he got to lose?”.

- “How much did you give her?” he repeats angrily.

-“five *reais*”, I lie, “I swear I thought it was a one real note, what was I gonna do?”, I continue, rather truthfully “You know I don’t do that sort of thing”.

-“yeah yeah I know I know, but gimme something, anything”.

I pull out another crumpled note which miraculously turns out to be two *reais*, and, even more surprisingly, hoodie let goes of me and walks off with it.

I hurry in the direction of my apartment, avoiding the spot by the mango tree where I saw a huge dead rat the day before. It’s six thirty PM, and already pitch dark. Is it late enough to go to bed? I woke up at 1:00 PM, briefly, and dozed off again till 4:00. I haven’t eaten in 24 hours—tried to eat after I awoke the second time, but couldn’t. My head is pounding, I am dizzy, and nauseous. What the hell did they put in my drink? Is this what a cocaine, or ecstasy hangover is like? Am I getting sucked in to all this? Or am I really paranoid? Oh fuck, last night.

*Making a living: Research, NGOs, and the Misery Industry*

II

Yesterday:

I spent the morning at the Federal University, in the Education Faculty. I have been spending quite a bit of time in various departments of the Federal University lately, in between trying to find teaching jobs and registering as a visiting doctoral student. Like all those years ago at the university of São Paulo, I felt inexorably drawn to the soviet-style modernist architecture, the crumbling blackened buildings, the scarce libraries and hordes of Guevarista-looking students. Yeah, I thought, this is where I belong. This is where I can teach my post-Marxist propaganda to politicized undergrads, this is where I can do my bit for the revolution. This is, also, where I sometimes hang out and eat at the subsidized student restaurant, wearing my Karl Marx or EZLN T-shirt in the hope that someone will strike a conversation with me. Of course, the soviet-style bureaucracy hits me in the face almost as hard as my solitude. My diplomas must be translated and authenticated. The office in charge of such transactions (that is, in charge of sending them off elsewhere), after long sweaty walks through sooty concrete mazes, turns out to be closed.

-“Nothing open today with the soccer-game, come back on Monday”.

In the afternoon, I walk, get lost, find, and navigate through the bureaucracy of a radical Freirian street education NGO I heard of from the Barra street kids. I’ve decided after all that I might be more “productive”, at least temporarily, as a

volunteer in such an NGO. The radical-sounding title of *educador de rua*, street educator, I must confess, fills me with hopes and thrills.

After finding the proper office where prospective volunteers and visitors are to introduce themselves, I locate the person I am to speak to but am told to wait until the end of the Argentina-Germany soccer game. "It'll only be a few minutes", the coordinator assures me, "you should know, however, that we no longer accept volunteers, and especially not foreign volunteers". He pauses; filled with shame, I remember Tobias Hecht's similar experience with an NGO director who'd told him, "Like many foreign visitors, you have come to study our misery" (Hecht, 1998). What do you reply to that?

The NGO coordinator continues. "Let's say that we had too many problems of a *cultural* [he stresses that word] order....too many people who wanted to *show us the way*".

I am angry, and hurt, but I think I understand what he means.

- "No, no" I say, "I didn't come to teach you anything. I just want to learn".

- "Good then, you want to learn about the project, and many people come for that. These two girls [he points to two overdressed brunettes, fair-skinned, with straightened black hair, plaid skirt, white blouse and high-heels] came for the same reason. We'll speak to you in a minute, please make yourselves at ease".

I offer the only remaining chair to one of the brunettes, which she politely refuses, and we both remain standing. I contemplate the rather absurd spectacle of these men and women cheering and screaming at a cubic display in which

millionaires kick a leather ball around, and I get even angrier. Reviewing the room and its characters, my eye catches sight of a small tribalish tattoo on one of the brunettes' neck, just below the ear, shaped like the coiled opening of a violin. "Surprising", I note, because it doesn't fit my first impression and instant classification of the girl. But I am still angry. "But I am different!", I want to tell the coordinator. "I am not like these foreigners". Yet, what evidence do I have to support my claims? What am I to tell him? "I've read Tobias Hecht, and I agree with him!" Is this all I can say? But nobody's heard of Tobias Hecht, not here. Not the street educators, certainly not the street kids, not the University libraries, not the bookstores, not even the online bookstores. Nobody's heard of Donna Goldstein, Nancy-Scheper-Hughes<sup>24</sup>, or the Margaret Mead Award, their work untranslated still. How absurd. What's the point of all this?

Anthropology, and research, however, all are familiar with.

-“Anthropology is research, isn't it?”, 14-year-old Dagoberto had asked me, recounting his encounter with an *Americano* anthropologist who had spent three months “doing his research” in the favela. “He wore white clothes and white shoes”, Dagoberto had explained (we had been discussing the way he could tell who was and who wasn't a gringo, even Black American gringos, based on the types of clothes and shoes they wore. “Where are my shoes from? I'd asked him. He said they were *de la*, from over there. They were in fact Brazilian). We'd spoken of research and intrusion. Did he mind the presence of researchers in the favela? Did he mind being asked questions? Did he see a point to this research business, and did he think it made a difference?

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 4

-“No I don’t mind, why would I? People got to make a living, don’t they?”

Is this all it was, then? People—anthropologists, researchers—making a living?

This is why I couldn’t do it, why I wanted more, needed more, and wanted it now.

This is why I was at the *Projeto Axé* to offer my labour as a street educator.



## III

-“We’ve seen many foreign visitors”, patiently declaims the coordinator from behind his large wooden desk, on which sits a book about Chiapas, in front of the three chairs pulled up to accommodate the girls and me.

-“...many journalists, many filmmakers, many politicians,” he pauses”, “*many* students, many theses, many dissertations..... In fact, I am sorry to say that our project has gotten more attention and recognition in Europe [pointing at me] than it has in Brazil”

The girls and I expound our motives for visiting the project. They introduce themselves as graduate students in the social sciences from the State University, working on a project—obscure and uninteresting to me—about public relations, advertising and fundraising. When the coordinator tilts his head further to the right to indicate that his attention has now fallen on me, I mechanically recite my rehearsed introduction: I have nothing to teach them; I am here to learn and, if possible, to participate in street education and cultural circles<sup>25</sup>. I am interested in popular conscientization and mobilization. I am interested in ways in which the subaltern, but particularly young people in and of the streets understand the cultural, political and economic mechanisms that oppress them, and I would like to find out about ways to mediate this conscientization and opportunities where street youth can educate other segments of civil society and government bodies to mediate social change.

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<sup>25</sup> Paulo Freire (2000), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Quite a mouthful, but it came out more or less coherently, and I almost thought I saw a glimmer of interest—or was it reassurance? Or bored politeness?—in the coordinator's eyes.

We, or rather he, speak(s) for a long time, and I am mostly delighted—in fact thrilled—by the philosophy of the program. The Call of the Street, the Marxist political-economic view of history, the post-Marxist pedagogy of liberation, the references to Chiapas and the MST<sup>26</sup> (though how the MST is even remotely identity-based, I don't quite see yet), and the importance of dialogue between civil society and government bodies (which I hope will rescue me out of my growing anarchism). He insists repeatedly, peeking at the faux-diamond crucifix sandwiched in one of the girls' décolleté, that the Projeto is not a charity organization, and that their philosophy is not one of salvation of the soul, but of transformation of this world. He adds, furthermore, that the project's educators take great pains in encouraging the kids not to reject their rich Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage, and that they “have had it up to here with these damned evangelicals who manage to get hold of the kids and undo all [their] hard work by convincing them that *Umbanda*, and *Candomblé*<sup>27</sup> are the works of the devil”.

At this point, I am fully conscious that liberation pedagogy and the free-market theology of the evangelical churches are perhaps merely two proselytizing cosmologies fighting for their own version of salvation. In the end, however, I have made my leaps of faith and delineated my allegiances, and I side with liberation

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<sup>26</sup> Movimento Sem Terra, Landless Movement

<sup>27</sup> Often pejoratively referred to as *Macumba*

pedagogy all the way. In fact, I am so pleased by the words of the coordinator that I have to restrain myself not to high-five him.

*Salvador, Cuzco and the Transnational Imagination, Performance,  
and Commodification of History, Culture, and Childhood*

IV

A lapse later, I am out in the street, I have gone my way, and the girls have gone theirs, despite my efforts to strike a conversation with them. They politely responded to all my questions and my attempts to break the silence during the long and awkward elevator ride, but did not reciprocate with queries of their own. Why don't people ever ask questions? Perhaps this is also what I liked about the project. "Our pedagogy", the coordinator had said, "is one of listening". Of course, he'd noted, it was a little ironic that he'd been speaking all this time without giving us his attention, but he'd convinced me nonetheless. In truth, while I lauded the pedagogy of listening, and engaged in more than my share of probing and listening every day, I also longed for something genuinely more dialogical, or perhaps, selfishly, for something more reciprocal where "informants" would also show genuine interest in me. Perhaps what hurt me the most was not the lack of curiosity toward me, but the particular kind of attention that I constantly received; I had been prepared to be perceived as an "alien", as an oppressor, a source of hate even, but not as a commodity; not as one of a few scant resources to be competed for in a ruthless capitalist market. How ironic and absurd. After endlessly and nauseatingly deconstructing the politics of my gringo location in the field *before* entering the field, and quite unproblematically announcing that I would be studying "street

livelihoods”, I had failed to even remotely consider that *I* would be the “natural”, “produced”, and “social” capital that “creative economic agents” would compete for. How utterly, wholly, abominably fucking sickening. So many factors I had underestimated or simply failed to take into account: the overwhelming prevalence of prostitution as a livelihood, the reliance on tourists-as-resources; and above all, the brutal, direct, and oh-so-perverse asymmetry of the world-system that played out in the encounters between gringos and downtrodden Brazilians and their comparable “value” (aarrgh!) in the world-system. The fact that I, despite all wishful evidence to the contrary, was also a gringo and tourist, is perhaps the “factor” that I had, in the end, least anticipated.

So it rapidly emerged that for “street kids”, who, it also emerged, less and less covertly become street whores as they get older (at least the girls, biological and otherwise), gringos are not only the most prized, but also the most probable and reliable source of capital and “emancipation”. This is perhaps a lot more accentuated in “touristy” Salvador (and equaled only by Rio de Janeiro), and is consequently something I had failed to anticipate based on my experience in non-touristy São Paulo. It is also becoming increasingly clearer (and not without a hint of chance and irony), that Salvador and Cuzco (Peru), where I first encountered and developed an “interest” in street kids, bear more than a passing resemblance. Beginning with a bit of personal history and coincidence, then, Salvador is where my French ex-godfather, as a hippie backpacker and failed architect in the 1970s, landed after finding a “ride” on a sailboat from Senegal. From Salvador, whose epicenter of Afrobrazilianness made it a hot spot for “culture”-seeking backpackers,

he journeyed over the continent to Cuzco, the other hot-spot epicenter for “genuine” Inka culture-seeking backpackers. The middleclass gringo backpackers’ demand for “authentic” Afrobrazilian and Precolombian culture, indeed, anticipated and triggered the present-day themeparkism<sup>28</sup> of “historic” Cuzco and Salvador, but more about that later....So my ex-godfather remained in the Peruvian and Bolivian Andes for close to a decade, first as a tour guide, and later, when he had returned to France, as somewhat of a con-archeologist (as I became a con-anthropologist) who wrote cheesy bestselling books about the Inkas. Much later, I too, set-up by my con-archeologist and not-yet-ex godfather, arrived in Cuzco to work for an awful “adventure” travel company. Among the friends I met in Cuzco, was a Brazilian backpacker whom I later met again in Holland, and later still visited in São Paulo, where, at the prestigious Universidade de São Paulo (USP), I then met my now (ex) wife, who, after six years of marriage in five countries and three continents, insisted that we “pick” Salvador as the place where “my” doctoral fieldwork was to unfold.

Cuzco and Salvador, then, besides their physical and cultural distance, are fundamentally similar in various aspects. Most notably, of course, and unlike most of these moist latitudes which Erik Wolf would call “without-history<sup>29</sup>”, Cuzco and Salvador boast well-preserved and internationally-renowned “historic” centers where transplanted European memorabilia architecture that symbolizes the extermination of a people and the enslavement of another is celebrated as “rich” and “cultural”. Cuzco and Salvador, in addition, like many Latin American cities, are surrounded and crisscrossed by expanding and insalubrious shantytowns where

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<sup>28</sup> See Lim (2003) on themeparkism

<sup>29</sup> Wolf (1982)

such curable, not to mention preventable, diseases as cholera, tuberculosis and leprosy breed in raw-sewage, but, unlike most Latin American cities, Cuzco and Salvador benefit from astronomical “public” and corporate spending on the preservation, renovation, and revitalization of the “historic” centers where the VISA® and MASTERCARD® logos are now visible on every other door. In Cuzco and Salvador, hospitals, schools, and government services are saturated and disintegrating; hotels, clubs, resorts, and tour-operators, however, are luxurious, plentiful, and prospering. In Cuzco and Salvador, lower-middle to middle-class youths work long hours and borrow large sums of money that they surrender to private schools and colleges where they hope to learn English, hotel-management, and the various skills and trades of the “tourist industry”. In Cuzco and Salvador, furthermore, where “tradition” is not so much invented<sup>30</sup> as commodified, amid the English signs advertising access to “traditional” shamanic or Candomblê events, one (gringo/a) is struck by how remarkably skilled the downtrodden are at performing the version of their “culture” and “ethnicity” that they know gringos expect to encounter. So, in Cuzco, one can hardly spend ten minutes around the Plaza de Armas without running into a child in “traditional” Inka dress dragging the obligatory llama and demanding a few dollars to *tekapeekcha*, and in Salvador, one (gringo/a) cannot walk freely around the old district of Pelourinho without being periodically stopped by large Black women in “typical” AfroBrazilian dress and hairdos, who, if they do not request money for pictures, are in fact employed by the municipality or private tourist agencies and distribute the mandatory lucky-charm *Senhor do Bomfim* bracelets that no tourist will ever leave Salvador without (I am,

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<sup>30</sup> See Hobsbawm (1983), on ‘the Invention of Tradition’. In

as I write, staring at the yellow silk bracelet on my left wrist, which I expect to break off and fulfill my wish anytime soon).

In Cuzco and Salvador, finally, one (gringo/a) encounters street children who are particularly insightful and skilled at performing “defenseless” and “innocent” versions of childhood that will strike a chord with Gringo sensitivities and assumptions on the nature and vulnerability of “childhood”. My friend Christophe Matthey, whom I knew in Cuzco all those years ago and who now became a “real” anthropologist, documented a long series of tricks and bluffs of various kinds employed by the street kids of Cuzco to appeal to gringo sensitivities, guilt, and “charity”. Those included, among other “tricks”, hiding one’s shoes and sweater on a cold night and shivering in a dirty corner with a blank look on one’s face, or orchestrating a fight after which the smallest child would be left “crying” on his own<sup>31</sup>. Recently in Salvador, I noticed a group of *pivetes* I hadn’t seen before around Barra. Crossing the street in their direction, I remarked that one of the kids’ legs bore the drying scabs and marks of a recent wound, but I also remarked that the child began to limp and whimper only when he took note of my presence. In a nauseating mixture of post-Christian guilt and ethnographer’s opportunism, I couldn’t help asking the boy what had happened to his leg. In a perfect rendition of a hurt, lonely, lost and scared “child”, he recounted with teary eyes how he had been hit by a car. Minutes later, though, as the kids and I were sitting on concrete steps by the grocery store where I had bought them a pack of cookies, the boy jumped, laughed and cheered as he and his friends told and retold the spectacular story of the hit and run. “You should have seen him”, his friend

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<sup>31</sup> Matthey (2005)



went on, almost strangling himself with laughter, “he took the biggest dive ever and fleeeeeeeew up in the air....”. Later still, on the old stone pier by the Porto where I like to jump and dive with the kids, *moleques* from the same group told with pride and delight the story of their friend who had defended himself from a “crazy” *pivete* by crushing his skull with a big rock. The proud victor, encouraged by his friends, mimicked his exploit before me, lifting a huge imaginary rock with both hands above his head, and slamming it down violently with a toothy grin, “whaaack! Just like that!”. There was in the glimmer of his eyes something the gringo in me could call the excitement of child, but there was something else, something that scared me so much and that I couldn’t understand; something I know I will never understand.

*Further along the Road of Witnessing, Pimping, and Creating Suffering*

V

On the bus out of Pelourinho, on the steep road that follows the seafront and the gated high-rises above the quasi-vertical favela of Gamboa, I half-heartedly rationalize that my failure to establish contact with the two brunettes in white blouses was probably a good thing. "Their project was uninteresting, and the other girl was evangelical anyway", I tell myself, thinking, but trying not to think about the fine and blurry line between prospective "contact", "informant", "acquaintance", "friend", alternative to solitude, and sexual partner. In a similarly blurry manner, I contacted a local activist group through a listserv affiliated with riseup.net, my contact having been, so far, merely electronic. The group's monthly meeting, to which I am invited, is to be held tonight. Though I am expecting to encounter what I am often tempted to call "the usual" radical-chic bureaucratized kind of middleclass student ranting, I am comforted by the thought that I will find myself on familiar grounds and might even "establish contacts" in the mid-to-farther end of the informant-friend-sexual partner-significant other continuum. Meeting-time is nearing, but I am not concerned, at least, not with the time. What worries me the most is my timidity, and the rather absurd act of showing up alone and having to introduce myself.

Suddenly, abruptly, I decide that I cannot do it, that I cannot make myself go through this ritual, and I impulsively get off the bus. I am in Vitória, the ritzy

district (which I secretly find comforting) with its mixture of old colonial mansions, lush gardens, and postmodern high-rise complexes with private cable-cars to private beaches.

Crossing the street by the art-house cinema to avoid another spot where I had previously seen another dead rat on the otherwise impeccably tiled sidewalk, I decide to walk back to Barra via the steep costal road that boasts some of the most expensive buildings in Salvador.

Passing by the *Alliance Française*, I am instinctively drawn to break my own vow of never entering an overseas French cultural center by the sight a large banner advertising a painting exhibit—by a painter, unknown to me, with a French name—entitled “*Meninos de rua/ Enfants des rues*”<sup>32</sup>. With a tinge of shame and disgust, I enter the building through a set of white stairs flanked by faux marble neoclassical columns, and nervously pace through the wide exhibit room. All the large canvasses, painted in some sort of neo-impressionistic style and bathed in cheesy halos of light terracotta orange that remind me of the tiles and walls of nouveau-riche village estates in southern France, depict blurred contours of working children going about their daily subsistence tasks: washing car windows, juggling at traffic lights with empty coconuts shells, collecting aluminum cans, cardboard and scrap metals for recycling, etc. There is an emphasis on toiling, on the “harsh conditions of survival of these courageous characters”, but there also seems to be a glimmer of something in the paintings about happiness and the “playfulness of youth” that subsists in the children’s lives. Ok, I think, yeah, fair enough I guess. Let’s go to a cheesy, second rate *vernissage* so, in between name-dropping, gulping

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<sup>32</sup> Street Children

imported Red Label and Chilean Cabernet and stuffing ourselves with shrimp canapés and cheese dumplings, we can comment a thing or two on the artwork, and even on the subjects, that is, on the invisible figures of which we are simultaneously oblivious, scared, and annoyed at for having to surrender R\$1 when they aggressively "offer" to watch our parked automobiles. Ok, sure, but where are the scenes depicting the sodomy, the ritual gang rapes, the crack smoking, the blowjobs-for-food-to-be-exchanged-for-money-to-get-crack, the muggings, the skull crushings, the suicides, the mutilations, the public defecating, the public vomiting, the public bleeding, the pus, the gangrenes, the spectacularly displayed deformed limbs, the public death and the public rotting in mouldy blankets that takes days to be noticed, the public numbness, the amateur abortions with rusty coat hangers, the public miscarriages, the beatings, the drownings, the blue corpses swollen and gorged with black sewerage-infested sea water, the fat gringos in Hawaii shirts lusting after pre-nubile skinny brown bodies, the pedicured chubby toes crammed in high-heels holding brand-name shopping bags fleetingly walking on grimy sidewalks over skinny brown corpses that haven't moved since morning and might as well be dead. And what about what lies beyond the street? The rat-and-bug-infested crowded *favela* homes, the maddened mothers demanding money for food and bills, the desperately drunk step-fathers, the gun shots, the incest? Yeah, sure, what a "moving" exhibit. But what does "street children" mean? Why not just "working children?" What does "children" mean anyway? But more importantly, what motivated the artist to bring to light such "peripheral" characters? Is it what critics will call "humanism", "humanity" even? Does it make the artist,

then, and those of us who can “appreciate” her intention more “human” to find ourselves in a situation where we can claim to be “moved” by the artwork? But what does that mean?

Or is it just “a big deal” for the artist; something that will stand out on her CV; another perverse way of cashing in on photogenic human suffering? Did the artist get an Art Council grant for her “research”, a warm handshake and an admiring tap on the shoulder from the French public official who handed her a grant check and plane tickets to undertake her “courageous” and “compassionate” journey of inquiry? How did she “collect her data”? Did she sit around “public” spaces all day observing and photographing the toiling youth? Will the captions in her future French exhibits claim that, like an anthropologist, she “lived among” the street children of Bahia? Why do anthropologists and book publishers always make such ridiculous claims about the relationship between the researcher and the researched? A few of the patrons at the exhibit, like many other “intellectuals” and “activists” that can be seen around Salvador these days, are sporting black and white canvas bags from a recent African Diaspora conference that depict *Candomblé* priests photographed by Pierre Verger, the French ethnologist and photographer, who, as Tobias Hecht reminds us, “spent most of life living among the spirit practitioners of Bahia”. What the hell does that mean? Is this what will be written on the back cover of the imaginary book I will probably never write: *Samuel Veissière “lived among” the thieves, sex tourists and crack whores of Salvador da Bahia?* Will I be lauded for my “courage”, my “compassion”, my “vivid and insightful portrayal of everyday violence in the lives of the downtrodden”? Will I

accept congratulatory handshakes while I push away memories of walking three times around my upmarket block in order not to let one of "my" crack-addict "informant" who is lying comatose on the sidewalk discover behind which high-security gates I retreat at night so I can order American-style fast-food to be delivered through the metal gates and lay half naked in bed to watch foreign DVDs?

Is there, in the end, anything that we, the privileged, can say or do about the downtrodden, or our vision of the downtrodden, without it being condescending at best, and exploitative at worst?

*Descent: Cartographies of the Late-Capitalist Night*

VI

The feeling of nausea and dizziness I felt all afternoon has now intensified to the point of vomiting, and I suddenly realize that I have not eaten anything since the piece of stale bread and slice of salami I gulped down this morning in the elevator when I was rushing to get to what I imagined would be a successful job interview at the federal university. I flee from the exhibition room and stumble down a set of windy stairs, lured by a suspended wooden sign with a tricolor Eiffel tower that advertises a bistro inventively titled *Café de Paris*. The bistro, deserted save for an elderly gringo couple accompanied by a short-haired (local?) *negra* woman, extends over a tiled terrace that overlooks the seafront. On the left, past the luxury high-rises with their private parks and beaches, one can see the exclusive *Barra Yacht Clube* and the silhouette of the San Benardo fort. But from here, one is spared the constant stench of urine and excrement in the old stone walls, at the foot of which many of “my” crack-addict “informants” collapse every morning when the piercing light of dawn relieves them from their fight against their bodies’ constant drive to shut down out and expose their unconscious flesh to the anomie of the Late Capitalist Night. To the right, beyond and below another row of high-rises, a vertical jigsaw of favela “autoconstructed” houses. Rush hour traffic noises have faded away, and, miraculously, the Bistro’s stereo is mute. In the wind, coming

from the right and below, from the favela, echoes of *pagode*<sup>33</sup> music mixed with fainter layers of shouts, cries and live singing and drumming from a *Candomblê terreiro*.

Cartographies of the urban night, of the Late Capitalist Urban Night, are so absurd, inverted, *false*....I am in the liminal zone between Barra and Vitória, two of the city's most expensive and glamorous "good" neighbourhoods, yet, the streets are deserted; sporadic pedestrians, dodging the passing cars that rush by, double-locked behind their tainted windows without stopping at red lights, looking over their shoulders and zigzagging across both sides of the road, keeping away from the enemy that lurks in every crack of sidewalk, every tree, every street corner, every alley, every bush, every staircase, every, bridge and every underpass. That is why the homeless sleep during the day, choosing life over dignity in a world that values what is private, while those who can—that is, those who possess the means to hide—seek that privileged realm above all: the Safety of the Private; locked away from the Enemy. This is why people hide, and why Those Who Can invest in their own safety, retreat behind fences and bullet-proof windows and slither away from the "public" realm: because of the Enemy, because every passerby, every man, woman, and child is a potential enemy; because humankind is inherently wicked, thieving, murderous...in a word Evil. Yes, humankind is Evil and not worth saving. But if the individual is the only entity worth saving, then social cohesion is only necessary to the extent that humankind must be protected from its own Evil; that Man must be protected from Man, that individuals must be protected from

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<sup>33</sup> Commercial, often electronic and hypersexualized *samba* from popular with the working classes and routinely shunned by the "cultured" middleclass.



individuals: Security, therefore (the security of privacy), is the only social good worth investing in; "Government as Night-watchman", the good old Reaganite axiom, is the only social model worth buying, precisely because it is in the unbearable transparency of the Late-Capitalist Night that humankind's true nature reveals itself.....But that is a lie; even from within the moronic logic of Capitalism, that is a lie; Capitalism teaches us that humankind is inherently Good, and that the rational pursuit of individual happiness leads to collective happiness; Capitalism teaches us that the rational pursuit of individual profit will naturally lead to an equitable distribution of wealth. But listening to the favela sounds carried by the wind, I know that this is a lie, all of it. Listening to the laughs and cries down below, I know that humankind left on its own does not destroy itself, and I also know that humankind left on its own lets itself perish. It is all a lie, everything. The Cartography of the Late Capitalist Night is a lie. Barra is not Good and the favela is not Bad. Barra perishes and the favela lives. In the "vermin-infested" homes of the favela where "diseased and famished bodies" "pullulate", doors are left open well into the night, street corners are alive with friends and families drinking, eating, dancing, playing cards, chess, checkers, soccer, videogames, sleeping on their uncle's lap, and dropping in on one another at flexible meal times because food, however scarce, is never refused. Up here in Barra-Vitória, one is slashed in the throat by the anomie of the Late Capitalist Night and left to gag in one's own blood. Down below, in the residual spaces of Empire, "bandits" and "criminals" offer protection and "stolen" "commodities" such as water and light, while underpaid and misconscientized policemen and women, themselves from the oppressed classes

and employed by the crumbling State, channel their pain by wreaking havoc among the criminalized *favelados*. Give me a favela night though, any time, over a Barra night; give me the solidarity of a “bad” neighbourhood over the anomie of a “good” one. But that too is a lie; wishful thinking at best, and at worst, apolitically postmodern or even blatantly neoconservative celebrations of “spontaneous organic alternatives”; the naïvely essentialist feminist urbanist utopias of Jane Jacobs and Iris Marion Young<sup>34</sup> at best, and at worst, Rem Koolhaas<sup>35</sup>’ delirious celebrations of Lagos’s “organized chaos” or Hernando de Soto’s<sup>36</sup> antisocialist praise of *laissez-faire* approaches, pointing to the economic survival strategies of Lima’s urban poor as an example to follow.....But they are wrong, they are all lying, and they are all deceiving themselves, and so am I. Neither view of human nature is correct: there is no noble savage, and no original sin, and neither model of social organization is desirable: we can neither intervene, nor let be. Now, I can see that all of it is an illusion, and that the very bipolar logic that clouds all other possible views and alternative is also a lie. Fuck Plato, St Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Hegel and all the others who inscribed this shitty dualism onto the false division of our body and soul; and fuck Spinoza, Nietzsche, Sartre, Derrida, and all the other New Age Fridjof Capras and Cyborg Donna Haraways who think we can shake off metaphysics from our fragmented selves in the blink of an eye and become whole again. Tonight, I understand that there is no binary code, and no middle-ground; no

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<sup>34</sup> See Jane Jacobs (1961), “the Death and Life of Great American Cities”, and Iris Marion Young (1990) “Justice and the Politics of difference”; see also James Scott’s (1998) discussion of Jacobs and Young’s utopias

<sup>35</sup> See Rem Koolhaas (2002)’ “Fragments of a lecture on Lagos”, and Matthew Gandy’s (2005a; 2005b) critique of Koolhaas’ aloof postmodernism in “Learning from Lagos” (2005)

<sup>36</sup> De Soto (1989). For a point of departure, see Bebbington et al (2004), and Chapter 4

boundaries, and no third space; no truth and no aporias. There is no  
Either/Or.....just Neithers and Nors.

That is all.

*A Brief Sociolinguistic Anatomy of Transnational Hustling*

VII

Disgusted by the slimy trail of perspiration left by my trembling grip on the terrace's banister, I surrender to a spurt of even more violent vertigo and abandon my initial urge to take a few minutes to admire the view and take in the orange hues of the plunging sun—so rapid in these latitudes—until its vanishing behind the island of Itaparica. Doing my best to maintain balance and produce the illusion of a debonair sort of gait, I settle for a table that is probably much too close to that of the elderly couple by most dominant conceptions of personal space, and, after folding my blazer and laying it on the table and nervously putting it back on to conceal my sweat-drenched shirt, I finally sit down, facing the party of three. A black waitress in 19<sup>th</sup>-century French maid attire brings me a French-language-only menu while I check for my pulse under the table, and she slithers back behind the bar to chat with the chef, a young but balding gringo awkwardly wearing a French soccer Jersey over his caved-in shoulders, tight jeans and running shoes, whose accented Portuguese reveals that he is indeed French. I quickly order—in Portuguese, to the waitress—a glass of *Bordeaux* and a *salade de magrêt de canard* and, after retrieving a half-crushed Xanax pill from my wallet (which I had promised myself not to use) and placing it under my tongue, I attempt to elude my impatience and anxiety by leafing through an ethnographic study of local street-children (purchased earlier today) written by an ex-Federal University student (originally a Master's

thesis) who collected her data while she worked for the NGO from which my volunteer labour was so bluntly turned down earlier this afternoon. Though the Xanax couldn't possibly have taken effect so rapidly, my anxiety wears off almost instantly but I find that I cannot concentrate on the book's disappointingly journalistic and statistical tone. As my food arrives, I turn my attention to the elderly couple and their companion. They are conversing in French—a provincial and Northern kind of French-from-France. The elderly man, dressed in a clichéd-to-the-point-of-pastiche White Man in the Tropics khaki short sleeve shirt with military epaulettes and lots of front pockets, uses the informal pronoun—*tu*—to address the black woman; she, however, somewhat hesitantly uses the formal *vous* to reply to the man's queries in flawless French with only faint traces of a Brazilian accent. The older French woman, large and tired-looking, is silently focusing on her *crêpe au chocolat*. From what I can deduce, the couple and the woman do not seem to know each other well or have known each other for a long time. “*Au fait, quel age as tu?*” How old are you, by the way, asks Old Mr Frenchie. “*Et bien*”, seeming a bit troubled, “*j’ai vingt-six ans*”, she replies, and, after a brief pause, “*...et vous?*”

Later, while the waitress silently clears their table, the old man asks for a fruit juice. In typical Spartan French fashion, he demands in a grave tone that his drink should not contain any sugar or ice. He must have been warned about the Brazilian propensity for gargantuan sugar dosages<sup>37</sup> (a mortal sin in France), and, as

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<sup>37</sup> And an interesting fact, which, as Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) reminds us by way of Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* (1986) dates back to Brazil's days as a sugar colony, and the historical construction of a taste and need for sugar, first among Europe's aristocracy, but rapidly, as a “cheap necessity of the poor” in the colonies and metropolises, so that, by the seventeenth century, “it was the

an informed traveler about the hazards of the “tropics” and “the Third World”, must have been taught not to trust ice cubes made of “contaminated” tap water. In fact he demands, in French, that his Brazilian companion translate his order to the waitress, but, before she can finish, proudly interrupts her to blurt out his message about the ice in broken Spanish: “*Sin hielo! Sin hielo!*”. The waitress smiles at him, scribbles in her notepad and rushes back behind the bar where the French chef is sliding a Serge Gainsbourg CD into the stereo. “*Sem gelo, sans glace*” corrects the interpreter-friend-and-god-knows-what-else. “Yeah”, I think, sipping on my wine and mellowing down to the moans of Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin’s “*Soixante-neuf....année érotique.....*”, yeah, that makes sense, and confirms how all these street vendors, dealers and other hustlers who can spot a gringo a mile away and accost me night and day to sell me sunglasses, ice-cream, apartments, cocaine and prostitutes and insist on speaking to me in this ridiculous, yet surprisingly coherently syntaxed *Portuñol*<sup>38</sup>, must have somehow picked up rudiments of Spanish grammar from tourists who think they can speak Portuguese, and somehow learned to speak back to Gringos in what they assume is *the Gringo’s* way of speaking. What is really fascinating here, is not only that hustling borne of world-system inequities and survival necessities has once more given rise to what, in other times and spaces, might have been called a Pidgin, but that considering how very informal this “Pidgin” is—that is, the total lack of formal opportunities for learning

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deadly consumption of sugar by the English working classes that was to maintain the tropical sugarocracies up through the twentieth century” (1992, p34).. The construction of such deadly tastes, as she points out, is what propelled the slave trade, and the brutal racialized exploitation of sugar cane workers that continue to this day in Brazil and elsewhere, as well as the annihilation of fertile but fragile soil through burning and monoculture.

<sup>38</sup> Informal mixture of Spanish and Portuguese creatively devised by non-lusophone tourists to “get by” in Brazil

this language through a ritualized and institutionalized set of rules—these hustlers manage to learn to speak *the very same version* of this Pidgin, while they evidently did not take *Portuñol* classes together or independently drew the same conclusions and shortcuts from their own random encounters with random gringos”.

Carried away by the Xanax, Cabernet and intellectual excitement-induced buzz, I start fantasizing about how a “radical” sociolinguist might draw up a political economic history and grammar of Salvador’s *Portuñol* and its occasional variations into what I am tempted to call *Portuliano* (Portuguese and Italian). I also start fantasizing about working on my own a *Portuñol* grammar and lexicon:

...The *Portuñol* speaker typically adopts a Spanish accent, marking every syllable, along with Argentine/Italian intonations, albeit in a very slow pace, and merely replaces a few key words and verbs with their Spanish equivalent. For example, the Portuguese *olhar* (to look), becomes the Spanish *mirar*, and the Portuguese *garota* (girl), becomes *muchacha*, or, occasionally, the Italian *ragazza*. Though the overall accent and intonations of the Barra hustler will invariably be Spanish- *Portuñol*, he or she will often code-switch into other languages, and might even refer to the same object in different languages in the same sentence. A typical Barra hustler line, thus, would resemble something like:

E ché! [Argentine slang for ‘man’], e lui! [Italian for “him”] ey ameego, mira la muchacha, mira la bela ragazza; te gusta? Quê fazê um programa? Quê marijuana? [tickling his nostril with his finger] dju won coceyn, mah fren?<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hey dude, hey you, my friend, check out that girl, check out the beautiful girl; do you like her? Do you wanna go out with her? Dja want marijuana? Dja want cocaine?

I am shaken out of my *rêverie* by the waitress who slaps my bill on table. It is now pitch dark outside, and the French couple and their chaperone have departed. I suddenly get an eerie feeling from finding myself alone in the deserted restaurant, with its terrace dominating over darkness, and Jane Birkin singing *Je t'aime moi non plus*. I leave thirty *reais* on the table—one tenth of a monthly minimum wage—and rush through the winding staircase and the cheesy exhibit, doing my best not to look at the paintings.



*Heart of Darkness*

## VIII

I do not encounter a living soul in the seven minutes it takes me to hike down to the Barra Old Port.

The doorman spots me from his little booth behind the fences that surround my building, and the metal gates open before I get a chance to hit the buzzer. José is a good doorman; he always spots condominium residents long before they've reached the gates and never lets them wait in the anomie of the night streets.

The vertigo that slowly crept over me after I left the restaurant has become so overpowering that I have to lean against the wall with both hands when I wait for the elevator in the faux-marble lobby. In the mirror that covers the back wall of the elevator, I look frighteningly pale and small; in fact it occurs to me that I look *green*.

I have left the light and music on in my apartment to discourage the intrusion of potential robbers through the patio's sliding doors. My apartment is at the back of the building and only gets a few rays of sunlight in the morning; after that, it macerates in suffocating humidity for about 22 hours a day. The patio, though it is technically on the second floor, is overgrown with the lush vegetation of a steep hill that belongs to a private hospital, and is sunk about a yard and a half below the base of the hill. When I first moved in, I would sweep the rotten leaves and mangoes that fell on the patio's tiled floor every day so Carl Phillip Emanuel could play there and give his toys a bath with the hose. Ever since he left, I haven't

gone near the patio, and the marshy paste of leaves, mud and mangoes that covers its floor is beginning to resemble slime. Fungus has grown all over the American Apparel T-shirt I left hanging on the clothes-line, and it still hasn't dried. I am terrified that the mango slime will attract rodents, and that they, along with robbers, will enter my apartment through the sliding doors, but I cannot possibly close the doors and windows if I want the air inside to remain breathable. No matter how terrified I am of the rats that I know will invade my apartment—and I loathe rats far beyond the most liberal thresholds of what is considered pathological—I cannot bring myself to clean the patio.

I stumble past a half dozen dirty towels and clothes scattered on the floor and, without removing my shoes, sweat-drenched jeans, and long-sleeve shirt, throw myself on the bare mattress in the bedroom, from which the only bed-sheet I possess has long since slid off. The mattress' odour, which I find soothing, is strongly impregnated with different layers of dust and humidity, with hints of mould, and the sweet scent of my own semi-dry sweat. From the grimy stuffed polar bear that rests by my pillow, with the word NUNAVUT embroidered in red bold print and its Made in China tag, emanates the even sweeter scent of Carl Phillip Emanuel. Carl Phillip Emanuel must have thrown a tantrum when he realized that he'd left Nunavut—*Nanavut*, as he calls him—behind when he was taken to São Paulo by his mother. He would go into a panic whenever he couldn't find his Nanavut.

“You bought this for me in Iqaluit, didn't you *papai*?”—he would ask me.

—“Yes my love, I got it at the Arctic Ventures store”

-“The Inuk likes to eat caribou, doesn’t he?”

-“He sure does. Do you remember how to say ‘caribou’ in Inuktitut?”

-“Yah, it’s *tuktu*, isn’t it?”

-“That’s right my love, you’re a little genius”

-“Papai?”

-“Yes?”

-“Is it like the *tuk-tuk taxi* you took in Bangkok?”

At night, he would fall asleep on my bed hugging his Nanavut. I’d give him a big kiss on his moist cheek, and would fill myself with the sweet scent of his sweaty hair.

Last time I spoke to Carl Philip Emanuel on the phone, he didn’t remember how to say ‘caribou’ in Inuktitut.

## IX

The knot in my throat has become so tight, I become overpowered by the fear that my windpipe is about to close, and propel myself out of bed in direction of the computer. I type in “allergy symptoms”, and “throat” in the Google searchbar, but do not click on any of the links that instantly show up. Instead, I motion toward the kitchen. Dishes piling up in the sink, a gas stove without a gas bottle, an empty fridge, save for half a *maracuja*<sup>40</sup>, a pack of sugar, and ice. I retrieve three ice cubes made of tap water from the fridge and a glass from the sink in which I empty the content of a bottle of Teacher’s Scotch whisky (with imported malts “assembled” in Brazil).

After returning to the computer and spending close to an hour on Wikipedia, [wrongdiagnosis.com](http://wrongdiagnosis.com), and [emedicinehealth.com](http://emedicinehealth.com) reading about symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis while trying to ignore the pins and needles in my feet and around my mouth, I pop another Xanax and return to bed.

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<sup>40</sup> Passion fruit

## X

I awake a few minutes after 23:00 with a heavy tongue. I am maddeningly thirsty. Only the Ipiranga gas station by the lighthouse sells bottled water, and they lock their fridges at eleven. I've been through this before.

-“But I just want to buy a bottle of water....”

-“Sorry sir, this is a state law, we cannot sell alcoholic beverages after eleven, and we cannot open the fridges”

-“But for fuckssake, I just want a fucking bottle of water for my *three year old son!*, I don't want to buy any alcohol!

-“Sorry sir, we cannot open the fridges, I suggest you go to a bar....”

I urinate a long flow of dark and foul-smelling piss, and gulp down what feels like five liters of warm tap water. Looking at my scrawny bearded figure in the cracked mirror, I am once more pleased to notice that I have lost about 5kgs. I am thinking of Christian Bale's pointy shoulder blades in *The Machinist*, when he hunches over the sink in the green light of his Spartan flat. Fucking pseudo-Kafkaesque clichés; I am swimming in pseudo-Kafkaesque clichés; and tropical clichés; pseudo Conradian clichés. Yeah, this is my Heart of Darkness. My tropical death. If I wasn't so goddamn sick of clichés, I would say something like:

perhaps I have come here to die.

## XI

I put on my favourite jeans (my old driven Buffalo's, size 32, which are finally not too tight; I ripped the crotch when I was running from a snowstorm in the tundra two months ago, and, when I'd returned to Montreal and endeavoured to get them fixed, the Chinese seamstress on Monkland had declared them beyond repair. The first seamstress I encountered in Salvador sewed them up in five minutes for three *reais*), my yellow Karl Marx T-shirt, and a denim jacket. I stuff two ten-real bills in each back pocket and a fifty-real bill in my briefs. I briefly consider changing into the black T-shirt on which I had the word GRINGO printed in huge white letters on the chest and back, but decide against it, and motion toward the door.

Out the metal gate, I impulsively make a left, instead of making a predictable and by-now mechanical right in direction of the Barra Old Port. I make another left past the Ipiranga Gas Station, while refraining myself from giving the finger to the fridge-locking clerk.

*The Social, Eugenic, and Biopolitical Division of Labour on a 'Trendy'  
Night Street*

XII

The *rua* Almirante Marquês de Leão is lined with fashionable bars that spill out onto the sidewalks with plastic tables and chairs that advertise local laager brands. It is not always evident to discern the territorial markers between bars along the continuum of plastic tables, but a safe bet is to go for different beer brands: the Oceanica bar begins after the set of yellow tables and chairs that depict wet bikini-clad blondes marketing *Skol* laager, after the Bohemia bar with its red and white table that depict wet bikini-clad blondes marketing *Brahma* laager.

On this Friday night—or is it Saturday yet?—the *rua* Almirante Marquês de Leão is an eerily perfect microcosm of the Brazilian pigmentocratic<sup>41</sup> social division of labour. Affluent whites with chemically lightened and straightened hair (males and females) sit and drink on the plastic tables and bark orders at perpetually smiling black and brown waiters who keep rushing back and forth in a perpetual movement to maintain an equilibrium of full glasses of whisky and laager for the boys, and Smirnoff Ice and Vodka fruit cocktails for the ladies. The daddy's boys—known as *mauriçinhos*—are all wearing designer jeans and trainers, and heavily printed designer T-shirts over their artificially sculpted and shaven torsos and

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<sup>41</sup> Nelson (1999)



square biceps<sup>42</sup>, often adorned with the turquoise waves and orange suns of neotraditional Japanese-style tattoos<sup>43</sup>. The daddy's girls—known as *patriçinhas*—are all wearing heavily printed designer dresses and high-heels over their carefully pampered skins obsessively sheltered from the sun, and the paler bikini marks through which they can fully justify their whiteness. The mauriçinhos' spanking new cars—because most Bahian *patriçinhas*, unlike their counterparts from São Paulo, do not drive—await in nearby alleys, under the “protection” of toothless, barefooted, and black street dwellers who sometimes succeed in inspiring enough fear and guilt to be given a few coins in exchange for their “service”. These toothless and barefooted black car watchers, usually a good shade darker than the waiters—themselves a good head smaller than the selectively bred mauriçinhos and *patriçinhas*—often inhabit and operate in areas of street space designated by lines that I cannot read in matrifocal family groups that span three generations. Last time I came to the *rua* Almirante Marquês de Leão, there was across the street from my plastic table a sooty, ragged barefoot, toothless and black grandmother who sat against a piss-stained wall on a piece of cardboard with two toddlers sleeping on the concrete sidewalk with their heads on her bony lap. Intolerably loud *Axé* music blasted out through the open trunk of a tuned-up Peugeot 206 parked a mere ten yards away by a plastic table with of a group of mauriçinhos sitting around a bottle of Red Label. Meanwhile, the kids' mother, wearing a dirty-but-flashy yellow traffic signaler's waistcoat and blowing in a whistle, frantically beckoned passing

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<sup>42</sup>..which reminds me of Donna Haraway: “I knew how important it was to have a body pumped up, petted and managed by the apparatuses of medicine, psychology and pedagogy. I knew modern subjects had such bodies, and that the rich got them before the laboring classes” (2003, p266)

<sup>43</sup> See De Mello (2000) on the middleclasses' appropriation of tattooing and “traditional” designs from the working classes and “primitive” peoples

cars in search of a parking spot. Another two kids begged for food and change from plastic table to plastic table, and the last one sat at my table, playing a videogame on my cell phone after he'd gotten tired of scribbling on paper towels.

*Tattooscapes, Neo-Tribal Nomads, and the Paradox of Resistance in the All-Encompassing Cosmos of Empire.*

XIII

The man who calls out to me is leaning against a silver Fiat Palio double-parked in front of the Bohemia bar.

-“Hey François, how’s it going, man?”

I hadn’t recognized him at first because of his cornrow braids. Last time I’d run into him, he was wearing a headband to secure his Afro. I never got around to learning his name, and never found out why he insists on calling me François. He might have remembered me as François from recalling that I was *francês*, a Frenchman, or he might be taking me for someone else. In any case, I’ve never bothered to correct him.

-“Hey man, how’s it going?” I reply, extending my closed fist to meet his homeboy handshake, “is that your car?”

-“Naah bro” he shakes his head in a frown, as if to say ‘how could a guy like me have a car?’, “I’m just checking out the scene [pointing his chin toward a group of patriçinhas]. What about you?”

-“Same here, I think I’ll go check out the Mexican joint up the street”

-“Aright bro, I’ll catch up with you later”

I keep running into this guy. The first time I saw him, he was hanging out on the stone parapet by the Barra Old Port with Marinalva and a group of younger hookers. Marinalva had waved at me, but he is the one who had initiated the conversation to ask me something about my tattoos. He wanted to know if I was a tattoo artist, and had shown me some of his own body art.

-“You see [pointing to a naked woman tattoo on the inside of his left bicep] everybody gets an Indian Woman done, man, but I thought I’d do something different, so I got a *mulata*. There ain’t no *indias* left in Bahia, man, and we’re all African here, so I thought this would be a better way of honouring my culture. My brother is a tattooist, and he put it on me, but the design is mine. Pretty cool, huh?”

He wasn’t the first street character to accost me with questions about my tattoos. In this game of street-interaction, where bodies and naked flesh are constantly exposed, displayed, commodified and consumed, whores, street kids and hustlers often asked me if such or such design “was real”, or wanted to know the meaning of characters they couldn’t read. Older or more street-worn *pivetes*, more adept at reading the increasingly globalized class-and-caste language of tattooscapes, were quick to offer me the drugs they associated with my “type”; so that many of them ruled out cocaine upon noticing that I did not fit in the New School<sup>44</sup> mauriçinho category, dismissed the crack option associated with sewing-needle-made prison tattoos, and flung bags of marijuana in my face, which they correlated with the “hippie” type of my tattoos. Accustomed to being ignored, the street pushers would often be startled by what, out of exasperation induced by a Sisyphean routine, became my trade-mark reply when they would offer me drugs:

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<sup>44</sup> See de Mello (2000)

“why, do I look like a fucking drug-addict?”, to which many would reply, “Wow, chill out dude, how was I supposed to guess?....a guy all covered in tattoos (*um cara cheio de tatuagens*) and shit....”.

I had been mildly aware of sociocultural tattoo typologies before being sucked into the Bahia street scene, but I had grossly underestimated the socio-narcotic categories associated with this typology, and local actor’s astute readings of these signs.

An afternoon at the Barra pier, when the subjects of tattoo types had come up, I had confronted my friend Jefferson, a 15-year old *pivete* and sometimes pusher, with the question of my own typology:

-“You’re pretty much all hippie, dude” he’d explained, squinting his eyes and taking a long drag from his joint as he examined my arms and back, “except for this one and that one, that are kinda *mauri* [mauriçinho] (pointing to Greek characters on my right shoulder bone and a red star above my elbow). “Yeah”, he’d continued, “that one is kinda prison-style (referring to a faded cross on my right hand), but the rest is definitely all hippie”. He’d grinned at an Inca sun and moon on my right shoulder and a Nazca geoglyph on my back: “yeah, those are totally *maluco*”. *Malucos* [literally meaning crazy, or whacko], he’d explained with the tone of a lecturer, are the bearded and dread-locked hippies who sell their crafts to tourists on the beach and seafront.

I’d already befriended a few of the *Malucos* that had established their camp in the disaffected public lavatory, a few blocks from my building on the seafront, and, though I had shied away from spending too many guitar-playing, pot-smoking

and society-bashing nights with them (that reminded me too much of my own adolescence), I had questioned them at great lengths and with much curiosity about their nomadic existence. The first things that fascinated me about the *Malucos* was their anarchist reading of social relations of exploitation and their own class positioning. Unlike their gringo or Paulistano<sup>45</sup> counterparts who could sometimes be seen traveling along in one of their groups, I was surprised to find out, very few of the Bahian and Northeastern *Malucos* were from the “educated” middleclasses. A vast majority of them, it emerged, had grown up in *favelas* and had left school early. Diane, a local *Maluca* whom I’d first befriended by giving her dolphin teeth (which I had extracted from a sea-mammal that lay putrefying on a French beach) in exchange for a pearl necklace of her confection, and who, unlike many Salvadoran *negras* who desperately sought to embody the whitening *patriçinha* beauty standard by ritualistically straightening their hair, wore her hair in a majestic Afro, had resumed the process of her conscientization in a few sharp sentences:

-“You see, I grew up in the *favela*. I was my mom’s last one from a family of ten kids—from just about as many dads—and she always took me with her to work in bourgeois houses [like all politicized, and self-termed anarchist *Malucos*, she used the term *bourgeois* to refer to what other street characters would simply call “the rich”, or *filinhos de papai*—daddy’ boys]. I saw her slave away and ruining herself [*se acabando*] from house to house where the fucking poodles ate better than we did and the fat white kids never even looked at me, and I always knew that I would never ever get anywhere with a life like that....My mom never gets her labour card signed, so she’ll never be able to retire and get a pension from

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<sup>45</sup> From São Paulo

the government. When she gets sick, she doesn't make any money. She'll be slaving till she dies.....so there was no money for school books and uniforms, so I never really went to school, and I knew there was no way anybody could ever put me through university. You see, I could have become a whore like all those girls here. I know that I could make more cash in an hour doing a single *programa* [pass] with a gringo, than what my mom makes in month...in one fucking hour!!!...but I got my dignity and my freedom....”

Diane's dignity and freedom, she'd elaborated, consisted of having few needs and not falling into “the trap of consumerism”. Most *Malucos*, then, animated by such an anarchist-existentialist philosophy (rejecting the norms and values of mainstream society and reinventing oneself as a result), had “opted out” of traditional and neo-capitalist modes of mobility—or stagnation—and sought a mobility of their own outside the perverse logic of commodity fetishism and commodification. Prostitution, therefore, as the most extreme, perverse, but also logical form of capitalist commodification (but also production, fetishization, consumption, and alienation), constituted an absolute taboo in the *Maluco/a* cosmology. The resulting way of life and livelihood was a strangely homogenous neo-tribal hybrid of anarcho-existentialist and New Age Euro-romantico-essentialist fantasies of human nature and dreams of alternative social organization. The fact that the *Maluco/a* way of life, despite its anarchistic credo, was situated on the fringe or perhaps even at the heart of the hyper-capitalist economy and neo-colonial fetishism of the “tourist industry”, however, was more than a little ironic. Indeed, the *Maluco/as*' survival through the marketing of their neo-tribal arts and craft, and

the epistemological possibilities that allowed them to keep reinventing themselves fed exclusively on the generation of economic surpluses and flows of global capital and neocolonial symbols that produce 'tourist' movements and desire for the 'exotic'.

My encounter with what I was tempted to christen *The Malukan* tribe, at any rate had coincided with my own coming of age playing the role of a "traditional" anthropologist. Here I was, "among the Malukan", like a Frederick Barth among the nomads of Baluchistan, reflecting upon social and ethnic<sup>46</sup> boundaries as I mapped out migration patterns and other anthropological favourites such as sexual customs, kinship structures and economic systems (but also, in the presence of Diane's athletic braided friend with the fleeting hazel eyes who never looked at me, like a tortured Malinowski lusting after Trobriand tribeswomen). At last, I had encountered a "tribe" with its own livelihood, cosmology, and myths of genesis and teleology (the Malukans had, by their own account, emerged from the ashes of a decaying capitalist system). Like many "tribal" groups, they were polygamous and matrilineal, and the responsibility for raising children fell on the whole tribe, with, however, a fluid emphasis on motherhood, and an even more fluid but important role attributed to the children's numerous and rapidly shifting "uncles". Faithful to the cultural politics between "tribal" nomadic groups living on the fringe (or perhaps at the heart) of "settled" societies, thus, demonizing myths on both sides of the nomad/settled boundary appeared to antagonize both groups, and homogenize them along an impermeable "ethnic" divide. A closer "anthropological" gaze, however, revealed a continued flow of sexual and economic exchange and

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<sup>46</sup> See Barth (1969)



migration between both groups that enabled the tribal group to survive, and in fact maintained the very reproduction of the tribal group strictly within symbolic and structural parameters defined by the dominant "settled" group.

Maintained inexorably captive within the perverse logic of Late-Capitalism and the all-encompassing boundaries of the cosmology they sought to elude, then, the Malukan's economic system, migration patterns and mode of livelihood relied on a flow of fetishized goods and symbols that traveled along quincennial routes etched in the land, coast, rivers and forests by a long history of colonial and neo-colonial plundering. Thus, Malukans who passed through Salvador were invariably on their way to or from their ritual journey to the Amazon (typically to the northern coastal city of Belem where they could get on a steamboat that would take them upriver to Manaus in the heart of Amazon) where they would procure anaconda skins, leopard pelts, caiman and monkey teeth, and other plants and seeds from which they make their craft. The most adventurous sometimes ventured into Colombia, Peru and Bolivia through the Amazon, and reemerged in Southern Brazil after a journey through the Andes where they merged with the Chilean, Peruvian, Argentinian and Paraguayan Malukans who could sometimes be seen in Salvador.

What I had learned from imagining myself as a colonial anthropologist among the Malukan, thus, was a lesson in the dynamics and possibilities of resistance within the hegemony of the late-Capitalist world system. I had come to understand that the Malukan's entire way of life and mode of livelihood, like so many others, in spite of its fantasies of subversion and freedom, was entirely

invented, regulated and contained within the cultural and economic regimes of Late Capitalism.

As I had learned from Jefferson, then, most of my tattoos, and by association, at least a part of my person, were associated with the Malukan in local ethnoscares. What gave me away, I had learned, were my Peruvian tattoos, which were linked to the Malukan by way of the Amazonian route into Andes, and the neo-capitalist flow of people, neo-tribal goods and symbols that connected it all, and had been inscribed and inked in my own skin during my own coming of age in the Andes nearly a decade ago. Thus, while most “educated” Northeastern Brazilian knew little or nothing about the history and iconography of the pre-Colombian Andes, it wasn’t rare for a Malukan to recognize an Inca or Nazca design among my tattoos and greet me with a sign of recognition.

*On Being and Becoming a Puta in a Transnational Sexscape<sup>47</sup>: Roman loss, Bavarian Salvation, and Other Sad Tales of Whoring at the End of the Line*

XIV

Nobody had mentioned anything about the Andes the night Marinalva's friend—who didn't yet know me as François—has asked me about my tattoos, and the talk had revolved around his own body work, and the ways of life associated with it.

I had hoped to discuss his choice of a naked *mulata* tattoo as a celebration of “Brazilian culture”, which I (quite obviously) saw as belonging to the sexualizing, commodifying, neo-patriarchal logic of neocolonial tourism. I had wanted to question him about his choice of a *mulata* over a *negra* to celebrate the negritude and “Africanness” of the Bahia identity. My contention (quite obviously), was that this celebration did not run counter to Eurocentric beauty regimes that forced women to straighten their hair in a desperate asymptotic quest toward Whiteness, but that it precisely reinforced them by legitimizing the notion that Blackness only

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<sup>47</sup> Termed coined by anthropologist Denise Brennan (2004) in her study of sex tourism in the Dominican Republic. She explains that, inspired by Appadurai's global scapes, the word *sexscape* refers to “both a new kind of global sexual landscape and the sites within it” (Brennan, 2004, p15). According to Brennan, then, “sexscapes link the practices of sex work with the forces of a globalized economy [ and are characterized by] international travel from the developed to the developing world (*sic*) for the consumption of sex [and “inequality”, in the sense that] there are power differences between the buyers (sex tourists) and the sellers (sex workers) that can be based on race, class, gender, and nationality. These differences become eroticized and commodified inequalities. The exotic is manufactured into the erotic—both privately in consumers' imagination, and quite publicly by entire industries that make money off this desire for difference” (Brennan, 2004, p16)

became beautiful through Mulataness by possessing certain white traits<sup>48</sup>. I'd refrained myself from asking when I realized that I would have equally scorned a naked Black Woman tattoo as a "naïve essentialization" and "africanization" of Brazilianness trapped within the logic of sexualization. In the end, I was overcome by an auspicious spell of humility and desire to permanently shut off this pompous "theory mode" from my ill-functioning brain, and I struggled to silence further assumptions as he was showing me more of his tattoos.

Through an explanation of a black and white design on his impressively square bicep depicting a *berimbau*<sup>49</sup>, it emerged that the man identified himself as a *capoeirista*<sup>50</sup>. I'd already noticed that many Barra hustlers who operated on the beach and seafront used their *capoeira* skills to seduce, sexually possess and be financially entertained by gringas, or to make money as informal instructors with tourists eager to learn "local cultural practices". I had encountered several local *capoeiristas* who had been recruited to teach their art in Europe and were, as a result, conversant in several European languages. I had at the time thought about the perverse role of the Brazilian Body as a resource and commodity in the global flows of neo-colonial goods. The bodies of *putas* and *capoeiristas*, as I was to find out, were trademark products of Bahian exportations to Europe (where the lack of visa requirements for Brazilians facilitated global flows) and favourite objects of consumptions for pleasure-and-culture-seeking Europeans who do not have regular

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<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 4

<sup>49</sup> Single-string musical bow used as a percussion to accompany singing and dancing/fighting in *Capoeira*

<sup>50</sup> Practitioners of *capoeira*, the martial art and dance adapted from African practices by Brazilian slaves

access to such ritualized and deliciously essentialized performances of femininity (*putas*) and masculinity (*capoeira*) in their own bounded lives.

My new tattooed friend, however, had never performed his Brazilianness and masculinity abroad, and had proudly asserted that he did not like dating gringas.

Unlike the previous nights I'd spent in the company of Marinalva and her friends, I had not been asked to provide the funds for the constant flow of laager that kept the conversation going, and had instead been invited to drink from a plastic cup which my new tattooed friend had produced from a stack that lay at his feet. Marinalva kept running to the 24h Chinese store across the street to fetch 600ml glass bottles of ice-cold *Brahma*, courtesy of the tall brunette from whom my tattooed friend did not disentangle himself while he was exhibiting his body art. The mysteriously moneyed and generous brunette who continually interrupted my friend's monologues to give him passionate open-mouthed French kisses, I was soon to learn, was celebrating her imminent return to Germany where she was to get married. Ginette, as she introduced herself, had been sent home by her German fiancé to attend to "paperwork" [*papelada*] while he prearranged procedures and ceremonies on his side of the Atlantic. She had already spent two years in Europe, and prided herself on speaking better German than Marinalva, who had spent twice as much time in Germany but confessed that she could "never really get her tongue around that ugly language".

Ginette appeared to be in her late thirties, although she was probably much younger. She seemed like someone who had been very pretty in her younger days, but whose years of rough living had taken their toll on a prematurely spoiled body.

Her long and fragile-looking hair was dried and broken by years of chemical straightening and inexpensive dyes that made it look almost green. Her counterfeit Diesel tank-top exposed a bare midriff that hung over tight jeans and the impossibly tight laces of a protruding thong, and was traversed by a voluptuous trail of long black hairs and spotted with equally dark pimples and stretchmarks that contrasted ominously with her pale skin. Etched between her heavy breasts, through which one could discern an intricate network of dark-blue veins, was a large prison-style tattoo of a plain black cross.

The atmosphere had been so naturally friendly and relaxed, as if we'd all been good friends for many years, that I hadn't thought twice before impulsively asking Ginette:

"Wait a minute, what are you doing eating that guy's face if you're getting married with somebody else in three days?"

I'd instantly regretted what I'd said, and had frozen in anticipation of the scene I had no doubt initiated. But no one had seemed offended or even startled by my naïve question, and Ginette had simply brushed off my concern by declaring that she was "just having fun". To my even greater surprise, she'd proceeded to answer my question further in the most unproblematic and natural manner:

-“You know, I'm not exactly *in love* with the guy.....”

I'd been shocked out of my naiveté by the brutal honesty of her reply. Why after all did she need to pretend to me that she was marrying the Teuton for anything but his citizenship and access to higher echelons of mobility in a ruthlessly Darwinian world-system? Weren't we, after all, Characters of the Night in Barra

Old Port, a place where “human nature” and “dark instincts” were laid bare for those who dared to expose themselves in the anomie of the night?

As we sat drinking at the German cuckold’s expense, in accordance with the routine that had been established during my earlier drinking sessions with Marinalva and her friends, I only participated in jokes and conversation through short questions and interjections, but no one ever asked anything significant about my own story and intent. Strangely, eerily, I just sat there on the old stone parapet, drinking, laughing and probing, while marveling at the improbable fact that these street characters would share so much “confidential” information with me. I had expected to be a feared and exotic Other, when in fact, I was anything but a stranger. As a tattooed and obviously run-down Gringo in Salvador’s whore district, I was not so much out of place, but was in fact a permanent landmark in a deeply normalized transnational landscape. My presence, then, did not constitute a violation of the Barra cartography of the night in the same way that it would in a *favela*, but was part of a “natural” routine; of the routine of everynight life in the Porto da Barra. One would not ask a staggering crack user, a whore, or a homeless family “what they were doing” in the streets at night. Such a sight would, “naturally”, constitute a “normal” state of affairs anywhere in urban Brazil. The presence of a lone mauriçinho or patriçinha, however, would constitute a violation of cartographies of the urban night, and would only become normalized through a “predictable” physical assault. This is perhaps why, as I had finally come to understand, I had never—to the panicked puzzlement of my mauriçinho and patriçinha friends who had declared me insane to walk alone in Barra at night—

been physically assaulted, robbed or intimidated during my nights of flâneuring in Salvador. Unlike other categories of gringos whose presence might have been “out of place” late at night and given way to more aggressive kinds of routinized behaviour (like the mugging of a camera-wielding tourist), my fluent Portuguese and presence in the low tourist season betrayed my status as a more or less permanent sexpatriate<sup>51</sup>.

That night then, I felt for the first time that I *belonged* in a circle of actors where participation in the sex-trade was openly and naturally lived and discussed without resorting to the artificial apparatuses of interviewing. It was the first time I’d heard women openly and casually refer to themselves as *whores* (*putas*). The word *puta*, which seemed to evoke no more in my friend’s minds than any other banal word from the lexicon of their everyday(night) life had resonated in me with electrical awe. Bruna, a tall and bony brown-skinned twentysomething in a red flower dress, who seemed to be Ginette’s friend, had been the first one to use the magical word when we had been discussing European stereotypes, and the topic of Italians had come up:

–“...yeah I know....” Bruna had exclaimed, “Italians are jealous as shit. I was living with this guy from Milan for a while, and after, like, *two weeks*, the guy wouldn’t let me go out anymore, and wanted to know where I was, and who I was talking to....He wouldn’t even let me go out with my *sisters*!...and that’s before I was even a *whore*.....[*eu nem era puta ainda*]”

I’d wondered about the nebulous boundary beyond which one *became a whore*. According to Bruna, thus, living with and being financially supported by a

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<sup>51</sup> Term coined by Jeremy Seabrooke (1996) to refer to foreign men living in Thailand for sex



gringo did not constitute, at least *not yet*, an act of sexual trade that would be defined as *prostitution* in the Late-Capitalist Bahian popular imagination. The Barra *putas*, however, as I'd come to understand, did not always or necessarily charge a fixed monetary amount to their gringo "customers", and often played by the rules of "dating" when the possibility of local or international travel emerged, or simply when they could be entertained and supported during the gringo's stay in Brazil. Judging by Bruna's account, then, I had come to understand that being a *puta* had a lot less to do with the explicit or more ritualized—and subsequently less "evident"—offering of sexual favours in exchange for financial "autonomy" and "mobility", but rather, with a *specific state of mind and conscientization in which one became conscious that one's sexual and bodily assets constituted the sole or principal means of one's livelihood*.

Yet I knew that the context in which women like Bruna made the "conscious choices" of reverting to prostitution was nothing short of an all-pervasive neo-Colonial Cosmos thickly woven by 500 years of local and transnational asymmetrical relations of power that had legitimized a perverse kind of Euronormative patriarchy in which most if not all subaltern women in Brazil lived in a reality where the lack of plausible channels of agency and the way they learned to understand and "value" themselves led them into the belief that *finding a man who would care and provide for them and their dependents* was their most probable and desirable way to achieve autonomy and cease to be a burden on their families<sup>52</sup>. By this account, then, privileging one's "sexual assets" in the quest for an "autonomous" livelihood did not constitute a rupture from the subaltern female

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<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 4

status-quo into the “deviance” of prostitution, but a quintessentially “normal” exercise of agency in a brutally inequitable system. I also knew that in this pigmentocratic system in which “racial” boundaries were being aggressively preserved among the middle and upper classes through a highly selective biopolitics of anti-*mestiçagem*<sup>53</sup>, the practical impossibility of marrying into the upper-classes forced subaltern women in search of “agency” to resort to the role of rich white men’s (referred to as *coroas*<sup>54</sup>) mistresses, and often to have to rely simultaneously on several such *coroas* to eek out a livelihood. I knew that depending on a subaltern woman’s “success” in maintaining the sexual interest of a *coroa* (and subsequent “interest” in the *coroa*’s “illegitimate” offspring), a “successful” mistress could hope to be put up in a small *favela* home at the expense of the *coroa* and even obtain money for bills, clothes, the children’s schooling, healthcare, etc. I also knew, however, that subaltern women’s survival money, like the *coroas* themselves, came and went sporadically, and depended on a brutally fragile chain of improbabilities tied to *coroas* good dispositions, their relationship with their wives and “legitimate” families, their drinking and gambling habits, their other mistresses, their jobs, their sexual appetites, the global economy, and an infinity of other factors entirely beyond the subaltern women’s control.

What I’d come to understand that night about the usage of the word *Putá* and the exercise of a livelihood associated with it in the transnational sexscape of Salvador, thus, was that the “conscious choice and state of mind” of subaltern

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<sup>53</sup> See Nelson on *mestisaje* and the “policing of white women’s bodies for the preservation of the white elite”, see also Veissiere (in press 2007) for a critique of the myth of Brazilian exceptionality.

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<sup>54</sup> Goldstein, 2003

women who had become *putas* in Barra was situated at the level of the channels of agency they were targeting through the use of their sexual assets, and the specific search for *transnational* channels of agency through which they could escape the traps of the *coroa* economy. The word *puta* then, which was primarily a word used pejoratively by Brazilians who do not identify themselves as sex workers to refer to sex-workers and women who actively seek gringo men, had come to be adopted by the Barra women themselves as what was no doubt an explicit rejection of the late-Capitalist Brazilian status-quo and politics of definition that relegated them to the bottom of a social pyramid which denied them upward mobility. By calling themselves *putas*, they didn't so much laugh along, as laugh in the face of the Brazilian Cosmos (and the way it defined them) which they would soon be leaving behind. In point of fact, by openly being and calling themselves *putas*, and subsequently rendering themselves *unworthy* of a local "career", marriage or *coroa* patronage, they had embarked upon a strategic wager after which they had *already left behind* the Brazilian status-quo they had rejected, and *had already entered* the transnational gringoscape in which they were valued as the exoticized objects of desire and potential marriage candidates.

What I was eager to explore at this point, was the complex dynamics of conscientization through which subaltern women explicitly came to reject the fascist Euronormative beauty regimes (like the *patriçinha* paradigm) that would have forced them to Whiten themselves in the competing grounds of the *coroa* economy (and thus withdrew themselves from the *coroa* economy), and learn to strategically perform certain locally frowned upon forms of negritude and

femininity desired by gringo men. In addition, I would have to inquire into the complex mechanisms of neo-Colonial fetishism and post-industrial disempowerment that drew gringos into transnational sexscapes. After that my task as I imagined it, would be to investigate the complex emotional, cultural, social and economic mechanisms of such encounters, and to look at what happened on the other side of Atlantic when Barra women ceased to become *putas* and took on the role of transnational wives or mistresses.....

That night then, Bruna, Ginette and Marinalva had given me more clues to help me understand what it meant to be a Barra *puta*, and what it was they were after. Marinalva's stories had confirmed my convictions about these women's in-your-face politics of self-definition and rejection of the late-Capitalist Brazilian Cosmos.

Emitting foamy beer spittle through her missing front teeth as she raised the tone of her voice in anticipation of the joke she was about to tell, Marinalva had regaled us with a story about the assertion of her *puta* identity:

"....so the cop wouldn't leave me the fuck alone, and was all like, 'what do you think you're doing out here by this hour?', so I'm like, 'well, I'm working, aint' I?', and he puts on all kinds of airs and goes 'and may I ask in what quality you are working here at this hour?', so I look at him, and I'm like 'what's it look like to you mister? I am a WHOOOOOORE!!!'"

We'd all burst out into fits of laughter and continued to chat in the good spirits brought about by Marinalva's performance, but I couldn't help sensing the

prevalence of a larger tragedy surrounding her life, which she was so skilled at reinterpreting in the language of stand-up comedy. Behind her drooping and limping figure, desperately joking, gesticulating and drinking her way to the center of attention, I could feel the eerie silence around the sexual kind of attention she could no longer compete for, and the stories of failed pursuits that had brought her to the end of the line. Unlike the Hollywood-style happy-ending of Ginette's transnational Cinderella story, (Ginette was proudly celebrating her "success" and imminent return to the promised land where she was to be wedded), Marinalva's stories of "access" to the "higher" channels of agency of the promised land were permanently frozen in the past tense (and even more distant past conditional), and what is worse, were tainted by the "failure" of having fallen short of leaving the shadows of the *coroa* economy for the promises of a "legitimate" relationship with a respectable gringo man. All those years ago, Marinalva had "succeeded" in conquering the lasting desire of a rich German man who had brought her along to Germany, but had "failed" to graduate beyond the position of the man's mistress. Like so many of her Brazilian subaltern counterparts, she had succeeded in obtaining lodging and an allowance from her *coroa* lover, but had failed to replace the man's wife and become "legitimately" integrated in the man's life and family. Unlike her Brazilian counterparts, however, Marinalva had found herself isolated in a foreign land whose habits and language she did not know, and where her opportunities for autonomy and survival were extremely limited beyond the increasingly fragile assistance provided by the man who had brought her there. When the man's funds and attentions came to a predictable stop, Marinalva found

herself subsisting through the only means at her disposal, and drifted from town to town and from sleazy pension to sleazy tenement, working the streets, alleys, highways, truck-stops and brothels of Germany until a providential police bust that unearthed her “illegal” immigration status led to her compulsory repatriation to Brazil at the German taxpayers’ expense. While many “illegal” expatriated sex-workers in Europe lived in constant fear of being arrested and deported to their country of origin, Marinalva had explained to me, her own repatriation, for which she could never have managed to raise the funds on her own, had come as a blessing.

Back in Salvador, aged, worn and penniless, displaying her shame and failure for all to see, she reintegrated her position in the old circuit that took her from her endlessly shifting favela homes to the streets of Barra.

Marinalva’s salvation appeared years later in the form of a Roman tourist named Fabricio. Fabricio, as Marinalva had fondly recalled, was a strong, rich and handsome blond man in his early thirties who had courted her and played by the rules of a seduction game that most gringo men happily bypassed in the presence of the “easy women” of their fetishized tropical paradise<sup>55</sup>. Fabricio had taken Marinalva on a long and idyllic trip down the coast of Bahia, and upon their return, had been introduced to Marinalva’s family. The two had made plans to move into an apartment in Barra. When Fabricio’s vacation came to end, Marinalva accompanied him to the airport, where they parted in tears. Fabricio promised to call, write, and return.

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<sup>55</sup> See Steven Gregory’s (2003) *Men in Paradise*, in which he analyzes how gringo sex tourists travel to the Dominican Republic to live out their fantasies of “heteronormative masculinity”

She never heard from him again.

Fabricio, however, had left Marinalva with a lot more than hopes and memories. Soon after her lover's departure, she found out that she was expecting his child. Rejoiced at first at the thought of forming a stable family with the Prince Charming who had finally come to her, she waited for Fabricio's calls and letters. She waited until a homemade abortion would have become too dangerous. She waited until she became desperate.

Not knowing how to contact Fabricio to give him the news and, at that point, beg him to come back, she decided to seek help at the Italian Consulate. Predictably, her pleas were met by the patronizing comments of impatient consular clerks.

"What do you mean you don't know the guy's surname?! Do you have any idea how many Fabricios there are in Rome? Listen missus, this isn't a bloody dating service, there's nothing we can do for you!"

Marinalva had begged. Well-versed in the logic of international migration procedures, she understood that her son, Fabricio's son, would by right be a citizen of Italy and the European Union. But the consular clerks wouldn't hear of it:

- "Sure missus, but that's only if the boy's father—if he is who you say he is—recognizes him, and as far as we're concerned, the boy's father could be anybody, so unless this Fabricio person shows up and declares your child as his own, there is nothing we can do to help you".

Marinalva's child, whom she named Fabricio, was born soon thereafter. Eight years later, Marinalva had not entirely given up hope that Fabricio Sr. would reappear some day.

-“Well if he does show up, there's no way he'll be able to deny that the child is his”, she'd affirmed, “Fabricio is the spitting image of his father”

The night I'd met the tattooed *capoeirista*, then, behind Marinalva's laughter and comic stories, I couldn't help hearing the tragic echoes of Germany, Fabricio, and the other stories she hadn't retold that night. I laughed along, but couldn't help being terrified by the bottomless void in which Marinalva's desperately humorous stories of self-definitions were grounded.

Tragedy disguised as comedy covering up lies.

The asymmetrical global flows that produced transnational sexscapes and forced women like Marinalva onto global streets, it seemed to me, were complex, perverse, nebulous, hard to grasp, anomalous, and a multitude of other things, but couldn't really, in the end, be described as “funny”. More perversely, furthermore, beyond this first layer of ambiguous “comedy”, lied the sadder “truth” that Marinalva was no longer a *puta*. She was no longer the kind of *puta* that possesses the deliciously essentialized and sexualized colonial fantasy of femininity that inspired desire in gringo men and jealousy in bourgeois women. What was abominably plain for all to see and hear in the silence and ring of dissonance that lingered once everyone's laughter had died down, is that Marinalva no longer inspired desire and jealousy, and not even hate or moral judgment. She was no



longer seen, desired and feared as a *puta*, and her presence only provoked embarrassment, pity, and revulsion. She was a *puta velha*, an old whore; *velha e acabada*, old and finished. Marinalva had not come back in a full circle to where she had started; she had reached the end of the line.

If one was to ignore or reject the tragedy of global sexscapes, Ginette's story, which we had celebrated that night, could be interpreted as one of success. Like all Cinderella stories, it had begun in tragedy, and, in the tradition of Marinalva's European experience and that of so many other Bahian women, had initially failed to follow the pattern of the traditional Prince Charming narrative. When Ginette first left for Germany, she had not been accompanied by a young and enamored fiancé eager to introduce her to his family and start one of his own with her, but by one of the managers of a Munich lap dancing club-cum-brothel who had "recruited" her to provide "entertainment" for the club's gentlemanly clientele. Unlike so many of her Global South sex-worker counterparts in Europe, Ginette had not found herself in a situation of debt-bondage and had not been obliged to repay the expenses of her airfare, clothing, and other beauty products that had been given to her by her employers. She had even received a modest salary and enjoyed relative amounts of freedom at the club. She did, however end up in an equally painful sort of bondage with the hard-drinking and physically abusive recruiter-manager she had been made to marry for immigration purposes.

Ginette's story, it seemed, was well on its way to joining the ranks of Marinalva's (and so many others') narratives of crushed hopes, until the beginning of her second year at the club, when one of the patrons, a middle-aged and childless car-salesman from a small Bavarian town who had become one of her regulars offered to "rescue" her. I never found out what or how much it took for the car salesman to release Ginette from her "managers", but by the time I met her, she was already divorced, living with her saviour, and counting the days before the new wedding that would wash away her illegitimacy.

That night, then, I had half-heartedly joined in everybody's good spirits and tried my best to let everybody's altruistic joy rub off on me. Indeed, Ginette's friends, to my surprise, all seemed *genuinely happy for her*. Even Marinalva, who had every reason in the world to be bitter, and my new tattooed friend, who would soon have to give his sexual partner back to Mr. Bavarian Car Salesman.

Later, I had attempted to imagine Ginette in a Bavarian village. I had tried to imagine lone TV evenings with her bald and big-bellied Günter; how she would lie on the bed for hours on end and stare quietly at the flowered wallpaper in the guest room at her in-laws; the long silences at Sunday family dinners; and the gaze of Günter's inebriated colleagues upon her. I'd imagined the schoolteacher's, the priest's, and the shopkeepers' gaze upon her, the weight of all that silence, and the weight of her sinful origins that every man, woman and mirror would never cease to reflect back to her.

That night, I had thought something awful. I had thought:

“...give me Marinalva’s nastiest truck-stop nightmare, any day, over  
Ginette’s Bavarian salvation.....”

*Pathologies of plastic Cyborgs and toothless creatures of the night*

XV

Running into the man and being brought back to the role of “François” has triggered the return of that void feeling that had paralyzed me when I had been confronted with Marinalva’s and Ginette’s tales of loss and “salvation”.

A general sense of melancholy has now settled over the panic that had threatened to overpower me earlier. I still feel too fragile to return to the Old Port and face the sad tales of whoring at the end of the line, but I no longer feel the need to seek refuge in the clinical atmosphere of a yuppie club. In fact, I feel equally terrified and incapacitated at the thought of interacting with the plastically-engineered mauriçinho and patriçinha cyborgs who move like automata in climate-controlled hermetically-sealed islands of concrete while the toothless creatures of the night with their festering wounds creep all around on the Outside.

Despite what I told my friend when I left him in his hunting ground by the Fiat Palio, I feel physically—viscerally—incapable of entering the *Café Cancun*, the trendy Mexican-themed club (in fact, I’ve tried to enter it on several occasions, but have never succeeded in conquering my own fear and nausea and have, to this day, felt inexorably compelled to turn back at every attempt) and equally unable to sit on a plastic chair with the cyborgs at the *Bohemia* bar.

But I need a drink. The port is out of the question, and I feel too fragile to get on a taxi, so I drag myself to the last bar at the end of the street, imaginatively baptized the *Habeas Copus*<sup>56</sup>.

What I like about the *Habeas Copus*, despite its popularity with Barra *putas*, is its older and more plebian clientele, its run-down white plastic tables without beer advertisement, and the ever-present group of elderly patrons singing and playing old-school Samba on ramshackle guitars, tambourines and *cavaquinhos*<sup>57</sup>.

I sit at the far edge of the bar, leaving two rows of empty tables between my own and the nearest patrons, and order a *caipirinha*<sup>58</sup>. My drink arrives miraculously fast, and I feel the melancholy warming into an intense mixture of an erotic thrill and a sigh of relief as the *cachaça* and rough grains of sugar descend against the back of my throat. I order a second *caipirinha* which I down almost as fast. The cozy feeling of warmth, as though I am protected from the cyborgs and toothless creatures by a fuzzy cocoon, has now spread from my throat and chest to my upper-arms and back, and I feel surprisingly *good*. I am watching and soaking up the music of the old *sambistas*, and their tired singing and playing makes me feel almost hopeful. So much cacophony around, so much *noise*, so much junk, so much shit, so much suffering, so much scarcity, so much gargantuan indulging, but these old, sorry, tired toothless old geezers playing so well and with so much heart on their pathetic guitars....I am thinking about the plastic cyborgs shaking, drinking, smoking and popping themselves numb to the sound of this electronic holocaust on the other side of these concrete walls, and I look at these old guys performing these

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<sup>56</sup> *Copo* means "drinking glass" in Portuguese

<sup>57</sup> Brazilian four-stringed mandolin-like instrument used in old-school instrumental samba.

<sup>58</sup> Popular drink made with *cachaça* (local sugar cane alcoholic drink), sliced lime and sugar.

beautiful and complex bar progressions that they would never think of as “complex bar progressions” on their shitty guitars, and I think, no, no, fuck no, I am not depressed, there is nothing inherently *wrong* with me; nothing *pathological*; it is the world that is insane; the world is *sick*.

*Hair "types", "racial" eugenics, and fantasies of "nature" among the elites*

XVI

Trying to blank out the cyborgs, the scarcity, and the gargantuan indulgence, I try to focus on the old guys and my instable inner warmness, and order a beer. Looking past the musicians and beyond my own instability for the first time since I sat down at the *Habeas Copos*, I scan the rows of plastic tables and take a look at the eclectic mix of patrons: the odd mauriçinho and patriçinha table: the black working class families dancing along to the music, and the table of putas, strategically occupying the far edge of the bar—at the opposite of my table—and monitoring the action and movement. So far, not a gringo in sight; except for me, that is. I try my best not to give them too much of my attention, so as not to trigger the usual *flirting* game (that invariably begins with quick fleeting glances that rapidly transform into winks and blown kisses) that would send one of them to my table with a usual "'hey honey, 'mind if I join ya?"

But I've taken a good look at them, and have recognized two of the women from the Old Port. Unlike the other working class women who are here tonight, and who have more or less are all surrendered their bodies to the whitening patriçinha beauty regime by straightening or slicking back and weighting down their hair with large quantities of greasy hair cream, the *putas* are all wearing "African"-style artificial hair braids, with the exception of the youngest-looking, who is proudly displaying her natural curls.

For having lived among and married into the Brazilian bourgeoisie, I knew that hair-style, and by extension, hair “type”, held a crucial position in the beauty, social prestige (and by extension “racial purity”) and ideological regimes of Brazil. I knew that in order to be physically desirable (that is, in order to be “eugenically desirable” as objects of marriage and reproduction; that is, as phenotypical sites through which the “white” elite could be reproduced), bourgeois women needed to possess (that is, produce the illusion of) thin and straight “European” hair. I knew that curly, frizzy (or worse, Afro) hair were considered *cabelo ruim*, or ‘bad’ hair, and were associated with “ugliness” and the “lower” classes. From living among the upper-classes, and as such, interacting with the working classes from a “dominant” angle, and having access to the dominant’s comments about the oppressed, I knew that there were no limits to the violence of the eugenic hair-style regime, and that, from the point of view of the dominant classes, straight-hair was only desirable as a characteristic of “beautiful” “white” women, but was considered “ridiculous” and an “imposture” of sorts for phenotypically more “African” (and hence poorer) women for whom straight hair could not possibly be “natural” (“oh jesus, how *embarrassing*, look at that poor maid with that preposterous hair-style: she looks like a monkey who scalped an Indian woman....”). Among the poor, then, I had for many years been observing (and more recently, started to discuss) a painfully ambiguous attitude toward this racialized beauty regime. I knew that subaltern women who aspired to social mobility and gained access to universities and any job requiring “visibility” (clerical, public service, retail, etc.) tended to straighten their hair, but that depending on their degree of subalternity and how they had been



taught to value and “naturalize” their phenotypical traits in the neo-colonial dominant typology, some women could be made to feel “unworthy” of the “European” straight-hair look they admired and envied in others. Thus, I had come to understand that artificial “African” braids that laid at the bottom of the “racial” Eugenic typology, were reserved for *faveladas* who could not afford the costly and high-maintenance of constant straightening and weighting down, and whose “natural” hair “type” was too *ruim* and *duro* (“hard”) to sustain the delicateness of a “beautiful” hair style.

*Putá Africana: The subversion of Eurocentric beauty regimes and high-jacking of Afrocentricity in transnational sexscapes.*

Before my encounter with the Barra putas, I knew that “African” and braided hairdos were associated in the popular Brazilian Late-Capitalist imagination (by the upper and lower classes alike) with “ugly” and downtrodden *faveladas*, with the notable but minoritarian exception of hippies, *malucas*, left-wing intellectuals and Black Power activists. What I’d recently understood, then, was that many of the Barra putas, who had rejected and transcended their position as *faveladas* adopted a partially *faveleda* look, not as a tragic *faux-pas* that rendered them undesirable, but as a highly strategic move that enabled them to leave oppressive Brazilian beauty regimes and enter the transnational sexscape in which essentialized and sexualized feminine negritude (which I call *negratude*) was the object of gringo desire. Everything had become ominously clear in the words of my friend Janaina, a self-

identified *negra*, socialist activist and social work student I had met at the Federal University, who had summed up the complex transnational positioning and ambiguity of how the Brazilian hair regime played out in Global Salvador and how she felt caught in the middle of conflicting appropriations of *negritude*:

"It's really complicated you know, because part of me feels I really shouldn't be straightening my hair. I mean, I actually really *like* the way it looks when I straighten it, but I also think all these African hairdos are really beautiful, and, like, you've no idea how much shit people give me because I straighten my hair, I mean, not my family and stuff, but people at the [socialist] party and at school...and well, I even stopped going to UNEGRO [Black consciousness movement] meetings, because they would always be like 'how dare you do this to you hair and try to look like a white girl, what kind of a black women are you?', and it's like, on the one hand, I don't see why I couldn't be *negra* and feel *negra* and be proud to be *negra* and do whatever I want with my hair, but the real problem is that I really really don't want people to think I am a *puta*. Man, it's hard enough being a *negra* in Brazil, which, as far as a lot of bourgeois men are concerned, pretty much equates you with being a *puta* anyway, but imagine being black in Salvador, with all those gringos....and the problem is not even that the gringos would think I am a *puta*, because I don't go to Barra or Pelourinho often, and I really don't put myself in a lot of situation where gringo men can hit on me, but the problem is people here see me wearing nice clothes and hair like that, they're just gonna think I am a *puta de gringo*. I mean, it's okay for Yara [one of UNEGRO's leaders] to wear her hair like that and dress all Yoruba and shit, because everyone knows who

she is, and she's always walking around with famous artists and politicians and stuff, but it's like, who the hell am I, you know? So I know that *patriçinhas* are all vain and stuff, but you know what? When it boils down to this, I'd much rather people think I am a *patriçinha* than a *puta*"

Janaina's disturbing words had given me a whole lesson in Late-Capitalist identity politics, and on the status of Salvador as a transnational heterotopia where the dilution of dominant ideological regimes with transnational flows of desire and symbols, and the subsequent subversions and transformation of these regimes impacted on the identity and (negative) processes of identification of an ominously large array of social actors. The revelation from Janaina's testimony had, once more, re-grounded me in a quasi-animistic appreciation of the interrelatedness of elements. Here was a compelling example of how apparently "isolated" events like the "individual choices" of a few poor women<sup>59</sup> to sell their bodies to foreign tourists, and more specifically, the visual and apparently "trivial" hairstyle strategies employed by these women had a profound cultural and axiological impact on *the whole community*. The impact of this apparently insignificant politics of hairstyle appropriation, thus, greatly influenced the processes of both *identification* (who and what kind of person a woman is) and *valuation* (what is this woman worth?) of many Salvadoran and Bahian women who were not apparently "related" to the transnational sex trade.

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<sup>59</sup> Because indeed, only a microscopic proportion of toiling subaltern women resort to transnational prostitution. Much like Tobias Hecht (1998), who, when he considered the harsh conditions in which so many favela children lived, had wondered why there were in fact so few "street" children who had escaped these conditions, one is faced with the puzzling fact that, given the inhumane living conditions of *faveladas* and the near total impossibility of upward mobility, it would seem like a perfectly probable option for many more women to sell their bodies.

*Fetishizing the phenotype: Colonial and strategic dilemmas of essentialism*

Besides this animistic revelation, Janaina's insightful social commentary had served as a reminder of how essentialist discourse was not only oppressive when articulated by dominant groups to contain subordinate populations in discursively constituted margins, but also proved equally problematic when strategically deployed by subaltern groups in search of emancipation: thus, Janaina had very clearly described how, by straightening her hair and thus failing to adhere to orthodox phenotypical conventions of Black "nature" (as legitimized by the colonial discourse that invented Black Otherness in the first place), she had been rejected by black activist groups, and as a consequence been denied a "legitimate" identity by the emerging hegemonic authorities that were in the process of reclaiming, reinventing, and appropriating the means of identification of the idea of Blackness.

Janaina's conundrum had left me with a profound sense of hopelessness about the project of "racial" emancipation, or rather, about the possibility of emancipation for the subaltern articulated around notions of "race", or even "ethnicity". I still understood and respected the historical necessity of collective mobilization for groups with a shared experience of subordination, and thus, I still understood that, though it had no real biological basis in nature<sup>60</sup>, the idea of "race" couldn't been discarded altogether because of the need to address the injustices that had been and were still being perpetrated against subordinate groups who had been

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<sup>60</sup> See Moore et al, 2003

historically constituted as “racial”. And yet, I couldn’t help feeling exasperated by the fetishization of phenotypical traits that was still being perpetuated by *both* neo-colonial, and strategically essentialist forms of discourse. Indeed, in “essence”, that is, if we momentarily imagine that it is possible to strip Janaina’s body of all fantasies and fetishisms<sup>61</sup>, why couldn’t she after all be “allowed” to straighten her hair while remaining a “genuine” self-identified Black Brazilian woman? Wasn’t it, in essence, violently absurd that *both* white and black elites would articulate their own exclusive identities around categorical imperatives that would prohibit women like Janaina to straighten their hair? Wasn’t it absurd to continue to rely on fetishized phenotypes to mobilize group identities, which would always imply a boundary beyond which non-qualifying Others would be *excluded*?

As I got to know Janaina better, I observed how her body was used as a site of struggle (social and epistemological) by the many individuals and institutions (her friends, family, strangers, the State) who inscribed on her their own fears and fantasies of social organization. Silvana, her older half-sister who self-identifies as white, for example, would insist that Janaina was not *negra*, but *morena*, implying that she was lighter-skinned and possessed more white traits than “pure” black women. The term *morena*, which could also describe a woman of any skin colour with brown or black hair (a brunette), carries a positive sexual connotation in the Brazilian imaginary, while *negra*, as we have seen, most often does not. Janaina’s aunt, a nurse’s aid working in São Paulo who is considered *morena* in São Paulo

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<sup>61</sup> Though we understand that we cannot, as we would have no access to any kind of meaning outside the fetishized forms of meaning-making instituted through various forms of hegemonic discourses.

but can pass for white in Bahia<sup>62</sup>, concurred that Janaina was indeed *morena*, or *mulata*, and had something quite *india* about her. Janaina, in turn, insisted that she was unequivocally *negra*, that she really could not find anything 'indian' in herself, and urged her aunt not to use the term *mulata*, which she reminded her was etymologically related to the word 'mule', the sterile offspring of a horse and a donkey. When I'd questioned white bourgeois acquaintances about Janaina, however, they had responded that she was "definitely black". Janaina felt exasperated by the constant presence of conflicting forces that sought to "identify" her as more-of-this, not-enough-of-that, and as a perpetually "incomplete" being who could always be bettered by being ushered further on either side a phenotypical continuum. She had come to understand—although not accept—that for most people, she would always be seen as belonging to the undefined "middle"; the sterility of *mulataness*. This had been confirmed recently, she'd explained to me, when she'd gone to a police station in order to obtain a declaration attesting that her student public transportation travel card had been stolen. The police clerk who'd typed her declaration had produced a form in which she was surprised to read that she had been described as a single, Catholic *parda* female. The term *pardo/a*, which had been affixed to her body by a clerk endowed with the official Eye of the State, was an old term meaning "half-caste" that was still being used by certain states and cities in their census data.

As for me, a transnational gringo Brazilianized into the Paulista bourgeoisie who was trying to acquire Bahian plebian sensitivities, I interrogated my own

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<sup>62</sup> See de Azevedo, 1978 on differences in perceptions and acceptance of "whiteness" between southern Brazil and Bahia

interpretations of Janaina's body, and, though I struggled daily to wipe out all colonially-constituted fetishized notions of phenotype from my own subjectivity, I couldn't help seeing and desiring her as a beautiful and "exotic" kind of Other.

*Life, Desire and Violence in the Sexual Hunting Grounds of Empire*

XVII

Looking down at my beer with the mental image of the table of *putas* I am trying not to look at, I get lost in my thoughts pondering the complexities and perversities of all this. Hair-styles, hair “types”, “race”, hegemony, apartheid, rejection, otherness, desire. So much to think about; so much to torture oneself about; so much to hate and so much to desire; so much to hate oneself about because of so much desire. I am thinking of Janaina’s long black hair, the sweet scent of the cheap lotion that lingers in it; how she lifts her hair up and reveals her long neckline when she gets in the water; the shape of her pitch black eyes; what I can guess of her inner-thighs from the back of her skirt; her phone number, that I know by heart, but cannot bring myself to call. Eight one eight two, four three three five; *oito um, oito dos, quarto três, três cinco*. I like the rhythm of Brazilian numbers: one two three four, one two three four. I tell myself that it’s too late to call, but that’s a lie; I’m not going to call either way.

The light-skinned *morena* sitting by herself next to the old *sambistas* has hair that reminds me of Janaina’s. But the *morena*’s weightless hair, which she keeps throwing back behind her ears, doesn’t look artificially straightened, at least not to me.

She is quite beautiful. One of the old *sambistas* has handed her a tambourine, and I like the way her thin arms move along with the music. She seems



completely at ease and in “her element” here, but, looking at her white cotton skirt, *havaiana* sandals and laced blouse with its puffy short sleeves, I tell myself that, if one were to change her clothes and teleport her to another context, she could appear “local” anywhere from New Delhi to Lima to Borneo, or even Lisbon, Cairo, Athens, Tehran, or for that matter New York, Montreal, or any metropolis pretty much anywhere in the world.

She has noticed that I am looking at her and smiles at me, holding her gaze. I instantly feel blood rushing to my head and look down at my glass, my ears pounding. How can she be so confident? So young and so confident.

She orders a beer. I wave at the waiter and point toward my empty glass. The game continues through a half dozen beers, four of them my own. She maintains her glittery stare whenever I look up at her, but I can’t match it; I can’t do it, I cannot find the confidence to do it. Go on, I tell myself, look at her, look at her like a man, what have you got to lose? But I can’t do it.

The waiter refills her glass and she whispers something in his ear. He makes a little frown, looking in my direction. He eyes rest on me for a second, and he motions his chin, looking back at her. Whatever she told him, he got the message. He is coming toward me, and I can hear the whooshing sound of my own heart.

–“Pardon me sir”, he declaims casually, “the lady in white sitting over there would like to know if you would care to join her for a drink”

My heart skips a beat. That’s just insane, I tell myself. This kind of thing would never happen to me in the North and it seems to be such a natural occurrence here.

I had found myself in a similar situation a few weeks before, when I had been on a short visit to São Paulo. The night had fallen on the avenida Paulista, in the downtown area, and I was sitting at the terrace of a Bistro, enjoying a beer and sandwich over a book. I hadn't paid any attention to the other patrons at the Bistro because I was captivated by my book. The waiter had tapped me on the shoulder and handed me a folded napkin. "From the two ladies sitting at that table", he'd announced. Inside the napkin, in blue felt tip in a girly handwriting with circles above the i's, was written, in English: "*Hi! What are you reading?*".

I'd looked up at the two women, more puzzled than surprised. How did they know I was a gringo? I was wearing clothes that I had bought in Brazil, and I didn't think I stood out in São Paulo, with its many descendants of Italian, German, and Eastern European immigrants. I'd mechanically held up the book in the air so they could take a look at it. It was a French paperback edition of Sartre's *La nausée*, that I had just acquired at the FNAC, a French-owned books and music megastore. No reaction. They'd just smiled.

The two women were white brunettes, with yuppie-style clothes, maybe office workers. They each carried a yellow FNAC plastic bag on their lap. Perhaps they'd spotted me there? I was tired. I'd spent eight hours on a bus, and was about to catch a flight back to Salvador. The girls didn't seem particularly interesting or attractive to me, so I'd focused on my book, but I hadn't dared to peek back in their direction. After paying my bill, I'd briskly walked over to their table, and apologized for not having spoken to them, explaining that I was tired and had to catch a flight; I didn't say where to. I'd left them my card and walked off. It was a

crisp winter night in São Paulo. I'd thrown my coat over my shoulders and disappeared, disguising my timidity as what felt like cool existentialist aloofness. It was all a show; a lie, but it felt good. Back in Salvador, I'd gotten an email, in English and Portuguese, from one of the two girls telling me about an "extraordinary coincidence"; she told me how, the day she noticed me (she apologized for her behaviour at the bar and assured me that she didn't usually do that sort of thing but had had a few drinks), she'd just bought a book from one of her favourite authors, Sarah Mlynowski, who turned out to be a graduate of McGill University (she had used several exclamation marks to convey her amazement). I'd checked out Ms Mlynowski online; she wrote cheesy chick-lit books along the lines of *Confessions of a Shopoholic*. As for my mysterious new friend, her Orkut<sup>63</sup> profile revealed that she was a travel agent who had majored in Business and Marketing, and had learned her English in Australia. I wasn't interested, so I hadn't written back.

Tonight is different. I feel electrified by the way the *morena* is looking at me. I throw a quick glance in her direction, and the waiter is still standing here, as though he expects me to give him a message that he will deliver back to her. I am looking at her. A plump white woman with piercing blue eyes who had been sitting on her own before joining the table of *putas* has now gotten up and said something to her; she is sitting at her table. ... Oh fuck....I look at the two of them, chatting, then at the waiter, who is still standing here. Shit, it was too good to be true. Painfully, I ask the waiter:

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<sup>63</sup> Turkish version of the website [www.MySpace.com](http://www.MySpace.com) extremely popular among Brazilians.

-“she.....she’s a *garota de programa*, isn’t she?”

-“He looks down and closes his eyes. “é...”, he whispers, “...she is”

My head is pounding, and I feel dizzy all of a sudden.

-“well....tell her that...tell her that she is very beautiful...that...that I am sorry, but that I am not interested in a *programa*”

He remains impassible; in fact, he reminds me of a Hollywood version of a posh British butler.

-“Very well, sir”

-“Oh, and before you go”, I add, “can you please bring me another beer?”

On his way back to the bar, my butler stops by the two women’s table, and whispers my cold reply to the brunette. She doesn’t seem offended, or even slightly shocked and simply looks at me with a weak smile, as if to say, “too bad”. She says something to her companion who turns back to look at me and slowly shakes her head. She slides her chair and shows me her back.

I look down at my feet and run my head through my hair. It is not really warm tonight, but I realize that I am sweating profusely. I am thinking about Nicholas Cage’s character in *Leaving Las Vegas*, who had resolved to drink himself to death.

Minutes later, a morbidly obese gringo sits at one of the three empty tables that separate me from the two brunettes. He is wearing beige slacks, black Kenneth Cole shoes that need polishing and contrast pitifully with his dirty white socks, and a white, nearly transparent shirt drenched in sweat whose cheap fabric stretches to

the point of ripping across his hard large stomach. He is grunting and snorting loudly, like a wild boar, strained from having had to motion the flacid mass of his body until here. He checks the time on his mobile phone, a “trendy” Motorola V3, which he retrieves from a plastic sheath strapped on his belt; puts it back in the sheath, wipes his glasses with his shirtsleeve, and orders a beer. “What a fucking moron”, I am thinking, “displaying his stupid cell phone like that; he’s gonna get mugged for sure”.

With his sweaty hair combed over his central bald spot and his Lord of the Rings-geek-style beard, he reminds me of the Project Management professor who had given me so many nights of terrified insomnia during my undergraduate years in Ireland. The pathetic sight of his sad white face also reminds me of my brother’s comment the day he had urged me to shave off my beard.

I run my fingers through my beard, and feel a wave of disgust wash over me, with a sudden urge to disintegrate; to cease to exist; to be wiped out from the memory of everyone that ever interacted with me.

It doesn’t take long for the two brunettes to start their little game with the fat gringo geek. The wave of electricity that had run through my body when I had been the object of the first brunette’s attention has now sent the fat gringo in a near-epileptic fit. He is quite literally shaking. His eyes are rolling. I refrain myself from looking down, but I am sure that his pathetic little prick had managed to summon what little blood it could to erect itself in his disgusting beige slacks. And the two girls are throwing quick glances and flapping their eye-lids at him. Oh god, gawd,

god-all-fucking-mighty....I can't take this, I can't fucking take this, I am thinking, there isn't enough alcohol on this whole street to calm me down.

Soon, the two brunettes are sitting at the fat gringo's table, drinking his beer. The older *morena*, the whiter one with the piercing blue eyes is whispering in the fat fucker's ears, but he is looking at the other girl. I can't, I can't, I can't, I am going to get up and beat the fuck out of that fat piece of shit...no...I'm gonna grab the girl by the hair and drag her away from him...no, I'm going to go home, pop three Xanaxes, and sleep for 48 hours...oh gawd, why? Why don't I believe in god; why don't I believe in anything anymore?

He's got his hand on her thigh now; the fat fucker has got his fat, greasy, hairy paw on my girl's thigh, creasing her skirt back against her hips. I can't. My bladder's about to explode, and I get up, storming past their table, in direction of the bar and the bathroom.

There are two lines, winding across the cramped space of the indoor bar; I join the long line of quivering men and look down at the grimy white tiles, littered with empty plastic cups, cigarette butts, and dark pools of foamy liquid. I am considering rushing past the men in front of me and pushing the reticent ones against the wall, when the first brunette, the one that I imagined would be my girl, shows up in the ladies' line. There is only one person in front of her, and she is about to get in the toilet, but before she grabs the door, she turns toward me and kisses me on the lips. "Sorry, sorry", she says, "I'll stop now, I swear I'll stop now", and she locks herself in the lavatory. I briefly contemplate kicking the door in, but somehow manage to find the strength not to, and rush toward the

overflowing urinal in which I attempt to piss out my rage and frustration, but only succeed in making myself dizzy. I rest my forehead against the soft plaster wall to gather my senses, until the loud bangs on the toilet's door shake me out of my torpor. Back at my table, where I have left my drink unattended, I am almost pleased to notice that the fat gringo piece of flab has now got his slimy hand on the older brunette's thigh. Go for it you fat fuck, I am thinking as I get up, you can have her. I take a few more steps and lean toward the first brunette who is silently focusing on her beer; "please", I implore, "please don't do this"; she peeks up at me with a quizzical look that says 'what the fuck are you talking about?', and I stumble back to my table.

I try to gather my wits and exhale slowly out of my mouth. Inhale four seconds; exhale six seconds; inhale four seconds; exhale six seconds...if I start hyperventilating, I am going to freak out. Relax, calm down.

Why do I hate this guy so much? Is it because I am jealous? Is it because I am trying to "protect" this "poor innocent" girl? Why do I hate his ugliness so much? Why can't I wipe out all notions of normative beauty and fashion standards from my subjectivity? The pathetic poor old piece of shit... why wouldn't he be here? Why wouldn't he grunt and feel his shriveled old cock and heart regain life when those girls breathe down his ears and flap their eye-lids at him? Doesn't he need that kind of attention? don't we all need that kind of attention? Don't I, too, need that kind of attention? Maybe that's why I hate that poor old fat fuck and have to restrain myself not to bash his head in; because, with his dirty-brown balding hair that can pass for blond down here, he reminds me of me; this could be me, I think;

this is where I could end up; this *is* me; he is me; I am him; I am here....Oh god, please....I am thinking about my little boy Carl Philip Emanuel asleep on my bed, and the sweet scent of his sweaty hair, and I want to cry so badly, but I can't. I can't.

Back from another trip to the overflowing urinal, I crash back on my plastic chair. The two girls and the pathetic waste of an existence have gone. A young dark black puta with red braids whom I hadn't noticed here tonight sits at my table and greets me with a kinky smile. "*Oi meu amô!*" "hey honey".

-“Can't you tell that I am gay”? I retort aggressively.

Her smile disappears into an angry frown, displaying her menacing teeth

-“well *fuck you too* you fucking *faggot!*”

-“yeah, yeah, that's right, fuck me, and fuck you too, fuck all of you, just fuck off now” I mutter without even looking at her.

She gets up and slams her chair back against my table.

“*seu veadô!* You faggot!”

I pay my bill and storm away, throwing my chair against the table, just like the puta. I expect the waiter or anybody else to stop me or yell something like “hey you! What the hell do you think you're doing?”, but no one says anything.

I am about to make a left to get back home and avoid the herds of plastic tables in front of the GLBT club, but the first brunette, the one who had reminded me of Janaina and who I had imagined would be mine, sees me from across the



aisles of tables, gets up, runs toward me, grabs my hand, and drags me to her table, where she is sitting with the other brunette, one of the black putas who had been at the *Habeas Copos*, and a stumpy bald guy wearing a flashy red T-shirt. She holds on to my biceps, which I instantly contract, to make sure I am going to remain seated, then gives me a dry kiss on the cheek and runs toward the bathroom. Without a word.

-“Hey man, how it is going?” smiles the bald guy in the red T-shirt, extending his hand.

I meet his handshake, limp and moist. “Hey, what’s up. I am Sam”

-“Flávio”, he replies with a nod. “I am the manager of the *Escandalo!* Club down the road, d’you know it?”

-“I’ve walked by a couple of times; I know where it is”

-“Never been in it?”

-“Nope”

-“well you’re gonna have to check it out, dude....where are you from?”

I can’t find the energy to feed him the ‘I was born in France-but..’line, but I can’t find it in me to introduce myself as ‘French’.

-“Canada”, I lie.

-“Cool...not from around here, huh? I’m like you man....”

The pause in his speech is an invitation for more questioning. The brunette and the other puta haven’t said a word, and the other girl is still nowhere to be seen.

-“Don’t worry dude, Patricia will be back any minute”, Flávio assures me, sensing my distress. So that is her name.

-“So...you’re a gringo too?” I venture, weakly, to please him.

-“might as well be” he grins, “I am from Santa Catarina<sup>64</sup>”

-“Oh, cool”, I continue, uninterested. “So you just moved here for business?”

-“Yeah, that’s right. Business.”

-“and do you like it here?”

-“to be completely honest with you man, I can’t stand the bloody place...”

-“yeah?”

-“The people here man, they’re just soooo slow, and so ignorant...*O povo d’aqui....lerdos e ignorantes*” he pauses, “don’t you think so?”

-“Yeah, sure, whatever”. I’ve had this conversation over a thousand times. But I am no even sure I dislike the guy. Whatever. I just want to see Patricia and talk about the fat gringo.

Patricia has returned. She sits next to me, grabbing my hand.

-“Hey.”, she smiles.

-“Hey.”, I manage to speak softly.

-“Let’s drink, shall we?” proposes Flávio, whistling at the waiter and dangling his index finger above the empty beer bottles on our table. Now that I’ve taken a good look at his expensive white smile, I decide that I do dislike him after all.

The second woman sitting next to the blue-eyed brunette speaks for the first time, addressing Patricia who is sipping on her beer.

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<sup>64</sup> One of Brazil’s southernmost states known for its German immigration

-“hey girlie!” she shouts, “what’ d’you think you were doing leaving your drink on the table like that? You want people to put pills in it, do you?”

She speaks in an accusing but somehow motherly tone, as though she feels it is her duty to protect Patricia, visibly the youngest of us all. Patricia doesn’t say a word, but frowns with a bored look on her face.

-“Relax Thaisa”, says the blue-eyed brunette, who, now that I take a good look at her face, really does look much older than Patricia and the other woman, “we were here”

Thaisa replies with a smirk of exasperation:

-“sure Veronica, and we all know that we can all trust everybody around here....”

-“Chill out girls” interjects Flávio pouring beer down my glass, “let’s just have a good time, alright?”

What an asshole.

-“So where was the fat gringo from?” I finally manage to ask, trying not to tremble, looking at Patricia and Veronica.

-“Dunno, Canada I think”, says Patricia, staring straight into my eyes.

I feel a chill run through me.

-“but that’s where *I* am from...”

-“Oh yeah?” Patricia replies, with the same bored look on her face. “I am cold”, she adds, and she gets up from her chair to sit on my lap.

I take off my denim jacket, place it over her shoulders, and wrap my arms around her stomach; it is soft and warm. I can feel her neck in the electrifying proximity of my nose, and I wish I could gently part her hair to smell her skin. 'How do people do this?' I am thinking; 'how can people say so little, share so little, and be so intimate; get so unproblematically *physical* with one another?' God she is beautiful. My fingers play with the soft fabric of her cotton blouse. 'But she doesn't *look* like a hooker....' I lament internally. What does that mean, anyway?

She has her arm around my shoulders and is massaging my right bicep. I feel calm. Calm and disinhibited.

-“So the fat gringo just went home?” I wish I could drop the subject, but can't resist asking.

-“Yeah”, confirms Veronica, “he said he was tired or something”

The fat fuck was probably impotent, I tell myself.

-“you...you wouldn't really have gone out with him, right?” I am trying to conceal how frenzied I feel.

-“why not?” she retorts with an unbearably calm and puzzled look, as if my question made no sense at all.

-“well...with...,you know, with a guy like that...”

-“like what?”

How can she be so calm, so composed? How can she look so genuinely surprised by my question? The fucking bitch. Is she playing games with me?

-“Oh *please!* You know what I mean; an old, ugly, *fat motherfucker*....the man's a *monster* for *god's* sake!” I burst out.

-“How can you say something like that?” she replies. She seems even calmer now, almost gentle, like a cheesy, motherly group therapist in a Hollywood movie showing an out-of-line husband that anger will not help him get his point across; “physical appearance is not what matters in a person or what makes her beautiful” the bitch continues, “what matters is what is *inside* a person.”

I can't believe my ears. The language; the audacity; the hypocrisy...the...the...she sounds like the politically-correct spokeswoman of a pharmaceutical company being interviewed on TV. I am about to explode. How can she be feeding me this phony Dalai Lama bullshit? She has simply *got to be* playing games with me.

-“Oh for fuckssake! You....you.....” I am completely taken aback; I am shattered.

I am getting paranoid: could she somehow have sensed that I was struggling with my own intolerance, with my own fears, with my own insecurities and my worst nightmares of what my gringoness represent, and what I could become.....and somehow be *confronting me with my own prejudice?*

-“Oh just forget it!”, I manage to whisper, “forget it.”

-“What do you say we all go have a couple of after-hours drinks at my club?” ventures Flávio, seizing the opportunity of the silence that has fallen after my outburst. I must be in a really bad TV-inspired nightmare, I am thinking, this guy has got a beer commercial cliché for every occasion.

*Ghosts and Fetishes: the Impossibility of Being and Knowing Bodies within the Rules of Empire*

XVIII

I wake up on my unmade bed next to Patricia. It is bright outside, but the sunrays are not piercing through the large windows behind my bed, so it must be late in the morning, or perhaps even noon. Patricia is still asleep, lying on her stomach, snoring lightly. She is still wearing her skirt and blouse. I am wearing my pink America Apparel boxers and yellow Karl Marx T-shirt. Her underwear (unlaced pink and light green bikini bottoms) is tangled around her left ankle. Pieces of shiny-black ripped condom wraps lie all around my side of the bed. On the floor by the bedside, next to my dirty socks: three used condoms, splattered and zigzagging across the floor; no traces of semen in any of them.

It all comes back to me:

...the aggressive disco lights and sounds; the endless chain of bottled beers produced out of an unlocked fridge by a perpetually-smiling Flávio; Flávio's bald skull shining in the stroboscope light as he was bending down over the Formica counter to dip his nose in little mounds of cocaine; chasing Patricia across the empty dance floor; grinding against Thaisa in front of the mirror in the girl's bathroom; a wobbling Flávio sandwiched between Thaisa and Veronica yelling "don't pay for it!" as I am dragging myself home with Patricia; the doorman's silent sneer as he buzzes us in; how she'd insisted on sleeping on the couch by herself;

how I'd carried her into bed with me; how we'd heartlessly, mechanically, and unsuccessfully tried to have sex; how we'd fallen asleep without holding each other...

I get up to urinate, and realize that I am very drowsy. My head is pounding; it is not exactly painful, but I can hear my heartbeat and feel the blood pumping through my temples. After ingurgitating three half-pints of tap water in the kitchen, I briefly follow an impulse to clear the dirty clothes and books scattered across the living room floor, but abandon after shoving them all in a corner. I sit on the couch, on which Patricia had wanted to sleep. Her purse, crocheted in red and white cotton wool, is still lying on it. A hippie's purse; not my idea of a hooker's handbag...

The purse weights almost nothing, as if it contained nothing. I can't resist the impulse to look inside: a key ring—just the bare ring—with a single key, a lilac lip-gloss stick, a crumpled two-real note, and her state ID. How sparse; it leaves one with a sense of anguish. I retrieve the ID card from the bag and bend the thick laminated plastic between my fingers. I like compulsory Brazilian State IDs: the antiquated oversized laminated cardboard; the thumb prints; the austere military green: like a relic from the rusty modernism of an Orwellian centralized dictatorship. The ID is recent, and so is the picture, but Patricia, with her pale face and babyish smile looks younger on it; maybe not younger, but more infantile, more ingénue; almost angelic.

'Maria Gabriela Pereira de la Serna', reads the ID, born March 27, 1986. So much for 'Patricia'.....God...1986! She barely just turned 20; how could I? In

March 1986, I was in the first grade, priding myself on being able to read entire Tintin comic books on my own ...oh well...I guess a few more years from now that kind of age difference wouldn't even cause one to raise an eyebrow...no, what am I talking about; if we'd done this less than two years ago, it would have been labeled as a crime...but a crime against what; against whom? Against her innocence? Against her body? What does that mean? It doesn't matter....it would have been an abuse of power on my part...but what's the difference now? Is our rapport no longer bound by asymmetrical dynamics of *power* now that the course of her body's decay, on which we have inscribed numerical value, has reached a stage in which she is rightfully considered the *owner* of that body, and has been endowed the capacity to make choices and weight consequences about the use of her body? Why is everything so absurd? The absurd modernist mechanistic-dualistic schism of *having* a body; *owning* one's body, and not simply *being* a body<sup>65</sup>; the numerical teleologies that deny, grant, and take away the rights of agency *over* our bodies; over our schizoidally disembodied selves; the ghosts and fetishes of history, race and class inscribed on our bodies, that prevent our bodies from *being* and from *knowing* one another outside mechanisms of power, domination and subordination.....

Once more, I am reaching the same existentialist aporias: there is nothing left, at least nothing that I can *know* if I strip the ghosts and fetishes from my body, other bodies, and the world in which we have inflected meaning: I can "chose" to

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<sup>65</sup> See David le Breton's (2005) *Anthropologie du corps et modernité* on the historical constitution of the "modern body"



reject the ghosts and fetishes of Late-Capitalism, but then, there will be nothing left, no more meaning: there is no access to meaning beyond ghosts and fetishes.

But the teachings of existentialism are lies; no truer in “essence” than the ghosts and fetishes they have proclaimed absurd. We can reject ghosts and fetishes, but we cannot reinvent ourselves: the fetishes are too strong; our subjectivities are shaped; our bodies are grounded; our destinies are traced.

What can I know, then? What can I “uncover” besides ghosts and fetishes? Is the task of exposing ghosts and fetishes, probing the routes and teleologies through which they travel, and looking, hearing, feeling and imagining how they hurt, shape and regulate bodies good enough? Is it honourable enough? Is it revolutionary enough? Is it possible, is it necessary, to hold on to the hope that I can find spaces inside and outside Empire, inside and outside ourselves, where we have escaped, eluded, or destroyed ghosts and fetishes? Should I keep on searching then?

If I keep on trying to understand how ghosts and fetishes have created this person whom I thought was called “Pratricia”; if I peel off the layers of ghosts and fetishes, will I “discover” something *essential* that will tell me about myself, about us, and about the possibility of freeing the world from ghosts and fetishes?

I am holding her State ID card, the plastic shadow of an apparatus of identification, of identity invention and production regulated by the State, and the global flows of ghosts and fetishes that regulate the State.

I am holding the plastic ghost of a ghost of flesh-and-blood. What does it tell me? Many numerical values, many numbers, carved in her flesh by the positivist teleologies of Empire. What does it tell me about “her”? About the

*essence* I seek? Nothing. Just facts. Positivists inventions. The base of my inquiry, then, will remain positivistic. Like a positivist sleuth, I will gather clues, and piece together a mechanical truth. But like a post-existentialist ethnographer, I will imagine my way beyond the mechanics.

Maria Gabriela, daughter of Maria Gabriela Pereira Silva—a first daughter, then, maybe even firstborn?—and Juan Pedro Cruz de la Serna. That's an unlikely Brazilian name; a German name or a lone Spanish surname would be plausible, but not a full Spanish name; perhaps the daughter of a gringo? The destitute daughter of a runaway gringo?

My eyes fall back on her purse; her Spartan purse. No wallet, no cards, no makeup kit, no mirror, no organizer, no cell-phone, no Ipod, no gums and candy, no Tylenol, no lavender-scented panty-liners, no hand lotion, no pink Barbie pen, no teddy-bear key-ring: just the bus fare home and a compulsory ID. Patricia perhaps not, but *patriçinha* definitely not...

I picture the quarters that she must call home; perhaps a crowded bedroom with two bunk-beds and two more mattresses under the beds that she shares with two sisters, two step-brothers, and an old aunt; a 14-inch TV constantly tuned to one of the evangelical channels blaring in the main room with its concrete floor while her mother reheats the same pot of beans to which she's added tap water, a lump of pig fat, and an old piece of dried *calabresa* sausage. The step-brothers will be returning from work at the supermarket's parking lot, and will be served the beans and fat with rice and a manioc flour purée diluted in black water from the beans. If the week's been a good week, they might drink a bottle of generic cola or

*guaraná* soda with their meal. On the brick wall, two or three laminated pictures of New Testament psalms with pretty flowery drawings, and a framed photograph of an uncle, taken at his wedding (long since terminated) in São Paulo. From the window, from which girly cotton panties with hearts and flowers, oversized underwear, and the sister's only good work-shirt washed in the bathroom sink are drying in the sun, the wind carries in the stench of a rotting dead dog.

In a few years, Maria Gabriela's and her sisters' lean bodies will resemble that of their mother and old aunt. They too will wear oversized underwear; they will have the same varicose veins on their swollen shins, and the same trails of unkempt black hairs on their inner thighs and their bloated stomachs. They will perspire under the same nylon black dresses, will listen to the same evangelical music, and will buy the same over-the-counter laxatives and antacid medication with money obtained from selling Avon® products and saved from collecting Wal-Mart® coupons. The stepbrothers' arms will still be lean and strong, but their stomachs will have started to expand, their backs will have stooped, and their teeth will have loosened. At meal times, only the sounds of mastication, forks knocking on plates, and the evangelical TV program will be heard.

No photogenic misery; no spectacle of famine and physical violence; no pathologized suffering from living in the margins: just the languid, slow dying of everyday life in the center of their universe.

I am almost scared to go back to the room; scared to wake her; scared to scare her, I can't shake off the fetish-image of her angelic face on her picture ID

from my memory of her; the fetish-image of what I would like her *essence* to resemble.

She is still sound-asleep in the same position. I pull the sheet over her. Only her messy hair and the blackened soles of her feet emerge from the sheet. I lie next to her without daring to touch her. I try to let her scent penetrate me, but all I can detect is the smell of stale tobacco in her hair. Why do I treasure the olfactory so much? Do I somehow believe that I can get in touch with her essence through the olfactory?

How absurd. Of course not. I wish I could believe that, of course; I wish I could declare that one's scent is the *soul* of the self; the *soul* of the non-dualist self. I want to believe in a human essence, and I want to believe in the non-dualist soul, in the soul-as-body, in the essence of the self-as-body. I wish I could be romantic enough to believe that I can know the *soul* of a person by allowing her to touch my Self through my skin and senses; by making love to her. It's absurd, really absurd. I wish I could be completely free from the Christian ghosts that do not allow me to *be* flesh and to *know* through the flesh. But that is not all, that is not where it stops. I have seen much scarier ghosts; I have seen the ghosts of Empire; I have seen the ghosts of history, race and class, and what they have done to the flesh. I have seen where the ghosts of Empire have positioned me, and where they have positioned the girl that lies asleep next to me. Our essences, whatever they are, cannot touch each other. Only our flesh can, but it is too late; the ghosts have done too many things to our flesh. Her flesh and my flesh cannot know each other. The ghosts have already

decided for us; they have turned our union into abuse; they have rendered it utilitarian and abusive; they have made it a game of power and individualism.

I use her; she uses me; I lose; she loses.

That is all.

*Laying Ourselves Bare: What Empire has Made of our Flesh*

XIX

-“Are you awake?” I venture, after hesitating for too long. I cringe at the sound of my voice. She hasn’t really moved, but something in her breathing tells me she is no longer asleep

-“Yeah” she whispers calmly, but the silence around us is still scaring me, “what time is it?”

-“I dunno, last time I checked, it was a little after two”

-“Oh wow”, she sits up, still wrapped in the sheet. She fusses with both hands around her ankle, retrieving her underwear, “quite a night, huh?”

-“yeah....”

We fall silent. We are both lying on our backs, staring at the damp spots on the ceiling. But she doesn’t seem as anguished as I am about the silence. Then she speaks:

-“You know, you’re probably not going to find this funny, but I don’t think I even know your name...”

There we go, I am thinking, but she is making this more pleasant than I had anticipated.

-“Oh..yeah...well I guess it *is* pretty funny...I...I’m Samuel”

-“and where did you say you were from? Canada, right?”

-“yeah, kind of....well, I’ve been in Canada for a while now...before coming here that is, and I’ve lived in a bunch of places, but I was born in France”

“Oh...France is playing today right?”

-“ I don’t know, maybe...I don’t really care”

-“you don’t like soccer?”

-“no, I am not really into sports”.

I don’t want to have this conversation; not again; not now. I might as well ask, then:

-“Sorry, and *your* name....you said you were...?”

-“Gabriela.”

I wasn’t expecting this.

-“is it? But I thought Flávio said your name was Patricia?”

-“Flávio?”

-“The guy whose club we went to last night”

-“I’d never seen him before in my life”

-“and the other women?”

-“never either...did I tell them my name was Patricia? I don’t remember... I do that from time to time when I hang out with dodgy people”

-“ah? So...I guess you don’t think that I am that dodgy if you are telling me your real name”

-“guess not...I’m here aren’t I?”

I wonder what that means. I wonder if that means we have gained privileges over each other’s bodies. Does she expect me to be intimate? Is she wondering why

I haven't *touched* her?...she doesn't seem to mind being here and talking to me; is she expecting something, anything from me? God... I haven't done anything like this in years.

I am worried about the silence; always threatening to creep back between us; between our bodies.

-“Do you live with your parents?” I ask, hurriedly. Would it have sounded better if I'd asked if she lived alone?

-“Yes, with my mother”

-“Father?”

-“Stepfather.”

I picture an angry, jealous stepfather. Perhaps jealous brothers; a boyfriend even? Is she, or isn't she a prostitute, then? In the end, she never even hinted at the fact that she wanted money last night; but she hadn't seemed offended when the waiter had told her I did not do *programas*. Or had he? Am I being arbitrary and oppressive in the way I am quick to categorize people? Is it even possible to answer that question? How can I just strap the verb *to be* onto a whole person like that....she *is* a whore? Her whole person? Is that all she *is* or *isn't*?

-“Aren't they gonna be worried about you?”

-“yeah maybe.....I guess they know I do I do that from time to time”

I can't shake off the image of the jealous brother/boy-friend. I look for my cell phone.

-“do you want to give them a call?”

She seems surprised, almost amused.



-“Nah, that’s okay, thanks. I’ll think of something when I get home”

I can’t do silence. I know I have to learn, but I can’t do silence; not today.

-“So, are you from around here, then?”

-“Yeah, I’m from Salvador, but I am Argentinean on my dad’s side”

Her spontaneity surprises me. I feel like a traitor; like a spy or stalker who has been watching her and is pretending to get to know her. So that is where the gringo father was from, then.

-“...but I don’t know him”, she goes on, factually, without any particular inflection of sadness or regret.

I am thinking of the father’s name on her ID.

-“so he never lived with you?”

-“No, he did for a while—not too long, but he fucked off god knows where when I was still a baby”

-“Oh...sorry....so I guess he didn’t recognize you?”

What a stupid question. Why don’t I drop the subject?

-“No he, did, I’ve even got his last name, but he just didn’t stick around”

-“and what’s your last name?”

I feel my cheeks burning as I ask.

-“Pereira de la Serna; de la Serna is from my dad”

-“yeah, I figured; nice name”, I really feel uncomfortable with this subject; part of me wants to come clean and tell her I had a look at her ID, but I know I won’t have the courage. “are you by any chance related to Che Guevara?”

-“No, why?”

-“Well, the Che was born in Argentina; his name was Ernesto Guevara de la Serna; so since your dad was also Argentinean, I thought—“

-“—I really don’t think so, my dad was a nobody. If he’d been related to someone like that, that would have been the only thing to redeem him...I would have known”

Her tone is still factual.

-“why do you call him a “nobody” if you never knew him?”

-“that’s just what my mom says. I guess he would have stuck around if he was anybody at all...he was just a drifter who ended up living off of my mom for awhile. That’s all. No big deal, but just a nobody as far as I am concerned”.

I am impressed by the cold and lucid manner in which she sums up her abandonment. A “drifter”, a “nobody”....one is always told about Brazilian women “living off gringos”; if one is “noble” enough, one comes to realize, or admit, that many Brazilian women are forced into situations where they do indeed “live off gringos”; but one is never told how gringos live off poor Brazilian women. Is this what I look like then? Could she see me as a drifter? A nobody who will cling onto a woman for her roof, her pussy, and the food she puts in my plate?

-“you’re right”, I admit “that doesn’t sound like the nicest thing to do...”  
We have exhausted the subject. There is nothing more to say about her father; nothing to say about a nobody, “would you like to go to Argentina some day?”, I can’t resist adding.

-“No. Why would I want to go somewhere that’s just as fucked up as here?”

Nothing more to say. I am thinking about the ghosts and fetishes that have shaped me, and so many others like me; our fascination with many different kinds of fucked up. I could discuss this with her: being drawn to and away from many kinds of fucked up, but I don't. I return to the predictable markers of positivist conversations that allow us to "situate" (or imprison) people:

-“so what do you do, then?”, I ask

-“I am still a student”

Unexpected.

-“University?”

-“No, high-school; eleventh grade”

The fetishes of positivist teleologies stab me in the flesh with violence.

-“...but how old are you?”

-“I am 20; but I got held back a few times....it happens a lot in public schools around here, you know? Some guys in my class are over 25...”

-“yeah, I guess I knew that...”

And I did. I knew that people who attended public secondary institutions in Brazil tended to graduate, if at all, at a much older age than their bourgeois counterparts who went to private schools. But it had been “a fact”; numerical ghosts among many others that hadn't confronted me in a way that would torment my own flesh. Until now.

-“so you're a high-school student who lives with her mom and went out kind of late on a Friday night, then?”

What am I talking about? Why this stupid, desperate insistence on the verb *to be*; the impulse to situate; to define; to imprison; *you are* this; this is who and what you are, this is *what kind of being* you are....

-“well actually....”, she seems to have abandoned her factual tone for the first time, “I wasn’t completely honest with you....I...I don’t really live with my parents...”

-“you don’t?” I am shaken out of my certainties. “And who do you live with?”

-“I live on my own, in an apartment downtown”

-“ok, cool. But are you really a high-school student?”

-“Yes I am. I stopped going for a while, but I went back last year. I study full time now; in the afternoons”

-“Ok, but how do you make a living, then; how do you pay your rent?”

-“My boyfriend sends me money”

The thought of a boyfriend freezes my blood, but the fact that he is “sending” money, relegating him beyond immediate spatial reach, soothes me almost instantly.

-“He doesn’t live around here?”

-“No, he lives in Portugal. He comes here three or four times a year and keeps an apartment. He lets me stay there and sends me money for my expenses”

-“Is he Portuguese?”

-“No, he is Italian, but he’s been living in Portugal for a long time”

-“oh...and how long have you been with—known him?”

-“a year now”

-“that’s when you started going back to school?”

-“yes”.

-“and how old is he?”

-“He’s about your age, I guess; how old are you?”

-“I am 27”

-“Yeah, he’s 28”

She was more comfortable in her factual tone. She seems almost restless for a second, until she takes over the conversation:

-“what about you...are you married?”, she probes, looking at Carl Phillip Emanuel’s Nunavut teddy bear.

Sure, let’s go there. Safer grounds for her. Not for me.

-“I am yes....but I guess we are separated now”

-“you haven’t been separated long?”

-“no, not for long”

-“was...is she Brazilian?”

-“yes, Brazilian; from São Paulo.”

-“how long were you together?”

-“six years”

-“did you meet her here or *lá*, over there”

-“here...in São Paulo. But she lived *over there* with me; in different places”

-“where?”

-“France, England, Ireland, and Canada”

-“..and she was here with you, wasn’t she?”

-“do you mean ‘here in Salvador’, or in this apartment?”

-“I dunno, both I guess”

-“yes, she was here for awhile, and in this apartment too. We were separated in Canada, right before we came here, but we had made plans to come here long before. We tried. It didn’t work out. She went to her parents’ for a while in São Paulo; she left our little boy with me. Then she came back, took our son, and left”

-“when was that?”

-“just a couple of weeks ago”

We fall silent, and we both look at Nunavut for a while.

-“How old is your son?”

-“Three years old”

-“Do you miss him?”

I wish I could, but there will be no tears. Not now.

-“yes, very much.”

-“do you miss you wife?”

Even after such a short time, the word *esposa* ‘wife’, ‘spouse’ sounds awkward; off-key.

-“No.”

-“It didn’t work out between you, then?”

I didn’t think she had enough curiosity in her to ask so many questions. It has been a long time since anyone has asked me so many questions. I realize that I do not know her; that I do not know her at all.

-“I don’t know; no, I guess not”.

-“Brazilian women can be pretty *bravas*, pretty angry, can’t they?”

-“Yes, I guess some of them can be”

-“was your wife *brava*?”

-“yes, you could say that she was”

-“is that why it didn’t work out between you?”

-“I don’t know; maybe not. I guess I can be pretty *bravo* as well. We were very much alike; and very different, too”

-“you were too different?”

-“I don’t know; I think it’s good to be different, and it’s good to be alike; it’s not just that. In the end, things were too hard for me, I just couldn’t keep my promise anymore...I didn’t want to keep lying”

-“lying?”

-“to myself, to her, to everyone”

-“and what promise was that?”

-“Marriage....in sickness and in health....all that stuff”

-“you didn’t want the sickness-part anymore?”

I could never have predicted that Gabriela could do this. Like a counselor: the paraphrasing; the probing, the nodding; her head slightly tilted. Now she looks old. Not angelic, not child-like. Just old.

-“No I didn’t”

-“did you ever love her?”

-“yes, very much”

-“...and now?”

-“I don’t know”.

We have exhausted the subject. I like being at the other end of the probing equation, but it is my turn to reciprocate.

-“so how do you manage the cultural difference between you and your boyfriend?”

-“oh, I guess Italians and Brazilians aren’t that different you know...and we never really see each other long enough to start fighting. We have a good deal”

A ‘good deal’. She is old, I am thinking, a lot older than I thought.

-“and what does he do, then, your boyfriend?”

-“He’s in business. Computers. He sells computers to big companies...”

-“Computers, huh? And he makes enough money to maintain an apartment and a girlfriend here; that’s pretty impressive at his age.”

-“yeah, I guess he doesn’t do too badly”. No longer factual; neither factual nor counselor-like: “...well actually; I’ll be completely honest with you now....he’s not your age; he...he is a bit older”

-“ok, no problem, he’s a bit older...how much older then?”

-“well he’s not *that* old; he’s 46”

Strangely, I feel more comfortable now.

-“so he’s a *coroa*, huh?” The word is not meant pejoratively. Sometimes, often even, the word *coroa* can carry erotic connotations; evoking images of strong, comforting, virile, violent and protecting fatherly figures, like an aroused white-



haired Zeus ravishing a young maiden. Here, my intent aims at something more reassuring and paternal.

-“yeah, he’s a *coroa*”

What connotation she has inflected in the word, I do not know, and do not ask.

-“and how did you meet him?”

-“doing *programas*, how else?”

Factual tone again

-“and then you became close?”

-“... we became close, yes. After his second visit.”

-“when was that?”

-“last year”

-“is that when you weren’t going to school anymore?”

-“uh-huh”

I picture a 45-year-old gringo with an 18-year old. Am I inscribing arbitrary moral judgments borne of positivist teleologies onto a *genuine* human exchange?

-“for how long had you been doing *programas*?”

-“for about a year”

-“so you started when you were....”

The obsession with numbers; with numerical values and their relationship with agency.

-“just before turning 18”

-“how did it start?”

*Bodies of glamour, Bodies in hell:*

*Gabriela's body, my body, and the fat gringo's body:*

*bodies of regulation; bodies of mutilation;*

*bodies of consumption;*

## XX

She is back on familiar factual grounds. She knows the rules of conversations; *quid pro quo*; her turn to expose herself.

-“Usual story. No money; no freedom; no future...”

‘Usual story’, I wonder if that means that she is accustomed to telling her story, like my own story of not-quite-Frenchness, or if she is just giving me another ‘fact’; another premise; another reality that is by now taken for granted as the stuff of everyday life. She continues:

-“then you see a girl from your *bairro* who come back with jewels, nice clothes, nice hair, perfumes; she pays her mother’s debts; then she leaves again and comes back with more presents; more jewels. Then another one. Then another one of your friends leaves for Europe, and sends clothes and money. You ask yourself, ‘how did they do it?’, and they tell you. They live in Barra—for you, Barra is this distant glamorous places with lots of nice shops and rich, beautiful people—all you have to do is walk around, pick a nice-looking rich man, sit down and talk to him. It’s easy; it’s fun; it pays off—“

-“—there are other stories” I interrupt her.

-“sure there are other stories, but you don’t know about those stories; if you do hear the stories, you know it’s just gossip; the usual backstabbing from the jealous ones left behind; you don’t give it any attention..”

-“so you don’t realize what it entails”

-“not really no. When you’re a kid and you look at these glamorous girls, it just looks like they have found the best boyfriends who give them the best presents...”

-“and later?”

-“well, same thing really. You know it’s just a game, but it seems to be a better game. You’ve already been with a few boys and men from the *bairro*, and you know they’re not gonna give you shit; you know you’re gonna get knocked-up and end up serving a lazy bastard in a small *favela* cubicle, or maybe even working your ass off at some shitty job for a worthless guy who’ll sit at home drinking your money, who will fill your cunt with his kids, get his three meals a day, and get fat on you. Until you die. So why not look for something better in Barra, right?”

Her words are violent, but her tone still factual. Even if I tried to get inspired by ghosts and fetishes of the Morals of Empire, I would still find nothing to say. All I can do is play by the game of conversation; nodding, probing, paraphrasing:

-“So you think all the *garotas de programas* are looking to find a man who will take them off the street?”

-“for sure, they’re looking for a Prince Charming, but they have to make a living until they find him”

-“and do they ever find him?”

-“I dunno; sometimes I guess; not very often”

-“and have you?”

-“what?”

-“you know, found your Prince Charming?”

“I dunno; I have a pretty good deal, I guess”

The ‘good deal’ again. I can’t tell if the flat tone of her voice is from capitulation, boredom with the conversation, tiredness, or any combination of these. She still doesn’t seem to mind being here; with me. She hasn’t seemed pressed to leave, to go anywhere, to take a shower, to use the bathroom, to eat or drink. She just seems content lying here, talking to me.

-“so you wouldn’t mind continuing with *a vida*—The Life?”

-“No, I would. I was glad to stop”

-“So you don’t do *programas* anymore?”

-“no almost never; I don’t really need to now”

I could ask her if she’d intended to turn me into one of her “exceptions”. I know, after all, that she only has 2 reais in her purse. But that does not mean anything.

-“why were you happy to stop?” I ask instead.

-“Because *a vida* is tiring”

-“How so?”

-“Sometimes, you make a lot of money, and sometimes you don’t, but there are a lot of costs to maintain this kind of life-style. If you live in Barra or

somewhere downtown, your rent is expensive, even if you are sharing with a couple of other girls..."

-“Do a lot of *garota de programas* live together?”

-“Yes, the ones from Barra usually do....and then you’ve got the cost of your clothes, beauty salons, and so forth, and the drinks...Many times, you spend a whole night drinking and you don’t find a *programa*. You go home in the morning, and you’ve lost your day; you have to sleep all day if you want to be fresh for a night of work; and if you don’t work, you get in a lot of debt, and you’re fucked. Most of the girls who have kids back in their *bairros* don’t get to go see them because they have to sleep during the day...so when you live like that, you can’t study, you can’t get another job, and you just *get old* too fast...So I am glad not to have to do that anymore”

‘You get old too fast’...I think I know what she means.

-“so it’s basically really hard work; I guess that’s what you don’t think about when you are still a kid in your *bairro* and you look up to these girls....”

-“so it’s hard because you don’t always find *programas*.”

-“sure”

-“so you’re telling me that the hardest thing for you in *a vida* was not the men, but the *lack of men*?”

This last thought destabilizes me.

-“Definitely. Did you ever see how many girls there are for how many gringos?”

-“I...I dunno...I guess I’ve wondered why the girls didn’t fight over some of the guys...”

-“that’s because it does happen; and it happens a lot; but you just don’t see it around the Port because the cops and restaurant owners don’t like people who make a scene and drive the tourists away. The girls know that if they make a scene, they will be banned from the Port or from the best spots....”

That’s it again, I am thinking. Collaboration between the State, the private sector and the Mafia: selling and regulating public bodies, destitute public bodies, to get their share of foreign capital; public-private partnerships of pimping; pimping the commons to the gringos.

-“so you’re saying that the problem is that there are not enough men?...but aren’t the men themselves the problem at times?”

-“what do you mean?”

-“well...you know...don’t they get violent...or *disgusting*?”

I feel awkwardly childish asking this last question; I am a child; I am young, and she is old.

-“not really, no...I mean...you know how to pick your guys...”

-“so you only go with the good-looking guys?”

I feel even more childish now. Like a capricious, self-centered child. Am I asking her to tell me that I am good-looking? Or that I am not good-looking, because we did not go all the way?

-“No. I go with the safe guys”

-“The safe ones?”

-“Safe. The ones who aren’t twisted, or dangerous”

-“and you can tell?”

-“you learn....”

-“But what about the...you know, the *ugly* ones?”

Good-looking; ugly; disgusting; numerical values... these normative notions *mean* so much to me; to the way I *give meaning* to things, events and people.

-“you learn to accept I guess. It’s not such a big deal”

-“you mean that you don’t mind going with people like last night’s fat gringo?”

A child. I am a child.

-“No, I don’t mind”

-“so, you...you’ve been with people *like that*?”

Like *that*. The violence of the word *that*. I have taken an aspect of the gringo’s phenotype; of his phenotypical *deviation*; of the *violation* of the phenotypical parameters through which we define and value humanity, beauty, and so many other lies, and I have defined him: he *is* ugly; he cannot be touched; he cannot be valued.

I will never be free of ghosts and fetishes.

-“yes”, calmly, factually, “I have been with people like that”.

She repeats my ‘like that’ without any trace of sarcasm, but with a lot less violence.

-“and you didn’t mind?”

-“No. I didn’t mind. It’s not such a big deal. You just think about the money I guess”

‘You just think about the money’. If it weren’t for that last sentence, I could have followed my quasi-mystical search for an “essence”, and wandered off into deliria of sainthood; I could have imagined, seen, fantasized her as a saint, a bodhisattva, a martyr, a pure being who lived to give; who did not see ghosts and fetishes, and who could be, see, give and teach through the flesh; who could see and revive the fat gringo’s essence, who could give him life through the flesh.

But I will not follow such deliria today. Her last words bring me back to the hard, cold, metallic, industrial Marxist truth: This is what Empire and Capital have done to the flesh; they have done many things, and have shaped, twisted, twirled, shredded and mutilated flesh into lots of different kinds of suffering; they have condemned the flesh to the inferno of cannibalistic consumption. But flesh does not just consume flesh; consumption is fueled by desire fueled by the fetishes of capitalist patriarchy. In the end, all flesh is consumed but not all flesh is sold. In the end, Capital and fetishes consume us all. Yes, Gabriela’s body has been mutilated by Capital; it has been fetishized and thrown in “the free play of the market”.

Gabriela’s body is in hell.

But that is neither the beginning nor the end.

The fat gringo’s body, too, is in hell. Fetishes and Capital have also mutilated and done many things to his body: Capital has deformed him, has clogged his arteries, stretched his skin, compressed his lungs and, like a puppet, used his inert mass to suffocate people he has never seen and whose lives he has never



imagined: fetishes, too, have deformed him, and deformed him further, and stripped him of all value. Fetishes and Capital have turned his desire, the breath of his life, into a weapon, into poison; into an urge for air he has no right to breathe; into an inexorable quest toward murder, suffocation, and suicide.

Gabriela's last words bring many back many things:

A conversation that took place seven years ago, in São Paulo, with an artificial blonde I couldn't help disliking who had taken up a job at five-star hotel after graduating from business school:

She'd described what she had observed as a "pattern" among the gringo clients of her hotel: They would all be middle-aged, graying, balding, and overweight. They would all drink whiskey, and wear a wedding band that they would not bother to conceal as they went up to their room with local "escorts", call-girls, and street prostitutes, all of them younger, thinner, and darker than themselves. My *fausse-blonde* acquaintance, who had learned her counterfeit American English in Denmark, had confessed boundless admiration for these young women: "the service they are providing", she'd explained, feverishly, "is no more or less than excellence in entrepreneurship and customer-service". I had shivered. She'd continued: "you see, they have discovered the need for a service, and particular kinds of goods, and that is exactly what they are providing: they are offering these men the vigour, the beauty of youth, and the sexual acrobatics they cannot get from their wives, the girl-friend-experience and the fussing they cannot get from prostitutes back in their countries, and the trouble-free, no-strings-attached pure sexual pleasure they cannot get from their mistresses. This is pure genius you

see, and these girls make a lot of money! As a businesswoman, I can only respect and admire them as very successful *entrepreneuses*.....Because of my upbringing, I could never do this myself, you see, give myself completely to the customers like that...but I have a lot of admiration for them....the *ultimate customer service experience*....". How ominous. Here was one kind of capitalist enterprise, from the point of view of the *fausse-blonde*'s story, in which bourgeois cultural capital was not an asset, but an impediment. Of course, back then, I hadn't thought of the story in those terms, and I'd simply winced at terms like "service", and "customer". I disliked this woman intensely, and I wanted nothing more than to dismiss her business-school ranting as pure and hollow bullshit. But I couldn't. I was neither old, nor married, nor experienced with the mutual cruelties of Northern Hemisphere whoring, but, as a single white male, I knew of the desire for the facile, no-strings-attached satisfaction of one's sexual impulses, and I knew of the fetishized desire for "exotic" others. As a would-be-intellectual, I knew of the romantic, exciting, and pseudo-literary appeal toward lone male flâneurism and the mandatory detours and meanders in houses of pleasures, a cliché which had been exploited as far back as the time of troubadours and courtesans, and continued from Baudelaire to Woody Allen through the impressionists, Kafka, Henri Miller, Bukowski, and so many others. I knew that, a few months before, when my own transnational lone male flâneurism had brought me to Amsterdam's Red Light District, I hadn't resisted the impulse to rent and soil the body of a black woman who had immigrated from Surinam. I knew that the Christian ghosts that had shaped my conscience had viciously tormented me thereafter, and that I had promised myself not to succumb

to such impulses any longer. What had hurt and scared me when I had heard the *fausse-blonde*'s words, then, was that I knew that there was indeed, a "need" for such services in the "global market", and that I, as a slave to my impulses, contributed to this need, and the production of such exploitative services. What I had thought at the time, was that she had spoken an unspeakable truth, and that in the name of the universal categorical imperatives in which I still believed, this truth had to be silenced, at all costs, and that such services had to be banned. The conditions that produced "the need for certain women to produce such services", besides my own desire, which I also did not understand, were at the time incomprehensible, though I was beginning to suspect the ghosts of Colonialism as possible culprits. I was resolved, in any case, to shield my eyes from such services. Please, I begged, internally, I didn't know to whom, take away these tempting women in their cages of glass; take them away from my eyes, away from my reach, away from my flesh.

Later, much later, I had been confronted with the other side of the same argument. As an older, balding and married man well-versed in the jargon and aporias of postmodern social theory, I had picked up in the bathroom a warped copy of the Canadian edition of Marie Claire® magazine left there by my then-wife, which featured an article on "sex tourism" in Thailand. An "undercover" white male journalist, equipped with the objectivist lens of universalistic moral righteousness, had joined an organized tour of American "sex tourists", and endeavoured to "shed light" on this peculiar global phenomenon. Awkwardly conning his fellow sex-tour members, the author had guiltily taken off his wedding

band and taken part in the happy-go-lucky go-go parties that rejoiced his overweight countrymen, and would only “secretly” reveal his “true” identity once he would find himself behind four walls in the company of call-girls and masseuses whom he would then proceed to interview after paying them what they were owed, and apologizing for his chastity. The “hidden truth” had then slowly unveiled itself to his puzzled eyes. Witnessing how Thai prostitutes would prosperously cash-in on white men’s quick and uneventful orgasms while maintaining a plethora of overseas fiancés who wired them money after they’d exquisitely performed their promises, misery, femininity, and vulnerability, he had understood that things were not as they seemed. These seemingly poor and innocent Thai peasant girls, he had come to realize, were in fact conniving, mischievous and *lazy* women who made easy money from exploiting white men’s generosity, instead of dutifully flipping burgers while waiting for their turn to be blessed by the economic miracle of globalization. “In the end”, he had asked, “one is left to wonder who are the victims, and who are the exploiters”<sup>66</sup>. His argument had not confronted me with the same visceral violence as the *fausse-blonde*’s confessions; it hadn’t hinted at any kind of “hidden truth” that tormented my secret desire, and hadn’t evoked any particular impulse besides the urge to beat the fuck out of the author and a profound revulsion toward the project of objectivist travel-journalism. But still, I was forced to admit, the man had expressed a “valid point”, not because he had uncovered any kind of secret

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<sup>66</sup> See Kaplan, (2005). The exact ending words of the article (which was miraculously emailed to me while still in Brazil by David Houston from the University of Vermont) were, “...and I am left wondering, in this world of men-using-women-using-men, who the sucker really is” (Kaplan, 2005, p147)

reality about these women, but because his views represented those of so many others, and therefore, referred to a dominant reality that I couldn't ignore.

Here was, at any rate, another capitalist interpretation of a capitalist phenomenon. From an optimistic emancipatory perspective, one could "celebrate" the "creative" exercise of "agency" of subaltern women who had "succeeded" in gaining capital and "mobility" by tapping into certain global flows of goods, symbols, and people. From a neo-utilitarian perspective devoid of "humanistic" and "ethical" concerns, one could also celebrate, as the *fausse-blonde* had done, the "entrepreneurial" genius of such women. One could also, indeed, condemn these women, or their clients, for their "moral" faults. One could lament their status as hapless victims of brutal global forces. One could interpret these women's motives and conditions in an infinity of ways, but one could not, it seemed to me, deny the centrality of the Late-Capitalist global reality in the production of these edgy lives.

*Colonial Fetishes, Patriarchy and Desire: Epistemological, methodological, and political interrogations on the essence of it all.*

## XXI

So many questions remained open. If the larger, most ambitious question of all, motivated by a strategic humanist concern with the alleviation of suffering remained the question of “*what was to be done?*”, I still could not get past the underlying problem:

What was to be done....*by whom?* And *about what* exactly?

I had determined that the “latest” flows in a long history of the Capitalist invasion of global realities, this thing I called Late-Capitalism, was the larger, ominous, overall, abstract culprit in the production of radical modes of livelihoods in which social actors surrendered their flesh to the shredding machine of transnational capitalist sexscapes. But I had also decided that this pervert, abstract, and heartless machine, was after all entirely *human*, and was operated and regulated exclusively by humans actors: The fuel that gave life to this machine and death to those on which it fed, I had decided, was *desire*, human desire. The fuel, *l’essence*, as I would have said in French, was what made it all happen and unhappen. Perhaps after all I had found this *essence*, this Holy Grail I so desperately sought, this *breath of life* that had condemned the fat gringo to murder and suicide, and so much human flesh to the eternal hell of consumption.

I had “discovered” this essence by immersing myself in the depth and pains of human existence. From existence, I was back to essence: from existentialism, to

essentialism. I had also come back in a full circle to the schizoid binary logic I had tried to escape.

I was back among the ghosts and fetishes.....

The question of desire, and what was to be done about desire, in any case, remained central. The question of *my own desire*, then, as that of a historically and structurally constituted neo-colonial white male in a patriarchal world, remained painfully and naggingly open and central.

The piece of Marie Claire® trash journalism had sent me into fits of rage against the abstract but all-too-human machine of Late-Capitalism, and the related moronically binary interpretations of “victims and perpetrators”, and the even more violently moronic fantasy that had inspired that self-righteous prick of a journalist to point an accusatory finger at Thai women. The red veil of rage had clouded my own desire, and I hadn’t experienced any of the tortured post-Christian episodes of *mea culpa* that had plagued me after talking to the Cyborg businesswoman in her five-star palace. But still, when I’d haughtily frowned at the trashy blurred photographs of amber-skinned go-go dancers, my pupils had slightly dilated, and a weak but distinctive shiver had traveled down my spine and ended in a faint electrical shock that had flashed through my loin. Then I’d wondered, in the utmost secrecy of the back of my conscience, how I would have behaved myself in the skin of that journalist. I wasn’t interested (although I was convinced that he had) in pondering whether he had indeed banged as many Thai hookers as he could while concocting his pathetic little article whose conclusion he’d probably written long before entering the sexscapes of Bangkok. I was more worried about what I would

have done with my own desire on a similar “mission”. In the end, I’d thought, wouldn’t I too, in order to protect my marriage, my career, and my “reputation”, have concealed “the truth” about how I too had rented and consumed amber-coloured flesh in the line of my “duty”?

In fact, I’d thought about so many things: there was the question of desire, of course, and of the possibility of succumbing to one’s impulses, but there was also the question of acknowledging, deconstructing, silencing, or censoring one’s desire and impulses; behind the question of censorship, and the question of how one would present or silence oneself when one was to investigate and report on these issues, therefore, was the question of writing.

These urges were not mentionable, I had thought; not in the current project of marriage, nuclear family, and academic career in which one, in spite of all, still aimed to *do the right thing*. These urges belonged to the realm of fictions; to the tortured consciences and condemnable acts one would transfer to fictional characters, but which one could not, alas, at a risk of exposing oneself, deconstruct at great length. These urges had to be transferred to fiction, to lies, and to distant lands where one could rape and plunder at will, without exposing oneself to the moral gaze of work, family and community.

I’d thought of Paul Theroux, whom I also intensely disliked but whose travel writing books I couldn’t help reading and rereading with a strange and frenzied fascination, because they epitomized central questions in profoundly anthropological and pedagogical dilemmas with which I was battling: the question of the white man’s gaze on the Other and the Foreign; the question of the white



man's tools of description and construction of the Foreign; and the question of the white man's writing and censorship of his own behaviour toward the foreign, his own fear and hatred of the foreign, and, most ominously, his own desire toward the foreign.

From Theroux's earliest pieces as a lone, but dutifully married "travel writer", had emanated a visceral attraction with prostitution: hookers, whores, *putas* were always present, always luring in the end of beginnings of chapters. He knew how to protect his marriage and reputation by routinely pasting in sentences and paragraphs about the sorrows of being away from his wife and sons, by denouncing other writers' shameful sexual habits<sup>67</sup>, or by placing confessional whoring narratives in the mouths of characters he met along the road<sup>68</sup>, but he always silenced his own desire and censured what did—or did not—happen behind the pages<sup>69</sup>. Only later, much later, long after his divorce, had he revealed a bit more of his own colonial desire in his *Hotel Honolulu*, in which he autobiographically figured as the (s)expatriate husband of a young Hawaiian woman he referred to as a "coconut princess", and whose "tropical" intellect he routinely mocked<sup>70</sup>. But by then, it was too late for Theroux to "come clean", the book was still polluted with the presence of restraint; of what could not be written. There was always, after all, the risk that his "coconut princess" would one day gain enough "literacy skills" to read one of his books.

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<sup>67</sup> For example, VS Naipaul's, in *Sir Vidia's shadow* (2004)

<sup>68</sup> See for example narratives of hermaphrodite sex in Laos in *The Great Railway Bazaar* (1975)L

<sup>69</sup> See for example, *The Great Railway Bazaar* (1975), and *the Old Patagonian Express* (1980).

<sup>70</sup> *Hotel Honolulu* (2001)

*On writing, censoring, and fighting (one's) colonial desire*

Theroux's example, that is, the lessons I had learned from what I imagined as Theroux's strategic silence and self-censorship, had served as a reminder of how ultimately paralyzed I was in my endeavour to act, teach, and write my heart out and spill my guts out to combat the ghosts of Empire. It was one thing to engage in predictable degrees of mandatory reflexivity, and to acknowledge one's position of power in the structures one sought to denounce and battle against; it was also conceivable, once one had acknowledged *desire* as one of the main forces that animate the machine one sought to dismantle, to acknowledge the existence of one's desire, and to inquire into its historical constitution...but it was something entirely different and infinitely more difficult and improbable to interrogate the *consequences* of one's desire by acknowledging and deconstructing the *acts of violence* that had been committed through this desire.

I had reached a painful conclusion which I felt partially "solved" the debate over the use of reflexivity in ethnographic writing, and *the meaningful pedagogical and political value of reflexivity in postcolonial ethnographic writing*: writing oneself and recognizing one's *power*, I had thought, could indeed be pointlessly navel-gazing if done *superficially*; exploring deeply *the horror, violence, and consequences of one's acts*, however could be immensely valuable.

In the context of asymmetrical flows of goods, peoples and symbols that resulted in asymmetrical patterns of consumption and mutilation of people, I had come to realize, a central aspect of *what had to be done* to revert these

asymmetrical relations was not simply to improve the living conditions of the downtrodden (the *consumed*; the *mutilated*), but to tackle the mechanisms that produced the desire of the dominant (*the consumers*). Looking deeply inside one's desire and one's actions, then, could hold a partial key to a way forward.

This key, however, was out of my reach. The social and political projects in which I was too deeply embedded, like what I imagined of Paul Theroux, did not allow me to look deeply inside the what ghosts and fetishes had done to me, and what I was doing to the world as a result.

The privilege of narrative integrity, in any case, was too far out of my reach. That kind of "honesty" was reserved for the "bad guys", for the Henri Millers, Charles Bukowskis, Michel Houellebecqs, and Klaus Kinskis, who might be inspiring artists, but couldn't possibly be good fathers; for people who had the courage to expose the depth of the human experience, but who, we all knew, could not *do anything* to improve the human condition....

## XXII

A year or so after reading the Marie Claire® article, on my way back from a conference in Kuala Lumpur and a frenzied fortnight of flâneurism in other South East Asian megacities, as a lone white doctoral student desperately holding on to the last lies that held my marriage together, I'd landed late at night at Suvarnabhumi International Airport in Bangkok, where I was to spend two nights and a day before flying onto to Doha. I didn't know what awaited me in Bangkok, but, as the cliché goes, what I feared the most was inscribed deep inside my own flesh.

Once the sun has set after a day of purposefully getting lost through canals, streets and alleys whose names I couldn't read, I'd hopped onto a *tuk-tuk* and asked the driver, from behind my face-mask, to drive me to *Pat Pong*, the red-light district. But by the time I'd had my first meal in Bangkok hours before, my desire had miraculously faded, and the red veil of rage had returned. Late that morning, in the cyber-gringo-hippie quarters of *Khao San Road*, I'd bumped into and collided with the flabby arms and sweaty bare shoulders of two fat French gringos (who in these latitudes, had been discursively constituted as *farangs*). The incident had hit me like a violent *deus ex machina*, a brutal divine intervention, which, anticipating the wave of self-disgust that would wash over me in the presence of Veronica and Gabriela's fat gringo, had confronted me with an image that seemed to expose the horrors of my own soul. I'd collided with these two *farangs*, who had kept walking without preoccupying themselves with my presence. The man on my left; his oily, hairy arms wobbling as he wandered off, had mumbled through his teeth, which I

hadn't seen, but could only be black: *Bé quoi?? Y'a pas d'mal à s'vider les couilles, nan? C'est bien pour ça qu'on est là ?* "So what ? ain't nuthin' wrong with emptyin' my balls, right? Isn't that why we're here?"

The mirror-image of what my soul-and-flesh could become, or perhaps already was, had rescued me from what lied inside me. At night, I'd briefly wandered through *Pat Pong*, and had fled quickly. There was nothing like Amsterdam's tempting women in their cages of glass whom I hadn't resisted all those years ago. The only thing I saw that night was a highly organized, scary and efficient post-industrial meat factory. I'd thought about Elizabeth Costello, alone among all those who couldn't see the horror... "*fragments of corpses... that people bought for money*"<sup>71</sup>. On my way to the airport, I had thought about a story told to me by a childhood friend, the son of an American diplomat, who had lived in Burma as a child. I'd briefly seen my friend in New York before flying to the East, and he'd repeated the Bangkok story that had marked him as a young boy. On a trip to Bangkok with his mother, he had seen a ghost; a scary, pale, floating figure. It was that of a young Thai woman staggering on the edge of a street-market, splattering rice on her face and mouth with her bare hands and emitting little moaning sounds. Her body was lean and soiled; she was wearing a pair of black bras over the small lumps of her breasts...and nothing more...the rest of her flesh, and the small mound of black hairs between her bony legs were exposed for all to see. But no one was looking. My friend's mother, Cambodian by birth, had told him not to pay any attention to the girl; "she's just one of those drugged prostitutes", she'd told my friend.

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<sup>71</sup> Coetzee (2003)

*Emptying one's balls*, I'd thought, as natural as breathing and the lung's quest for air. I knew what the *farang* meant, for I too, needed to breathe. But not like that; not this way; not paying for air sucked out of people's lungs; sucking them dry; suffocating them dry.

I'd arrived early back at Suvarnabhumi Airport, where I'd found out that my Qatar Airways flight to Doha had been paired with the passengers of a cancelled Lufthansa flight with a connection to Frankfurt. During the long wait before boarding, I'd stared quietly at the many couples that resembled the gringo/hooker five-star hotel pattern described by the fake blonde in São Paulo. Older, heavier German men with younger Thai women, with sprinkling wedding bands, bringing gifts, sometimes babies, and their silence back to Germany. None of them spoke, but my tired and anguished fragility imagined capitulation, hate, and contempt in their eyes. "None of these couples have anything to say to each other", I'd thought. "The men look exasperated at the thought of what lies ahead, and the women have adopted their sad posture of capitulation at the thought of what they had to leave behind". Was this the necessary fate of unions of the flesh that had violated the laws of race, age, and class, I'd wondered? Or was I fantasizing all of it and projecting my own fears onto the morning silence of weary travelers?

## XXIII

Now, I am wondering what I would think and feel if I silently observed Gabriela and her Italian *coroa* flying from São Paulo to Lisbon; if I didn't know them and their story.

-“Are you ok?” asks Gabriela, with a sweet motherly look on her face, “you seem kinda lost?”

-“I'm fine, I'm fine” I reassure her. I am seeing dark floating spots. My blood pressure must be low. God, I hope I didn't blank out for too long, “I was just thinking about a lot of stuff”, I continue, “and I am kind of dizzy. I think I should eat something”

-“yeah, me too, I haven't had anything to eat since last night”.

I propose to run down to the bakery to get food. She asks me for a fresh mango juice, with ice and sugar, and a plain cheeseburger. I decide to get the same thing for myself, minus the sugar. I slip into my jeans, flip-flops, and the first T-shirt I can find, and hurry down.

Everyone is watching the France-Brazil game at the bakery, which I have never entered before. The cook asks me “where I am from”. I am tired and dizzy, so I just point at the TV screen.

-“from there”, I confess.

-“You are from *France*?”, he repeats with a grin.

-“yes”, I confirm, “but that was a long time ago”

-“so you are Brazilian now?”

-“yes, I am Brazilian now”

-“and you cheer for Brazil?”

-“yeah, sure. I cheer for Brazil”

On my way back up to the apartment, trying not to spill the mango juice, I wonder if my “strategic humanism” is hopelessly naïve. I am thinking of all the money, computers, cameras, clothes, and all the other “goods” in the apartment where I have left Gabriela. Just like last night, when I’d go to the bathroom and leave my drinks with Flávio and the girls. I was making a point of showing them *that I trusted them*. That I would not see them as potential enemies, but as fellow humans. I used to be terrified of everything and everyone as a child and adolescent. But now I have grown weary of so much fear and distrust. I still loathe my own body intensely, and all the internal and external mechanisms that I cannot control; that is enough to make one go insane; but I do not fear humans anymore; in fact, I desperately *want* to trust humans.

Gabriela has taken a shower, and wrapped her head in one of the only towels that wasn’t dirty. She hasn’t plundered my apartment and disappeared; she has made herself at ease; more at ease, it seems, than I myself could ever feel in this apartment. ‘She is remarkable’, I am thinking.

-“so, your hair is natural, then?”, I ask, handing her the food and drink.



-“No actually, it’s not naturally straight”

-“but you don’t mind getting it wet?”

-“oh, no. I can get it wet”, she declares taking a bite from her burger, “I got a permanent hairbrush done”

-“oh...that’s expensive, isn’t?”

-“yes”, she replies, “it is expensive”

The silence that takes over while we eat is no longer menacing, at least not to me, but it carries the reminder that it is my turn to expose myself. *Quid pro quo*.

She wipes her fingers with the paper towel I brought her, and folds it neatly with the aluminum burger wrap which she places in the plastic bag. She knows the rules of the *quid pro quo* game, and she will ask the questions from now on:

-“So what about you, then...you don’t do *programas*?”

I feel calm and eager to talk. She has revealed herself as a good conversationalist; one that is adept at the probing and parroting game of counseling. Perhaps it is part of her *métier*.

-“No, I have done *programas*, but I guess I am trying not to”

-“why is that?”

There we go. The art of getting one to talk; it doesn’t take much, but so few people can sustain that role.

-“well...because of what I do, I guess, because of what *I preach*...it goes against what I preach, and it turns me into a false person”

-“what do you do?”

-“I am a researcher; an academic. I am student, too, but I have taught and I will keep teaching. I teach against oppression, exploitation, patriarchy, all these things...but if you weight it all against what I *really* do, then it becomes worse than a lie...it’s like posing as something you’re not, and accusing people of doing things that you are responsible for”

-“so you think paying for sex is *wrong*?”

She emphasizes the word, but her tone is not accusing. She is simply playing by the rules of the probing game; getting me to speak; to expose myself.

-“no... I don’t know... I am not saying that what *you do* is *wrong*, because I don’t even know what that means, and I think that maybe I understand why you do it—or maybe I don’t—and I understand why men pay for sex, because I have paid for sex...I just think that...I don’t know...it’s hard to say something like that—that it’s not right *for me* to pay for sex...”

That sounded awful. It sounds like I am too righteous for that, but that I can condone the weakness of others, like a king who grants pardon. That is not what I wanted to say, but I don’t know how to express what I feel.

-“why not?”

Sure. Go for it, it is your turn now. That’s all you have to say, isn’t it: ‘why not’?

-“Because then, I’d have to stop preaching what I preach, and I don’t want to do that. I’d like to *live* what I preach”

-“fair enough, I guess”

Thank you. Thank you. But I am not off the hook, of course.

-“Have you done *programas* in Brazil?”

-“No, I haven’t”

-“why?”

-“For the reasons I told you”

-“So you’ve only fucked whores *lá*, then, over there?”

*Você só comeu putas lá.* It is the first time she has used the word *whore*.

-“over there, where?” I throw the question back at her

-“*lá*, there, where you live”

-“I live here now”

-“oh, you know what I mean”, she does not seem angered or even irritated, but she won’t let me play that game, “where do your parents live, then?”

-“My mom lives in the United States, and my dad in France, but I haven’t lived in either of those countries in a long time”

-“So where did you fuck whores, then?”

We could have stuck to the *programa* euphemisms, but she is too smart for that.

-“In Holland, the first time; in Amsterdam. Then in England, and Canada”

-“That’s it?”

-“That’s it”.

-“Did you think that it was ok for you to do *programas* there, but not here?”

We are back to *programas* now, but it isn’t a favour on her part. She is not a counselor. She is a judge.

-“Yes. Maybe for a while I did, or I wanted to. But I knew it wasn’t true; I knew it didn’t make it okay to do it there....maybe it made it even worse...”

-“worse, why?”

-“Because there is not like here....it’s a lot more hidden, a lot more secret, a lot more hypocritical...a lot more *personal*”

-“personal?”

-“yes, personal. Something you do alone, in hiding, with shame; not like here; it’s not in-your-face like here, and it’s not something people do together to have fun...it’s a lone, *shameful* thing”

Do I really believe that? Do I really want to gloss over Brazilian sexscapes with the term “fun?”....No, one cannot do justice to anyone or anything when one talks about these things.

-“But how does that make it more *wrong*? It just sounds more...I don’t know, *dull*...”

-“yeah...no....it is *dull* I guess; the thing is that...well, it’s the whole *pretense* behind it all that’s wrong, you see? The whole façade of righteousness, and all the things you do behind....I guess it’s not anymore okay here, but sometimes it seems to me that it is more....more *honest* you know?”

-“I don’t know. Maybe” she won’t discuss “morals” with me. But why should she? “but the girls...” she goes on, “the girls there, they must be beautiful?”

-“The *garotas de programas*? Yes, I guess some of them are....a lot of them were born in other countries, so maybe they don’t look like other gringas. Some of

them are *acabadas*, finished, like some women here....the streetwalkers, the drug addicts..."

-“there are crack addicts there, too?”

-“sure there are...”

-“So the gringos like foreign *putas* better in their own countries, too?”

-“You know, I’ve never actually discussed this with another gringo, but I am sure that many do”

-“Gringos like black women”, she declaims. It is a statement; not a question.

-“yeah, I guess a lot of them do like black women; have sexual fantasies about them, that is....but definitely not all gringos”

-“well it seems to me that all gringos are really into *negras*. I always thought I wasn’t as successful as I could be here because I wasn’t black enough”

What a strange thing to hear from a Brazilian woman; the world upside down.

-“yeah, well, the gringos who come to Salvador for sex are interested in black women; those that aren’t—and there are many—go elsewhere, or stay in their own countries”, I offer as an explanation.

-“yeah, I guess”

There is a risk that the probing device may spin toward her now, so she quickly regains ground:

-“so why else is it dull there? What is it like?”

-“well”, I explain, “it’s quite dreary really. You ring the phone number of an ‘Escort Agency’ that you got in the back-pages of the newspaper, and they give you

a description of the women; it's kind of like choosing a meat-cut at the butcher's— or more like picking a particular topping, or 'flavour' when you order a pizza on the phone. They give you an address, a code to get inside a building, and an apartment number. The buildings are always kinda nondescript—neither chic nor decrepit, you know?—just always kinda *plain*...a normal building in a normal part of town. There's no thrill, no romance, no danger, no game. You just go in, you briefly talk to the woman, but mostly you don't say much; you say as little as you can about yourself; you don't give any of yourself away...you just pay the fee; you go about your business. Sometimes, the girls like to chat afterwards, but I never do...so you just wash yourself up, put on your coat, and leave through the staircase, because you don't want to face people's silence in the elevator. You walk out the building, and you tell yourself you'll never go back there..."

-“And how much do the girls charge?”

She won't follow my bleak lead into lamentation territory. Better that way.

-“I don't know about the streetwalkers, but the agency girls usually charge 80 to 100 Canadian Dollars. Up to 200 reals, I guess”

-“sometimes, you can make that, or even more with a gringo here....but not often”

-“yeah”, I whisper.

I am tired now.

-“and did you go often?”

-“Sometimes, I wouldn't go for a long time; sometimes I would go more frequently”

-“and now?”

-“now?”

-“how long’s it been?”

-“about six months, I think. Five or six months”

-“so you went when you were married?”

-“yes, I did. I used to think that I went *because* I was married”

-“yes?”

-“I thought I could *save* my marriage like that, you know? I would have urges, and satisfy them, without really *cheating* on my wife”

-“that’s the usual story”

The ‘usual story’ again. She knows all the ‘usual stories’

-“that most of the men who go to prostitutes are married?”

-“yes, that and that they don’t considering it cheating”

-“And do you think it is?”

-“I don’t know; I don’t care, really. I guess it’s not exactly being faithful, anyway; it’s true that a whore is not as threatening to a married woman as a mistress; what do *you* think?”

Back at me.

-“Oh”, I murmur with a sigh, “I am asking myself a lot of questions about those things, about love, *possessing* one’s partner, fidelity, and all that...and I really don’t know what any of those things mean anymore....but yeah, to go back to what I was telling you earlier....no, it wasn’t honest...in relation to....well to many people...so I don’t know what *cheating* means; I really don’t know...but I guess I

can understand what *hurting* someone means...hurting someone you love, or someone you've promised something to...so whether you are 'guilty' of breaking your marriage vows with someone you 'love' or just with someone you are using to satisfy your impulses, or even to someone you are *hurting* to satisfy your impulses is perhaps not the same thing, but both scenarios constitute an act that would *hurt* the person you are not being 'faithful' to if she were to find out, and other people, too...I guess we can't compare the pain inflicted by different kinds of 'treasons', but yeah...basically, we're forced to admit that there would be *pain* in both scenarios—and I am not even going to go into the question of the pain I am inflicting on the body I am renting—but yeah, I guess that's what 'cheating' is, and yes...I suppose I was guilty of it"

-“but you knew all that then”

-“yes, I knew all that”.



*Who is hurting whom? Suffering, Body Consumption in Perspective, and  
Mobilizing Empathetic Imagination*

XXIV

-“so why did you keep doing it, if you didn’t want to hurt your wife, and if you did not want to do something that was against your principles?”

There we go. There is still not a trace of reproach in her tone; she is merely playing by the rules of the game; forcing me to see myself in the mirror of my own logic. But her question angers me of course; it angers me just like the logic of existentialism angers me: ‘reinvent yourself; make up the rules of your game, but *stick to them*’...the intolerance of people who just can’t see that *knowing* something is wrong is not the same as changing one’s actions accordingly...or am I angered by my own rage at hearing a nagging truth?

I know it wouldn’t be fair on her to become the target of my rage, so I try my utmost to control my voice, and speak after a long sigh:

-“...I kept doing it because it was *easy*.”

-“Easy? You mean, because there were a lot of *garotas de programas*?”

-“No. Well, yes, or no: it was easy like it’s easy to have another beer or another slice of cake, or to drive to the shop instead of walking, or to let your kid watch the same DVD twice because you’re tired and you have to wash the dishes, or to buy cheap Made-in-China shit when you’re broke, or to let yourself ejaculate before giving someone an orgasm..”

-“but I don’t understand what you’re saying...so it’s easy because it’s there and you can’t say no?”

-“No...like I said, yes and now...I mean yeah, sure, the question of *availability* maybe is important...like, well, there are places, like France and Ireland, where I have spent a lot of time and never paid for a *programa*...so yeah, maybe I could say that I was ‘happy’ when I was in those places, or had more self-control, but...I dunno...maybe that would be a lie, because it is true that in those places, there just aren’t as many opportunities to do *programas*...But then again, I could also tell you that I’ve been to places where it’s really in-your-face, like Thailand—or here—and where I haven’t done *programas*...but that might be precisely because the in-your-face-thing somehow makes it easier to have self-control and feel all righteous, and stuff..”

-“so?”

-“so what I am trying to say, is that it is *easy*, just like it is way too easy to buy ‘unethical’ products everywhere, and it’s easy to pretend that it is ‘normal’, and inoffensive....so it’s easy because I am a *man*, because I have extra cash that I can spend, and because even if I don’t really have the extra cash, everything pushes me to *consume*, and to be a consumer; because men consume women, and because women are for rent....”

-“But women consume men too, and *garotas de programas* use men too...”

I can’t tell if she is still playing the game, or really speaking for herself or on behalf of a notion of womanhood or of what it means to be a sex-worker. She is, after all, referring to *garotas de programas* in the third person...

-“Maybe...I don’t know, I don’t really want to look at it that way...I agree that the whole question of *who is consuming whom* and the larger question of *who is hurting whom* is really complicated, and yeah, you’re totally right, women can consume men, and women can use men and hurt men, and I am not trying to reaffirm any kind of idea about who is *superior*, but I guess that we have to admit that men and women are not equal, in the sense that they are physically different, which doesn’t mean that as humans, with all our differences and likenesses, we shouldn’t be equally *valued* and treated and accommodated according to our differences....Anyway, my point is that as a result of, I don’t know, for example, *real* differences in physical strengths between men and women, and the dominating role that men have taken in most places throughout history, more women are dominated by men, hurt by men, and *consumed* by men<sup>72</sup>...and maybe what I am trying to say is that this is not *right*, and that the forms in which men are consuming women through prostitution don’t put women at any kind of an *advantage* over men, or place them in positions where they *suffer less* than men...I mean, if we stick to the idea of consuming products: like, I dunno, for example, it’s not obvious, and it’s hard to see that you may be directly “hurting” a child who works for two cents a day to make pairs of shoes by buying that pair of shoes....and I know a lot of assholes will tell you that the child is *happy* to get those two cents a day, to give

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<sup>72</sup> See feminist philosopher Christine Overall’s (1972) article for a review of feminist literature on prostitution. In her opinion, she concludes that there is nothing “inherently wrong” with sex work itself, but that it is the conditions of capitalist patriarchy under which it occurs that are problematic. In her own words: “What is bad about prostitution, then, does not just reside in the sexual exchanges themselves, or in the circumstances in which they take place, but in capitalist patriarchy itself. What is wrong with prostitution is not just that it is servicing sexual needs, but, rather, that it is the servicing of men’s sexual needs under capitalist and patriarchal condition. Those conditions create both the male needs themselves, and the ways in which women fill them, construct the buying of sexual services as a benefit for men, and the reversibility of sex services implausible and sexual equality in the trade unattainable” (Overall, p721)

them to his mom, to get food, and all that crap...that he *needs* that money, and that without the shoes you are buying, he'd be making less money, or starving, or whatever...but please, don't tell me that the kid doesn't have *one hell of a shitty life* compared to yours. So another way of looking at it, is that the *real problem* is the division of labour and resources and the global mode of production imposed by western capitalism that forces kids in 'underdeveloped countries' to work in fucking factories so kids in other countries can wear get laid thanks to their designer trainers .... but what I am trying to say, is that even if it's not obvious, especially when we're so far from that kid, to see that *our habits* contribute to his misery, we are very implicated in this kid's life...and as long as we keep accepting that we live in a world where the majority of people slave away for a pittance while a minority can get fat on them, and as long as we keep accepting that we can buy these trainers, that we *need* them, and that *like* them, and that we *want* them...well, I guess we're always going to be producing miserable kids...and I guess that even if you *know* all that, and you want to stop buying these trainers you always end up telling yourself...well, you know...the usual stuff...that whether you buy the shoes or not, the kid will still be working there and your not buying the shoes won't 'rescue' him from that life...that he's stuck there and that you can't do anything about it...that you need to buy shoes but you can't afford the more expensive ones that they are made by kids too anyway; that you *really* need to buy those fucking shoes; that they *really look nice*, etc...so in the end, you buy the fucking pair of shoes, and you tell yourself, 'of well, it's not like I could do anything anyway...and I *really needed* those shoes...."

I know what she is going to say; I know that she understands what I have said—though I don't know if she agrees—but I know she has sensed that I have returned to my safe space: lecturing.

-“yes, but you can't really compare to all the situations of women who..”

I can't resist interrupting her; I am getting carried away now:

“but I *can* though....that's what I am trying to say...Maybe in some places, like some European or Northern places, it's kind of agreed upon that prostitution is *wrong*, or something, so it's more hidden, of course, like the factories with the kids—hidden from the view of the consuming masses, that is—and in some other places, it's more accepted, but whether it's there and tempting you in your face or not is not the point...the point is, is that is part of the same *consuming* reality as the two-cents-a-day trainers, and that you can always tell yourself that it's there anyway, that it's always been there, and that you can't do anything about it....actually, I think that's exactly why the whole question of prostitution, and the responsibility of the male consumer is a lot harder to tackle than the kids-and-shoes thing because not only do you feel less “sorry” for prostitutes, but you can also tell yourself that “you” are different, that you can “treat them well”, that you can “tip them well”, and all that crap. ....I guess you can always show a film with ragged teary coughing kids in factory, and make people *feel sorry for little kids* and campaign for their labour rights, etc...what...what I am trying to say is that it is relatively easy to make people feel both *sorry*, and *powerless* about the kids, but I think it's a lot harder to get people to *feel sorry* for poor women from poor countries who try to find husbands from rich countries...especially if those

'husbands' are not rich in their countries, and if they're going to "lose" a lot of money and end up miserable as a result of their failed relationships..."

-“yeah...but you're talking about a lot of different things now...” she has managed to reinsert herself inside the flow of my words, which she could tell was losing its coherence, “I understand what you mean about the consuming thing, but men are always going to need women that way, right?, so it's not like men can just decide not to want women, like you can decide to stop wanting shoes made by kids”

“But that's exactly it!”, I burst out; I feel almost happy now, “that's it: it *is* the same thing; the point is that, for sure, needing to protect our feet, and needing to have sex are *natural* needs, for sure, and we can't stop *wanting* to do these things...but the question is about *the manner*; the way in which we go about having sex, and designing, producing, and buying shoes...”

The same kind of happiness, of rhetorical happiness of one who is about to win an argument has lit up her face:

-“yes, of course, but then, you can't escape the fact that people will always need to buy shoes, and that many men will always need to buy sex”

-“No”, I retort, my grin widening, “having to *buy* shoes and sex is just a byproduct of capitalism, but ultimately, the only 'natural' aspect in this picture is the *need* to protect one's feet, and to ensure the reproduction of our species through sex. I mean, it's completely absurd, when you think about it: the way we've been made to need and want certain kinds of stupid shoes, and the way some men have been made to desire certain kinds of women, and the way people are *hurting* one another so some people can get certain kinds of shoes, and some men can consume certain

kinds of women...but in an ideal world, right?, people would craft protection for their feet and have sex without needing to hurt others, and without needing pay for it”

She is smiling. Softly, gently, almost condescendingly.

-“That doesn’t sound very realistic...”

From the way her fingers are fidgeting on the mattress, I know she will say her time to go home has come.

## TWO

*(Non?) Conclusion:*

*On violence love, essence, and the possibility of humanity beyond what the ghosts  
and fetishes of Empire have done to the flesh:*

*An Anatomy, possible Autopsy of, and desperate quest toward the possibility of a  
Manifesto against Biopower*



Salvador, February 2007

*Bodies Walking over Bodies: Searching for Humanity between Boundaries, the State, and Violence*

I

“And what makes you think you are above suspicion?” Kurt asks me with a sneer, sipping on his warm Guinness.

Kurt irritates me. Something about his manic grin; his crazy blue eyes; his frizzy white hair and sun-burnt skull; his Birkenstocks without the trademark white socks; his insecure pedantry; his insecure megalomania. But he is a good conversationalist, and he asks questions. He asks unkind questions, but why wouldn't he? After all, I too have asked him unkind questions.

“I don't. That's the point”, I retort dryly, “that's the whole point; I don't think I am above suspicion; I don't think anybody's above suspicion”.

I am not in a good mood anyway; or not in the right mood. I am not in the right mood to theorize on the possibility of love, of non-utilitarian relationships; on the possibility of non-utilitarian transnational unions; on the possibility of non-utilitarian transnational love that transgresses race and class boundaries; and I feel even less inclined to discuss or justify my own relationships.

This place irritates me. I can't think of a good reason why I came to Barra's Dubliner's Irish Pub tonight. I wasn't particularly displeased to run into Kurt, who

seemed as lonely and sulky as I was, and I might even have felt slightly uplifted at the prospects of a good conversation in English. But the pub irritates me, of course, with its aggressively green acrylic carpets, the waitresses' forced and dissonantly nasal English, their insistence of speaking forced and dissonantly nasal English despite my insistence to reply in Portuguese; and the shitty pool tables with the skewed sticks and the impossibly small pockets. "Like tight pussies", Kurt had commented. Those had been Kurt's first words to me, in English, when, two months before, when he'd been shooting pool on his own next to our table, he'd overheard my brother's annoyed remarks (in Frenglish) about the pockets.

I am also irritated about the *pivetes* I ran into on my way to the pub; a group of teenagers from one of the nearby *favela* known as Calabar who buy hippie jewels from *malucos* and sell them to tourists. Unlike the *malucos*, these kids are rugged and hard-working entrepreneurs, and they rarely go home until two or three in the morning. I know all of them well. Their usual routine is to circle around Barra, going back and forth along the seafront between the Old Port and the *rua* Almirante Marquês de Leão, selling their goods to tourists and the patrons of plastic-chairs-and-tables bars, and eating at the expense of gringos who invite them to join their parties. They've all sat and eaten at my tables several times in the eight months I have known them, and they have all told me their 'usual stories' of absent fathers, long series of abusive stepfathers, their brothers shot dead by gangsters or the police, and the financial assistance they provide for their mothers. Until tonight, I would also probably have described them as my "friends".

I already felt a bit edgy when Janaina and I had taken a walk on the seafront to admire the sunset. I was still shattered about the US Embassy incident, and on the verge of physical collapse at the thought of the conversation I would soon have with my mother after over two months of telephone silence between us. But I'd been genuinely happy to see the group of kids come toward us, and especially little Jackson, the youngest and "cutest" of the bunch, who'd held up his hand up in the air when he saw me, summoning me to high-five him. Jackson is probably around ten years old, and, unlike his older brothers who had been proud to spit a flow of multilingual insults at me when we'd first met (*va fanculo, maricon, yo mahddas poosy, sokk my deek, fokoffi...*), and had insisted on greeting me with a ritual *fokkoffi* [fuck off] for the following three months, he had always treated me kindly, and played the "innocent childhood card" with me. So he'd offered his open hand, and I had grabbed it, instantly sending them all into fits of hysterical laughter. His hand had felt wet, warm and slick. I'd taken a look inside my palm: it was covered in green slime. It was mucus. The little fucker had spat in his hand and lured me into splattering his filth on my own skin. I'd blanked out for half a second, and the red veil of anger had washed over me again, and I was screaming "you little shit", and chasing the brat across the street. The little shit ran fast, and I thought I was gaining ground, and I was thinking 'ok, I won't hurt him too bad, but I'll squeeze my fingers real tight around his scrawny little neck and show him my teeth and tell him if you fucking disrespect me again, you little faggot, I'll fucking kill you, do you hear me?' But then of course, the kid had disappeared into an alley, and he was gone for good, and I was already calming down and feeling ashamed, and

overwhelmed with self-disgust. No god, of course, I could never hurt the poor kid, oh god, why do I keep losing it like that? By then, Janaina had caught up with me and wanted to know what had happened.

-“I’m sorry”, she said shaking her head and closing her fists, “I’m really sorry, and I know you’re not gonna like this, but I think that sometimes, these little shits really deserve to get a good thrashing by the cops...”

-“But how can you say something like that?”, I’d replied, distressed; now it was easier to shift my anger toward her, “how can you call yourself a fucking activist and a socialist and talk like that? These kids are already being punished from the day they are born, and you want the cops to be *more* violent with them?”

-“Oh give me a break”, she really seemed angry too, “these kids have no respect for anything or anybody...I mean, look at you, you’re *nice* to these kids, and look at how they treat you?”

-“look I...”

-“Like the *pivetes* who stole your cell phone...”

-“ok, we’ve been through the cell-phone episode a hundred times”, I snap, “even you admitted that there was no reason why these kids wouldn’t steal my cell phone; and besides, we’ve bought stolen cell-phones from the favela too; *you* have bought...”

“look, yeah, you’re right, I am nervous too...and of course you know that I don’t support police brutality, and that I think the whole idea of *armed* police being paid by the state to *hurt* people is completely mad....but you know what I mean...I’m just sick of people being all over us, and all over *you*, always asking for

money, *always* assuming that you have money; *equating you* with money; trying to sell you this, selling you that...and the way people look at you, and look about us...and people *always* trying to con you, or to get something out of you...and you're just *sooooo* naïve...and you fall for it every time..."

-“I fall for it every time? What the.., just because I am trying not to perpetuate an oppressive class system? Because I am trying to be human....to be *nice* to...?”

-“your problem is not that you're *nice*; it's a good thing that your try to treat people kindly but your problem is—and I keep telling you this—that you are way too naïve...I mean, come on, you've got to keep your guard up, and keep *boundaries*, otherwise, they'll eat you up, and you still don't seem to be able to get it...these kids see that in you; they *play* with that; they are *playing* with you, and you think you're all best buddies? Come on! Wake up!, what does it mean to be ‘nice’ to those kids, when they see you all blond and white, wearing those clothes, going inside those restaurants they can't get into, going home to your condominium complex....do you have any idea what these kids go home to? You've got everything they can never get, and you're everything they can never be, and they know that, and you expect them to be your little friends...”

-“but I *know* that!...I am *shattered* by that....and...fuck! I don't want them to be me, or to have what I have...what kind of a *solution* is that? That's why I feel angry at myself for being angry at Jackson, and that's why I don't want the cops to beat the shit out of him. I understand that he'll hold on to whatever power he can have over me in his own space...and...in fact, I don't even understand why these

things don't happen more often, and why they are not more violent, and why he doesn't stick a rusty knife in my flanks; and why he doesn't sneak inside our building...or why the fucking doorman who makes 300 reais a month doesn't let him in and strangles me from behind while he stabs me repeatedly..."

-“oh, cut the drama, will you?”, she'd interjected with a concluding tone, indicating that we would not discuss this further; “nobody's gonna stab you in your building, and the only thing that will prevent you from sleeping is your own neuroses; but you *will* end up getting stabbed if you keep getting mixed up with these *pivetes* and *bandidos*; if you can't learn *your place* and respect certain boundaries; it's no use trying to be tough now and playing the 'respect' game after you've given them so much space to walk all over you...anyways...the boundaries between you and these kids are real, they are *physical*; look at the gates around our building...so when you act like that, it's like you're pretending the boundaries aren't there, and it's like you're mocking them in a way...it's almost *patronizing*, you know?”

-“But when I act like *what* for fuck's sake? *What* do you want me to do? So I have to put on this high-and-mighty crap and show them that I am too *clean*; too *pure* to take their dirty hands; that I am too *pristine* to *touch* them; just because the Capitalist machine has made them poor, black, ugly and 'criminal', and has given me power, I am not allowed to *touch* them? How can I even fight the machine, if I don't at least *try* to reconnect with my humanity and..”

-“Listen to you...’too pristine to *touch* them’...you sound like those religious freaks who get turned on by rubbing their hands all over lepers in

putrefaction....what will you resolve by *touching* them? How will you dismantle your machine by touching them? You know what *touching* them will achieve? It will make *you* feel better about *yourself*; it'll make you feel, like...*holy* or something...but it won't do anything for them...look, we've been through this before: if you want to do something for these kids, you should work for a street NGO, or go into politics, but..”

-“*Politics??* But come *on!* You've been in politics, you know politicians; you *know* that the rusty political machine is even more impenetrable than the...

-“that's not true....people have *rights* now because of politics, *we* have rights. Some of us have taken to the streets and demanded our rights, and...”

-“but what *rights*? What does that mean? So you got the secondary student unions to burn a couple of busses and prevent public transports prices from going up?”

-“that was a *huge* victory!”

-“well the prices went up again now, didn't they”

“but it was still an important victory”

-“ok, yeah, it was important, and it's great that you felt so strongly about it; and it's great that you got race quotas and public school student quotas for universities, and it's great that the unions are strengthening and stuff...but what do *rights* mean to these kids? Yeah, sure, they have beautiful *rights* on papers; and so do their moms as domestic *workers*, but what the fuck does it mean to them in real life? I mean, what do labour rights mean to their domestic servant mom, if no one will sign their labour cards and *give* them their rights? I mean; what's the point of

giving people *rights* if it ends up putting them in more trouble? And even the stupid rights-on-paper that they don't even get are a fucking joke, when I think of it.....how can you pay your bills and feed yourself, let alone a whole extended family, let alone *educate* yourself with a minimum wage of *three hundred fucking reais per month*? That's not even a hundred and fifty dollars.. Our fucking electricity bill, *for two people* was almost half of that last month, and we don't even use air-conditioning...Look...why can't they raise the minimum wage? Why can't your beloved Lula raise the minimum wage? And don't tell me that the economy would crash, because that's pure bullshit...

-“yeah sure, and where do you propose to find the money”?

“well, supposing that there is only a ‘finite’ amount of money to be distributed within a closed economy—which is far from being the case—you can start by taking off money from your fucking politicians’ and public servants’ salaries, not to mention demanding *real* corporate social responsibilities from big companies so that a high percentage of their profits should be given to the state... and *especially* the tourist ones around here...But coming back to politicians and public servants—let’s just keep things local for a sec—and I am not even talking about their privileges on top of the six-digit salaries: the free five-star lunches, the free first-class plane tickets, the gasoline coupons, the parking permits, the free rent, the free medical insurance, the free private schools for the kids; I mean, did you ever think about how *absurd* and *violent* it is for politicians and public servants to get privileges whereby *public* money is spent so they can get *private* healthcare and education for their families; I mean, it’s like a violent fucking *joke*; it’s like, “we



represent the you, the 'public' and the state, but we know that public services are shit, and that you are shit, so we're going to spend your hard earned money on ourselves and *private* services to which *you suckers* have no access! And it *kills* me, to have to say something like that, because I sound like a fucking neo-con ranting against the well-fare state; and you *know* that I fully support the idea of a dynamic welfare state; but come *on!!!* not like this: what kind of State is this? I'll tell you what it is; the State is a corporatized oligarchic private space to which "the public", who work for the global private, doesn't have access. I mean look at them; look at the *public*; queuing for hours in concrete buildings to get *another* fucking stamp on another fucking document they'll have to get stamped elsewhere, and file somewhere else, and never hear from again, that is supposed to be their fucking retirement pension...a whole *life* of slaving...It kills me you know, all this queuing...why do people *have to stand in line all the time*? And why do they keep so quiet, and why do they keep smiling? And why do they keep partying? Why do they keep dancing along like fucking *puppets* and shaking their ass to these awful carnival parties, Saint-something-this-or-other party, and National This-or-That Day parties thrown by politicians, and sponsored by the State and the fat cats? Why do they smile and dance like that, and go home to fuck and make more kids who will stand in line....always bloody standing in line....it fucking *kills* me when I see that; all these old washed-out, burnt-out, dried-out men and women spending *hours* in-line for nothing, and going home with nothing, standing up for *hours* in crowded busses...and you know what kills me even more? Roberto-da-fucking-Matta, the supposedly great Brazilian social-anthropologist writing about "citizenship" and his

fucking De Tocqueville-crap about the great “enviable stability” of American democracy, and marveling at the “order” and “civility” of Europeans and Americans when they stand in line as compared to the barbarity of Brazilians....you know what comment I wrote in my book when I was reading the DaMatta text for my social justice class at UFBA<sup>73</sup>? I wrote ‘are you on fucking crack?’ You remember when I came back from my class all pissed off after presenting an article? That was the article; I told the class that DaMatta was just another one of those bourgeois white men who had never stood in line in his own country and seen ‘the beautiful order’ of those lines; the quiet look of capitulation on people’s faces...I mean, you’ve stood in lines before; you stand in line all the time; you know what it’s like; you know that the rich always get the dark-and-poor to stand in line for them...and you know what the prof told me? She said I was being condescending, she said I was being *patronizing*; she even used the word in English....the old bitch is always putting me on the spot and asking me ‘and what do you think Samuel? What do you, as a *foreigner*, think about this issue?’, always drooling to get me to confirm how *uncivilized* Brazil is...and the day I give her my honest opinion on ‘the great’ Roberto Da-fucking-Matta<sup>74</sup>, she tells me I am being *patronizing*, because I dare to suggest that Brazil’s poor are poor because of something more than their own moral shortcomings and lack of ‘civilization’ and ‘entrepreneurial’ Northern European Protestant immigration... and now *you*, of all people, you the *social activist* are accusing me of being *patronizing*....and you know what? I don’t mind, go ahead...I’d rather be *patronizing*, or even

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<sup>73</sup> Federal University of Bahia

<sup>74</sup> See DaMatta (1987)

*paternalistic* than to keep doing nothing...you know what an old family friend who had worked in Brasilia as a French diplomat once told me? At the time, he was working for the Inter-American bank, and he had just discovered the works of Chomsky...he was going through a personal revolution...anyway, he told me that when he lived in Brasilia, he paid his maid the equivalent of 1500 reais; and that was a long time ago, that was before the *real*. He said his colleagues accused him of ‘unjustly interfering in the laws of the market’, and being a ‘paternalist’; and he said ‘yes, I am a paternalist, and so what?’, and you know, I used to think I didn’t like that guy, at least not politically, but now I can almost admire him somehow....my point is that if we can’t make the system disappear overnight, we might as well do our very best to use whatever privileges have unjustly been bestowed upon us to redistribute wealth and opportunities... ....I mean come on....senators make 12000 reais per month plus benefits—it would take a minimum wage worker three and a half years to make that much...what the rotten piece of shit makes in *one single month*—and most of them have high-paying public service jobs, private medical practices, private companies...you name it...and think about all those who don’t even make minimum wage...and you know I am not against the idea of a public service, and I think it’s great that public servants have such benefits....but make them accessible to the real ‘public’, make them *really* public... so that’s why I don’t understand why Lula, the PT<sup>75</sup>, and your own PCdoB<sup>76</sup> don’t support the idea of a reform to *really* raise the minimum wage..”

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<sup>75</sup> *Partido Trabalhista*, “left wing” Workers Party in power at the time of writing.

<sup>76</sup> Brazilian Communist Party

“Are you done lecturing now? Will you listen to my answer, or will you just go off into another speech?....We don’t ‘support’, as you say, the ‘idea’ of raising the minimum wage too high and too soon, because we’re being *realistic*, Samuel; it’s not even a question of finding the funds; it’s about a simple reality that says that no boss will want to pay their workers so much; lots of workers will be fired to compensate for the actual salaries that will have to be paid for show, and in the mean time, people will still be poor and do anything for a few bread crumbs, and they will keep accepting to work for a pittance without getting their labour cards signed, because they desperately *need* the money; no matter how insignificant it may seem to you...”

-“Then we need a cultural revolution; we need to conscientize the bosses, we..”

-“but *what* are you talking about?...a *cultural* revolution? What are you going to do? Get starved illiterate *favelados* to march into bourgeois households with machine guns and send the rich to collective farms so they can wash pigs for a decade? Are you going to give weapons to the landless movement so they can steal, burn, pillage and rape at will; so they can do to the rich what was done to them? You’re talking about all these ‘cool’ topics like ‘cultural revolution’ and ‘land reform’, and ‘redistribution of wealth’ like all these intellectuals and big [PCdoB] party and union guys, but they are the one who drive the big cars and live in the air-conditioned condos; what are you *really* going to do to start your ‘land reform’ Samuel, are you going to give away your apartment in Barra for a start?

-“...look, I...you know I am not in favour of a violent revolution...even though....even though bourgeois privileges...and the privileges of *whiteness* for god’s sake, and the privileges of patriarchy...and the cozy little privileges of being sheltered in Northern hemisphere fortresses away from the misery that we created...all these privileges are *already violent*; I mean...those are *very direct and brutal acts of violence* that are perpetuated *everyday, all the time* against the downtrodden...against the *vast majority of humanity*....so why is it perfectly acceptable for such violence to exist...why is it *normal*?...while it would be, oh-so-unethical, and really ‘not very *nice*’ for the poor to commit acts of violence to defend themselves....and it’s *already* normalized like that...I mean...acts of rebellion from the poor, *violent* acts happen all the time, but we call them *crime*, we call them *terrorism*, and we call them *pathological*...I mean, remember last week’s issues of *Veja* and *Istoé* <sup>77</sup> that came out at the same time, and they were *both* psychologizing the shit out of the ‘violence’ and ‘crime’ thing. Do you remember how infuriated I was after reading it? I think I even had to pop a couple of Xanaxes to calm myself down...Remember how the *Istoé* issue was entirely dedicated to the *psychological consequences of ‘crime’*? Jesus, I feel like crying just thinking about it.....the *psychological consequences* of ‘crime’ (the whole time treated as some kind of *abstraction*; some kind of independent realm of evil that possesses the body of the poor); the consequences on the *rich*; on the poor innocent *fat* bourgeois who couldn’t go to board meetings anymore because they had developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder™? So in between Prozac® commercials and personal narratives of

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<sup>77</sup> Popular Time Magazine-style right wing weekly magazines

Panic Disorder™ developed from undergoing Flash Kidnapping™<sup>78</sup>, there was a whole historical retrospective on scientific knowledge of *the mind of the criminal*...fucking *biological*, genetic, individual, psychobiological explanations of ‘crime’ can you believe it? Not even one half-arsed attempt at looking at the social, economic and *colonial* roots of crime, or of real social suffering for that matter....not even one half-arsed attempt at looking at the psychological *effect* of five centuries of colonial violence on the dark-and-poor...no...just fucking psychological *causes* of the criminal *mind*, and the *effects* on the supposed ‘victims’ of ‘crime’. It makes me want to scream, you know...and they had all these old fucking typologies and phrenologies of the fucking *criminal* ‘type’....I mean, it would have been one thing to include those things as a kind of a sad joke, and to deconstruct the hell out of them...but no...they were just there, with the old drawings depicting *noses* of the criminal ‘type’...the usual fucking *semitic* and *negroid* noises of courses....I mean, there’s no way we can even begin to *feel* the horror, *the horror* of it all...those liposuctioned™ bourgeois cyborgs sitting in the air-conditioned waiting room at the orthodontist™’s, reading this *filth*; soaking up this filth like it’s some kind of biomedical™ absolute truth...feeling up their biopolitically-engineered™ thin and triangular ‘European’ noses and sighing with relief, and *legitimately* transferring their fear and disgust toward those that *they* oppress...all of it legitimized with supposedly fucking *biotypes*™....with bloody

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<sup>78</sup> New form of car-jacking emerging in postcolonial global cities like Johannesburg, São Paulo, Bogotá, etc. known as *sequestro relampago* in Brazil, which consists of invading a bourgeois’ car, demanding his or her credit cards and PINs, driving to the nearest ATM and withdrawing as much money as possible while the bourgeois awaits in the car guarded by a colleague or locked in the trunk. Bourgeois are occasionally killed after Flash Kidnappings, and their cars occasionally stolen, but in most cases, they are safely released with their vehicles. Most Brazilian banks have adopted a ‘security’ system which prevents clients from withdrawing sums over 100 reais after dark in order to prevent kidnappings.

*phenotypes* for crying out loud! you know that in Canada there's this crazy tenured biopsychologist™ at the University of Western Ontario, or this sociobiologist™, or whatever, named Philippe Fucking Rushton<sup>79</sup> who is still alive and preaching his filth, and who came up with criminal and racial typologies based on *penis sizes* with, you guessed it, inversely proportional correlations between violence and size? Can you believe it?...and guess who the bad guys are again....that's right, the bloody darkies, the *kaffirs*....just because the man has a small cock...and you know, I am just so *shattered* by how the big corporate machine has high-jacked *language*....just think about it: the word *bio* means 'life'...such a beautiful word...and look what they've done with it....*biopsychology* for god's sake, *sociobiology*...such a beautiful word, and they oppress people with it, they *hurt* people with it; they inflict *physical* pain with it; they *mutilate* bodies with it....I mean, look at the stuff they teach you in your social work classes; look at all the social work students who want to become clinical practioners: *clinical* for god's sake! All the emphasis on mental health, on individual *psychology*; on the bloody DSM IV™, for god's sake....Social work is such a beautiful profession: the best and most important kind of theory and practice: theorizing the system and working within the system to reform it: such a beautiful, beautiful thing...If I could do it all again, I would go back and study Social Work; none of this ethereal anthropology stuff; none of this mechanical corporatized phycologized education stuff....but that's the point isn't it? Social work; that is the alleviation of social suffering has become psychologized too....good bye community-organizing, goodbye macroprattice, good-bye revolution....so you're mocking me—and you are right to

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<sup>79</sup> See Philippe Fucking Rushton (2000)

mock me—because of my reluctance to resort to a *violent* revolution and to inflict direct *physical pain* on people, but all I see around me *is* direct physical pain...and you're right, I cannot bring myself to inflict physical pain on anybody, because I am too much of a coward, and because I know that inflicting pain will only cause more pain and fear and will only bring people further apart, and also because in the end, I'll never have the confidence, or the audacity to point to a clear line between victims and perpetrators, and to know for sure who *deserves* be feel pain...I can't do that and I don't want to do that...In the end, I don't think anyone deserves to feel physical pain, at least not that way...and because, well, maybe I am just infected with too much of this Foucaultian crap, but in the end, I can't believe in any clear line between victims and perpetrators, and I know that the bourgeois' plastically-engineered bodies are in pain too, and I know that my own body is in pain too...and...well...all I see is this *biopower* that hurts different people in different ways, and that perhaps, along a possibly *real* commensurable scale, hurts some people more than others...many more people...but in the end, all I see is pain and biopower...and....and....and...I know that this biopower stuff isn't this independent realm of evil, like 'crime' 'drugs', or 'terrorism' in those fucking magazines, and I know that all the way, this biopower thing that hurts us, and makes us walk over one another and trample upon one another, and rape one another but also desire one another, and maybe even love one another...I know that biopower is *human*; invented my humans, carried by humans, done to humans by humans: it is entirely human, all too human...all the way...But I just can't think of a way, or see a way to revert it, or to alter it, because it seems to me that *culture*, including *material*



culture; that is, what makes us ‘human’, or what we have fooled ourselves into thinking makes us human...this *culture* stuff *is* biopower: culture is biopower...and I just can’t see the possibility of a *universal* solution to make culture, or biopower sustainable for all....that’s what scares me the most...all I can see are small, *individual* solutions, like the way you and I can love and treat each other, and...and...that’s why I get so upset when you tell me I am being patronizing, and when I see that I cannot really have a *human* relationship with Jackson or these *pivetes*...and...

-“Look *meu amor*, I know you’ve been under a lot of stress lately, and you know I like to talk about these things with you—or listen to you talk about these things, or whatever—but I’ve had a long day and a pretty rough week too... I’m tired, and I’m hungry; it’s getting late and I don’t feel like standing here all night...I am going home now. You are more than welcome to come with me”

-“No you go ahead”, I’d said, struggling to channel my anger away from her  
 “I’m gonna stick around here for a bit”

-“well, I’ll leave some dinner for you just in case”, she’d replied with a weak and cute smile, and I knew I should have kissed her, but I hadn’t.

*Bodies Exploiting Bodies: The Struggle for Love and Integrity beyond Transnational Capitalism*

## II

-“Nobody is beyond suspicion”, I tell Kurt, “and certainly not you and I”

-“I never tried to fool myself even for one second and pretend that I didn’t move here partly for the women; you’re the one who seems to have a problem with that”

Kurt is a cultured man; in the ‘well-versed Eurobourgeois dominant cultural capital’-sense of the term. Over two decades ago, he double-majored in Philosophy and Sociology at a “generic Midwestern college” at the US army’s expense; “just to dedicate himself to learning full-time for a while”. According to Kurt, that’s when he started to doubt the Marxist-Leninist doctrine by which he’d sworn until then, and by which he’d sworn not to have been infected when he’d joined the army, “just to travel around for free for a while”. He’s worked at a series of odd corporate jobs since, and, now retired, spends six-months a year in Salvador, and the other six months in Alaska where he runs a telemarketing company he can also operate from here. He kept reading avidly since his college years, with the eclectic thirst for knowledge of the autodidact, and has kept up with postmodern developments in the social sciences and the subsequent critiques of large-scale socioeconomic projects, but remains cynical about it all. As far as Kurt’s concerned, “it all becomes kinda wishy-washy after existentialism”.

In spite of his efforts to produce a cool existentialist stance, however, it seems to me that Kurt is far from unconcerned about the possibility of his 'suspicious' status as a gringo sexpatriate in Salvador's global sexscape. Kurt may casually assert that he is "attracted to dark women", but like myself and so many others, he had been quick to 'legitimize' his relationship with a local "dark woman" with "redeeming" class markers. The stereotype from which many gringos desperately sought to disentangle themselves, as my own experience had taught me, was not that they were sexually or matrimonially involved with local women, but that they were using the symbolic and economic power bestowed upon them to exploit "poor" and "uneducated women"; or that, an even worse sin, they were themselves "poor" and "uneducated" in their own countries and had only come to Salvador to rape and plunder at will in their masculinist paradise<sup>80</sup>. Thus, it was common for gringo expatriates "of a certain social status" to routinely "absolve" themselves of such sins through the use of certain class and bourgeois cultural-capital references that would acquit their partners and themselves of the sins of mutual exploitation. I for example, had always ritualistically absolved my own relationship with Carl Phillip Emmanuel's mother by making sure that I would always "casually" mention that we had met at the "prestigious" State University of São Paulo (USP), and through "casual" references to her father, the pediatrician who had once almost been elected as a congressman. This need for self-absolution was indeed not restricted to Global Brazil or Global Salvador, but constituted an

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<sup>80</sup> See Brennan (2004); Jeremy (2003); Seabrooke (1996)

inevitable routine one<sup>81</sup> had to go through in all corners of the globalized world. A Montreal episode involving Carl Phillip Emanuel perfectly epitomizes this dilemma:

A slushy March morning, I had taken Carl Phillip Emanuel to the municipal health center for a mandatory vaccine. A middle-aged francophone nurse had heard us speak a language that she'd recognized as Brazilian Portuguese, and enquired about our origins. Upon learning that Carl Phillip Emanuel's mother was 'Brazilian', she'd thought it appropriate to regale us with an anecdote of her own about gringos and Brazilians. "well that's funny", she'd told us as she was plunging a needle in my son's flesh, "a good friend of ours has just gotten married to a Brazilian woman".

-“Oh yeah?”, I'd replied, bored, but also a little frightened, holding and kissing my little boy “what part of Brazil is she from?”

-“Oh”, the bitch had replied in her best effort to produce a casual tone, “well our friend, who is 56, recently got divorced, and he was quite depressed, so he went to Brazil, to Salvador da Bahia for a vacation...and he came back with a *bride!*”

-“oooh”, I'd whispered; now I was clearly panicked.

-“Yes!”, the bitch had proudly declaimed, she could only be provoking me, “and his wife is *22 years old*, and she does not know how to read or write in her own language....oh, but she's *a beautiful girl*, though...” but she'd said this in her casual voice.

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<sup>81</sup> For gringos married with *brasileiras* or other kinds of eroticized “Global South” women, such as, say Thai or Dominican women

'A 'beautiful' girl. What an absolute fucking cunt, I had thought. If Carl Phillip Emanuel hadn't been there, I would have insulted her.

-*"right"*, I'd replied, my rage concealed into exquisite calmness, "well Carl Phillip Emanuel's mother actually does know how to read, and incidentally, she happens to be a graduate of Brazil's most prestigious university and to be the daughter of a successful pediatrician"

At the time, my reaction had felt perfectly legitimate. I had been 'accused' of violating race, class and power boundaries that I never would have thought I was desperately preserving and defending with my anger and reply.

Less than two years later, I have now lost all my certainties about all of it. I can see the violence in the nurse's friend's relationship with the *Bahiana*; I can still feel the violence in the nurse's masqueraded contempt about their relationship, and I am appalled by the violence of my own reply to the nurse's masqueraded contempt. I can see violence everywhere, and I can't stop looking at the violence of what the ghosts and fetishes of race, class and place have done to us: why after all, why should it be "unethical" and "impossible" for humans socially-constructed in "different" class and racial groups and with different forms of cultural capitals to "love" one another and be with one another? Wasn't this impossibility another "trick" of the ghosts of Empire? Another hegemonic mechanism to maintain oppressive social and "ethnic" boundaries?

But no matter how much I tortured myself with this thought, I couldn't free myself from these ghosts, for I too, continued to justify my relationship with Janaina by pointing to her "student" status, her "political activism", and the social

status of her university. I too, upon meeting other gringos, absolved myself of all suspicion by sneering at other “sex-tourist” gringos and asserting my “position” as a “doctoral student” “investigating” “sex work”, “survival strategies”, and “the impact of globalization on street populations”. But now, I was trying to get back to Kurt, his contemptuous little sneer and the blue Marlboro smoke through his yellow teeth:

-“Are you sure you don’t have a problem with being associated with these fat Italian and German guys? Sure, you tell us that you don’t have a problem admitting that you attracted to brown women, and maybe *I* have a problem admitting that but didn’t you tell my brother and I that your girlfriend was ‘a civil servant who owned her own apartment and went to UFBA and the bloody *Sorbonne*?’; didn’t you tell us that you could never date a woman ‘who doesn’t know the difference between Sartre and Camus?’”

-“what’s wrong with that?”, he asks, not as annoyed as I would have wanted him to be, “what’s wrong with wanting to have something in common with your girlfriend, you know, something to talk about?”

-“Yeah sure, and god knows, I used to always defend the idea that couples had to be from the same class background, and I was *sooo* proud to be from the same class background as my wife, and so quick to point the finger at couple who had ‘nothing in common’, even *happy* couples...that used to puzzle me, actually; how people could have different “educations” and be happy together...but now, I really don’t want to defend anything like that anymore; I mean, it’s just one of those oppressive mechanisms to maintain class divisions, and...”

-“But I wasn’t talking about class per se; I was just talking about similar references...”

-“But of course you were talking about class! You were talking about cultural capital; I mean, come on, why should Sartre and Camus matter more than *Ogum* and *Obatala*”?

-“*Ogum* and *Obatala*?”

-“They’re *Orixás*; saint-deities from *Candomblé*, mixed with Catholicism; originally Yoruba<sup>82</sup>...”

-“Like *Santeria*?”

-“Or Haitian Voodoo, yeah”

-“Ok, I get your point, but we don’t need to enter in the whole debate over the Canon<sup>83</sup> let’s just say that I was talking about the need for having similar *taste* ”

-“Ok, let’s not go into the debate over the Canon, but let’s talk about taste, by all means”

-“yeah, yeah, yeah”, Kurt laughed, but with an unflinching air, like I can’t get to him no matter what I say, “I’ve read Bourdieu<sup>84</sup> too [he pronounces it *Boorrrrhdo* with an exaggerated Hollywood Nazi German ‘R’], but you damn *postmodernists* have to stop going on about power; not everything has to be about *power*, ya know? So what if I want to have something in common with my girlfriend? Does that make me a *boogeois* male chauvinist pig? Let me just tell you that I don’t give a damn if it does”

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<sup>82</sup> Bastide (2000), Verger (1957)

<sup>84</sup> Bourdieu (1984)

It's been a while since I've spoken English or heard American English outside of my computer screen, and I can't get used to his Midwestern drawl; it seems improbable to me that anyone would *really* speak like that; improbable and irritating.

-“Fair enough I guess”, is all I can think of as a reply, “but as far as I am concerned, I don't want to let the ideological apparatus of taste separate me from the rest of humanity and prevent me from having meaningful relationships with...”

-“to have meaningful *sex*, you mean”, Kurt suggests with his grin and shiny eyes.

Oh for fuck's sake, I feel like crying out loud, what is it with near-impotent post-mid-life-crisis-guys who always feel compelled to talk about *sex* and how much sex they get when they meet guys in their twenties? But I don't:

-“But what I am trying to tell you that it isn't *all* about bloody sex, and that it doesn't always *have to be only about sex*! If you want to know, Janaina is far from being a nymphomaniac, and she's a lot more shy and inexperienced than...”

-“Ok, ok, whatever, you're *in love*, and let's just assume that you can separate that from sex—but I don't think you can—and let's just talk about sex: please tell me where the woman you've had the best sex with were from?”

-“look, that's a stupid..”

-“come on; just tell me:”

-“Ok, look, I was married for six years and I was pretty young before but....ok let's see....Peruvian, Brazilian, Black American, and....I don't know.....Chinese-Reunionese maybe—but I guess she was really French...”



-“Ok! Point proven”, he declares with an unbearable look of victory on his face

-“No! No!”, I cry out, “that’s precisely the point! That’s *my* point: it was *better* of course because I *fetishized* these women, because of what colonialism has made of me and them: I *exoticized* them: I *eroticized* them: none of them were the acrobatic nymphomaniacs you’d expect, and...I guess most of them were a lot more shy than some white woman of my own class background who were really into acrobatic stuff that I didn’t really like...that just seemed *forced*, you know?”

-“Exactly!”, he ejaculates, “again, you prove my point: they were more *submissive*, weren’t they? That’s exactly it..

-“ok you win, maybe some of them were more ‘submissive’ as you say, and I can’t deny that I am constructed from these Western heteronormative patriarchal narratives<sup>85</sup>, and that it isn’t somehow rewarding, or satisfying, at some sort of...I don’t know...*bestial* level or something—even though that is probably part of the social construction—to live out some sort of unrestrained and *violent* form of masculinity...but I don’t want to reduce my relationship to Janaina to that, especially given the fact that it’s taken us a long time to get to that stage, and that we’re far far away from anything of the sort now that she is pregnant....and yeah....I *struggle* with that you know? I can’t stop asking myself, is this is necessarily about *power*, and is it necessarily asymmetrical, and is it necessarily *wrong*? I mean...what if this kind of rapport works for a couple? What if they are really *happy* that way? Does it have to be wrong?

-“Exactly, maybe it’s more *natural* that way, and that’s why we...”

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<sup>85</sup> See Jeremy

-“No, *please*; that’s exactly what I am trying to stay away from: all this shitty, *dangerous*, essentialist stuff about ‘nature’: this is the kind of discourse that’s always been used to justify the project of colonialism with the cultural apparatuses of racism and patriarchy”

-“Yeah, sure, but at the end of the day, you can’t deny that there *is* some form of human nature, and that *sex* is part of this nature, and that it is linked to other violent urges...you know...the libido”

-“I know, I know....” I lament, “for sure there has to be something *essential* that makes us human, and some form of *nature* and *instinct*, but it’s been reinvented and co-opted so many times and with such devastating consequences, that I would never in a million years find the audacity, or the courage, or the madness to point to this “nature” stuff...never...I just can’t go there...it’s too dangerous...and yet, at times...*really pessimistic times* you know”, I pause to gulp down the rest of my scotch, “I feel horribly attracted to the idea of a cultural revolution...you know...not a wishy-washy ‘let’s all become politically correct’ kind of revolution, but a horrible, horrible ultra-modernist Maoist revolution...you know...*wiping out culture altogether* so we can be left with *nature* and see what it’s like...but yeah, of course, the cynics would tell me that this is where we started: with nature, and that where we are is the result of human nature; and that fucking capitalism, competition, and survival of the fittest is the result of human nature...so of course I won’t go there...and it’s just a strangely comforting, but also immensely scary kind of wishful thinking...so yeah...I know that all I can do to find this nature stuff, this *essence* is to fantasize”.

I pause for a second to catch my breath, and to my amazement, Kurt is still listening with wide eyes. I continue:

-“You know, I spent close to five years working with autistic children of all kinds well...children labeled or constructed as ‘autistic’, well, anyway; sometimes, I would fantasize that autism, whatever its etiology, was some form of ‘immunity’ to *culture*...that’s right...an inability; a blessed incapacity to pick up on ‘social cues’; social conventions; anything social, really, even language. So most of these kids would go through incredible amounts of suffering, but sometimes, it would occur to me that *we were the ones* inflicting the suffering on them: sometimes I would find some of these kids’ *immunity* to culture really *beautiful*, you know? It’s like I’d found my noble savages; I’d found beautiful and pristine beings, with humanity’s boundless genius and potential, but somehow *untouched* by all this hegemonic filth, you know?...And my task was precisely to *teach them that filth*; you know, to fucking drill binary thinking into them by forcing their arms and eyes over flash-cards of ‘opposites’; fucking ‘Black and White’; ‘Male and Female’; ‘Big and Small’...and I felt awful, god, I felt so awful drilling that into them; day in; day out...you know, one day, some relative gave my little boy a cardboard book called ‘opposites’, and you know what I did? I just hid it...I took it away from his sight; I *sheltered* my little boy from it....But these kids, the autistic kids...they might have been my Noble Savages, but they could also be the behaviourists’ Blank Slates....poor kids....*tabulas rasas* of flesh and blood; at the psychologist’s mercy, and at humanity’s mercy....So I felt like a monster, like a *traitor*...inscribing all that stuff onto them...and sometimes I’d try to imitate their sounds, or play their

spinning games with them; or sing their songs; but then I'd talk to the parents; the distressed parents; the *broken* parents, and I'd see the little glimmer of hope in their eyes when they saw that their kid's *deeply human* potential, no matter how *savage* could be used to inscribe all our absurd human conventions into their flesh after all...and I looked all around me, and the *unbreakable consensus* around the project of culture...and...well...I did what I had to do, and I *taught them culture*, you know, I would teach them how to become physically, and carnally bounded by the metaphysical stuff we'd invented and I felt like a fucking Rudolf Hess dutifully planning the logistics of..."

-“okay”, Kurt interjects, “you’re losing me here...what’s your point? How is this related to...”

-“My *point*? I don’t know what my point is; I am sick of always having to have a point...but ok...my ‘point’ is that I see where you are going with your sex, submission and nature stuff, , that ‘tropical’ women are closer to ‘nature’ and more ‘untouched’ by the ‘restraining codes of civilization’ and through our union with them, our ‘natural’, *sexual* union with them, we can reconnect with Nature, and with our bodies, and with the pre-modern Carnavalesque human body<sup>86</sup>, where bodies are still connected to the earth, and bodies are still connected to bodies, and bodies can still *touch* bodies because a body belongs to the whole, and not to itself...and much less to *him* or *herself*, and all that crap...and my *point* about the autistic kids is that whatever this ‘nature’ is, our fantasies about it really *hurt* people when they are imposed on them through the biopolitical apparatuses of culture, or hegemony, or whatever...and that with these kids, I found myself facing the *danger*

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<sup>86</sup> Bahktin (1993); le Breton (2005)

*and violence* of hegemony, and the pain it inflicts on people; but also the danger of my own assumptions and strategies...and how I found that I couldn't follow my impulses to 'do the right thing' about them, because, given the current social project, I would have ended up hurting them more...so I just went along with the dominant project...and that also struck me as violent...as inevitably violent; so it's almost like, one can either go along with the dominant project and inflict pain on people, or fight against the project, and inflict pain on people...so it's like nature, whatever it is, is lost, and all there is left is pain...or lone egotistical pleasure that inevitably hurts others... ”

-“yes, but again, how is that related to your relationship with”

-“well that's it...I am really attracted to Janaina you know, and I desperately want to make her happy, and to *give myself to her*; I...I *love* her you know...whatever that *means*; and I don't want to know what that means....that's just what I *feel*....and I am so afraid...so afraid to be fantasizing all that 'nature' stuff..”

-“what do you mean?”

-“well, that I've 'discovered' something *essential*; something about humanity and about me, and about her in the way that I *love* her and desire her and touch her and am touched by her and the way our child grows in her womb...and that is so...so “natural”...and so beautiful...so *human*...and it *feels so good*...and sometimes, I feel that there so much hegemonic stuff, so much of that race and class bullshit working against us and against the possibility of...of *touching* this essence...of *really touching one another* and then, at times I just think that all of

it...all the love, desire and essence stuff is entirely constructed by this hegemony...and that what we are doing is...you know...an *act of violence against humanity*: like the dirty and bearded Portuguese convicts and sailors arriving in their “new world” finding their garden of Eden, finding these “beautiful Indian women unspoiled by the restrictions of civilization”, and *raping* the shit out of them: mutilating their bodies; *desecrating their bodies*...but no matter what, I can’t stop...it’s too late, I can’t stop now...it’s too late”

-“Wow man...that’s some serious European-style romantic *pathos* you’ve got there...” Kurt observes, with his unbearable grin, “you’ve just got to chill out about all of this...deconstruct it if you want, but stop torturing yourself over it...I mean, really...what’s the point? If you’re happy with your Janaina, and she’s happy with you, why should you worry about what the world will think of you? All I can say is go for it man, if you’re happy, if you’ve found your little corner of happiness, then stick to it...because in the end, that’s what it’s all about..”

-“I agree Kurt, I agree; I just want to make sure that my little corner of happiness doesn’t infringe upon somebody else’s happiness...you know...like the rapist’s happiness...and god knows, I’ve done enough of that...”

-“what, raping?”

-“no, of course not...I mean not directly”, I sigh. I get a vision of the many prostitutes whose bodies I have used; lying inert and naked in a long line of cadavers; their multicolour corpses rendered pale and green by early putrefaction.

Kurt doesn’t follow the lead.

-“Yeah sure, Isaiah Berlin and the whole ‘freedom to the wolf is death to the lamb’<sup>87</sup> thing...but the point here is that we are all lambs, or maybe we’re all wolves, but that in the end, we share a common nature and a common ground, and I am trying to tell you that if you overcome your post-post-modern ‘return-to-morality-but-with-paralyzing-relativism’-stance for a second, maybe desire and sex can be a way to get to this common ground without it necessarily being a ‘rape’ or being about ‘asymmetrical power’ and ‘patriarchy’, and all that...and yeah!...what I was trying to say is that if you’re critical of this ‘colonial’ project—then you’ve already overcome your paralyzing relativism by the way, because you are definitely saying that one culture is *bad*—then maybe it’s okay to idealize and maybe to *seek* people who are not as ‘colonial’ and ‘civilized’ as yourself, and *yes*, I know you are going to say that ‘exotic’ and ‘submissive’ women are constructed by patriarchy, and blah-blah-blah...and maybe they are, or maybe they aren’t...and maybe *it doesn’t fucking matter!*, and maybe if you find a woman who allows you to be a bit more macho than a woman in your country and that suits you, and the woman is looking for a man who’s a little less macho than the men in her country, and you’re both happy together, then why the heck couldn’t you be together? You’re French right? I’m sure you’ve read Houellebecq...”

He infuriates me. The language; the accent; the pragmatism; the *unproblematic* pragmatism...the...for him, I am ‘French’; unproblematically...but no, I won’t let him go there:

-“Oh god, I know where you’re going...”

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<sup>87</sup> Berlin (1969)

-“Great, you’ve read him, I knew it!” he replies triumphantly, “but let me go on: So you’ve read *Platform*<sup>88</sup>; well so have I, and you know what? I think that in the end, he’s got a pretty convincing argument there...you know basically, the feminist movement and all that had its positive sides, but really, western women have become selfish, frigid, and obsessed with power...and *yeeah*, sure, I can see how people would throw their arms up in the air and burn Mr. Houellebecq to the stake, but really, I think he is critiquing more than just ‘feminism’, but really the whole culture of Capitalism, and the disgusting individualism of Capitalism...and whether you like him or not, you can’t deny that a lot of non-Western people and women are not as disgustingly individualistic as we are, and that many non Western women still know how to *give* themselves....and yeah yeah yeah, I know what you’re gonna say, and we’ll be arguing all night, but I listened to what you said, you know, I listened really closely, and you talked about *giving*; you talked about how you wanted to *give yourself* to your girlfriend, didn’t you?”

-“Look I...I think I am just too tired now...but ok, let’s go: Yes I’ve read Houellebecq, and he’s one of those authors that...well, I can’t decide whether I love him or hate him: I hate his sociology, and his idolatry of Comte, and I am obviously infuriated by what he says about Islam...but basically, I think he writes extremely powerfully in the way he captures suffering...and yes...the way he captures the alienation and physical suffering of living in late-Capitalism...it’s like Bret Easton Ellis<sup>89</sup>, but a lot deeper; a lot more *carnal*; like a commercial Coetzee, but being commercial on purpose...as a *comment* or something...but for the most part, I can’t

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<sup>88</sup> Houellebecq (2001)

<sup>89</sup> Ellis (1994)



tell is he's just being a smart ass...you know, a *provocateur*, or if he really has such radical or even *stupid* views on everything....so the *Platform* thing; I don't know if he *really* is putting forward that argument or if he is just taking the piss at the horrible commodifying logic of capitalism—and I am saying this especially because of the way he goes into minutious logistical details of the transnational sex-tourism industry...and the ending of course—but yeah, of course, you've guessed that I can't defend that kind of argument, but that I can't ignore it or dismiss it, because I know that, I can't deny that it becomes real in people's subjectivities..."

-“Exactly”, Kurt exclaims, “and that’s where we can stop arguing, because if we stick to your side of the argument, then we are forced to admit that colonized women were also conditioned into sexually desiring white men—remember Fanon<sup>90</sup>,”

-“Uh-huh, you know your classics”

-“I know my existentialist classics. But anyway; let’s stop arguing here. The point is that if people desire each other, even if the specific circumstances around some aspects of this desire—which I will continue to argue is a *natural* thing—are mediated by the legacy of colonialism; and if these people really want to *give* themselves away to the other and to really *share* something, then for fuck’s sake, let them be...”

-“I...yeah...I am too fucked up to keep arguing, and...yeah, maybe we are saying the same thing...to a point. But in any case, I’ll continue with my tortured ‘post-post-modern-return-to-morality-but-with-near-paralyzing-caution-and-relativism-stance’”

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<sup>90</sup> Fanon, 1968

-“Whatever you say, buddy”.

After this, we mostly drink in silence, looking up at the small TV playing trashy MTV hip-hop video clips.

## THREE

### *Epilogue*

Barra, July 2006,

The white winter sun is burning my shoulders. I am sitting on the little strip of sand spared by the high-tide on the Old Port's beach. The rising tide has rapidly gleaned the scattered brown human bodies that polluted the sand and compressed them against the old stone walls. After dark, the sea will reach the stone walls, but it will not wash away the stench of piss impregnated in its soul.

The pack of brown human bodies is uncomfortably dense; bodies are touching bodies, thighs are touching thighs; and sweat is dripping into sweat. The small waves are washing empty beer cans, dead fish, and plastic cups back and forth on the sand; onto our feet.

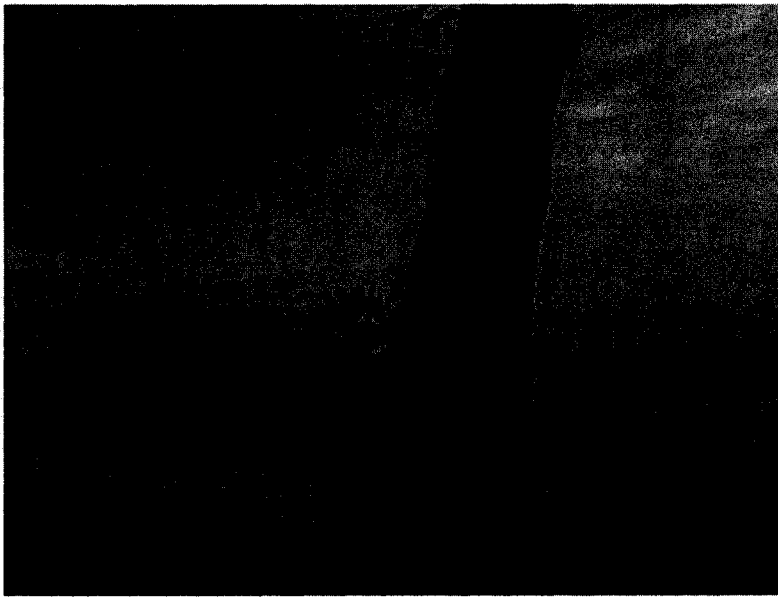
The sun will soon plunge behind the Island of Itaparica. People will whistle and cheer when the sun disappears; they will have another beer, will let the empty cans wash back and forth on the sand; and most of them will return to their homes of red brick and corrugated iron.

I have been talking to a woman for most of the afternoon; a woman who scares me and fascinates me. Her lean and ebony-black body is crisscrossed with bulging scars. A large slit runs through both her earlobes, now divided into two dangling appendices. Her eyes are...in her eyes, there is...She lives in the streets nearby. She expresses herself in perfect French; a French that makes her sound

older, wiser, and rougher than her non-normative Portuguese. She has told me her usual story; The favela rapes and flights; the years in the streets; being taken to France by an older engineer with her three year old daughter when she was seventeen; the French mother-in-law who never accepted her; the child she had with the engineer; the child who was taken away from her; the years in the streets of France; in the humid basements of France; in the highways of France and Spain; the small and dirty cocks of European truck drivers; her deportation after eight years on European soil; her peregrination through the truck-stops of Brazil to visit her daughter and mother in São Paulo; how she did not do *programas* anymore but lived from selling recycled beer cans like so many other inhabitants of the street....the strange feeling that I knew her well after two hours of conversation; how the light in her eyes had changed after a long silence and how she'd said softly, in Portuguese: "really, you're married? You don't do *programas*? you don't want to fuck my little pussy?", but had denied ever saying it, in French, when I'd expressed my puzzlement, and how I realized I could never know anyone well; how a Brazilian man with a bible had sat next to us and had spoken to me in German with a Portuguese accent; how he'd kept speaking German despite my insistence that I didn't understand; how she'd spoken a long and calm sentence, in German, that had made him go away; how her eyes had changed again after another long silence, and how she'd said in French, "*je viens de voir le Diable*", "I've just seen the Devil"; and how she'd told me, earlier, that she didn't believe in God; how we'd spoken about injustice, human suffering, and trying to look at reality from the outside:

and how she'd said: "you can't look at reality; you can't; if you do, *alors tu deviens fou*.....then you go insane".

## IMAGES FROM THE FIELD



Barra Lighthouse



Barra Seafront

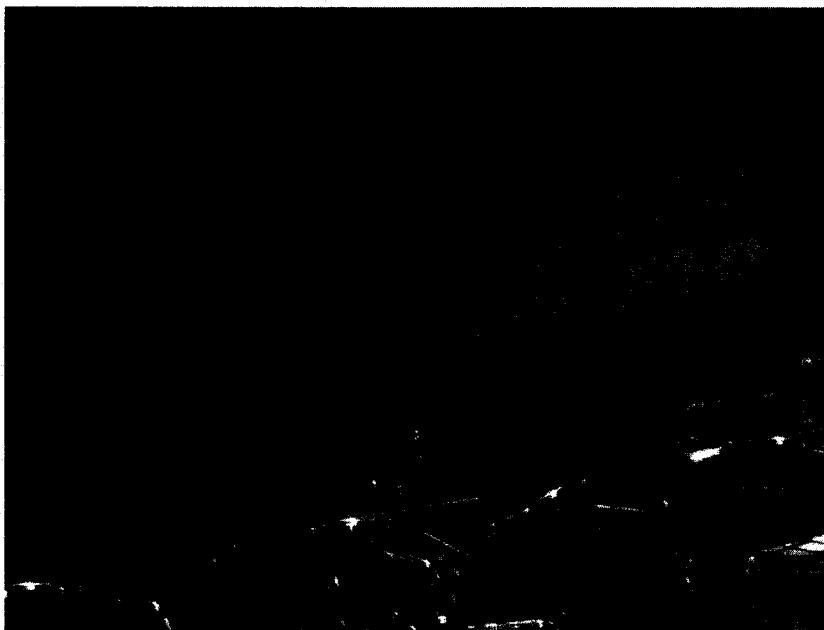


The anomie of the Barra sidewalks: Might as well be dead

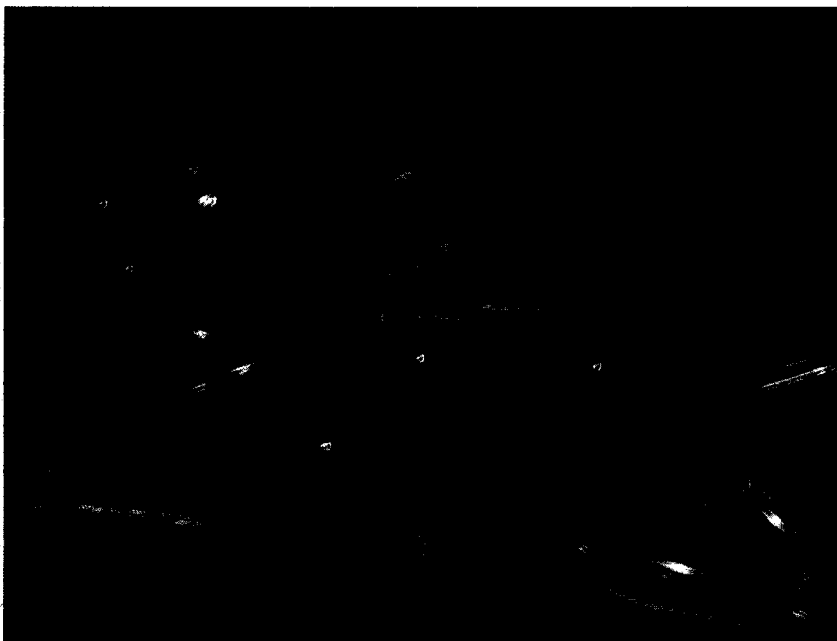


Public lives





Transnational Hunting Ground: Bar in Barra

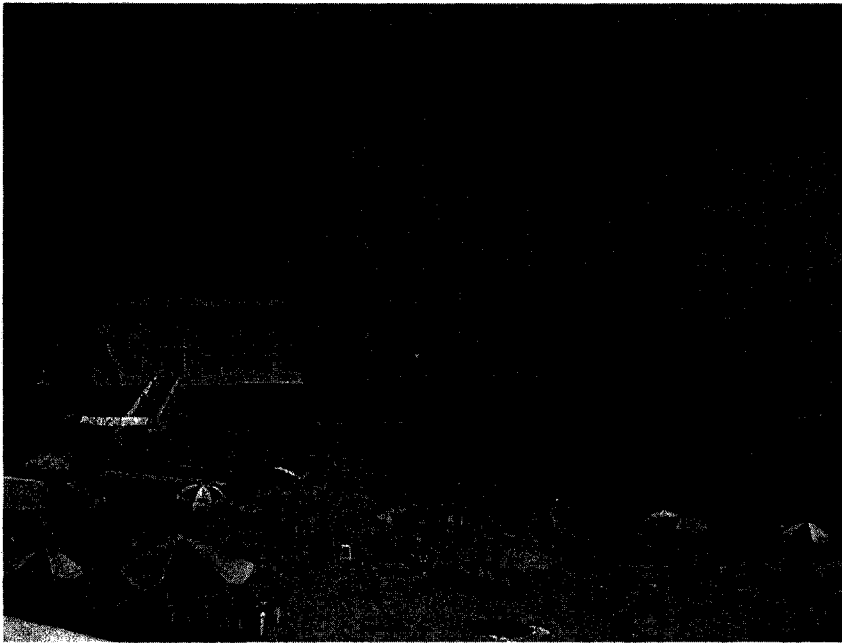




Hunting Ground 2



Hunting Ground: Sitting and Drinking on Barra's Old Port stone parapet



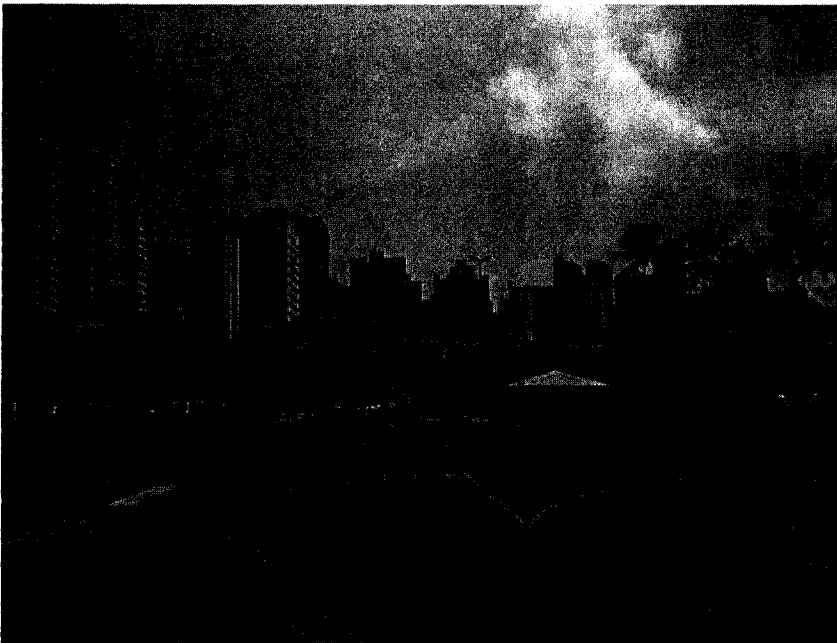
Barra Old Port Beach by day



Old Port by Night, and the ghost of the author



(favela) view from the Barra shopping mall

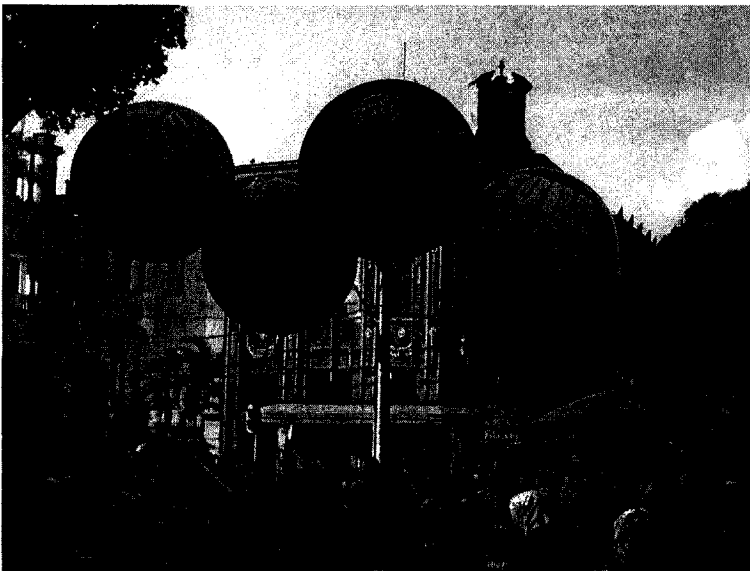


View from the mall 2



*Whitening Eurocentric Beauty Regime:*

*Advertisement celebrating Barra's shopping mall 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*



Taking to the streets: Black and Women's Movement

Protesting Bush's visit to Brazil on National Women's Day

## CHAPTER 4

*General Introduction to a Heterotopology of the Field:*

*Fractured Cartographies of Race, Class, Gender, and Childhood in the  
Postmodern Brazilian City*

### *Introduction*

This chapter, which can be read as a general theoretical and methodological introduction, or a contextual epilogue, examines the different spatial and cultural regimes of race, class and childhood experienced by Brazilian citizens from differing extremes of socio-economic realities. Drawing upon my own fieldwork, literature in cultural and postcolonial theory concerned with the nature, experience, and regulation of space, as well as key studies from the emerging field of Brazilian urban anthropology, I attempt to demonstrate how race, class and history mediate different perceptions and uses of the public sphere, and ultimately contribute to radically different lived-experiences of into embodied forms of race, gender, class, and age.

After an introduction in which I discuss alternative, heterotopic views of space and elaborate on the ways in which this study is informed by a “heterotopologic” paradigm of ethnography, I give an overview of current debates around issues of race, gender, and class in Brazil, and their relationship with the problem of social segregation and exclusion. The subsequent parts of this essay explore the mechanism and historical development of this segregated system and the different ways in which it is perceived and lived by different social actors. The final section describes different constructs and experiences of “childhood” in and across different dimensions of this segregated system and explores the possibility

of discerning local modes of resilience and resistance that can be better understood through ethnography and empowered through popular education.



*Toward a Heterotopologic Ethnographic Paradigm: Space and Time, Imagination, and Hegemony*

*a. Heterotopias*

In a 1967 lecture entitled *Of Other Spaces* published by the French journal *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* shortly after his death in 1984, Michel Foucault elaborated on his long fascination for space and spatial metaphors and listed six principles with which one could conceptualize spaces that he called “heterotopic”. Foucault coined the term heterotopia to contrast with utopias, which, he reminds us, literally symbolize “sites with no real place” that present, but also continually seek to construct and regulate, societies as “perfected forms” (Foucault, 1986 [1967], p24). If utopias are “fundamentally unreal spaces” (ibid), their monolithic spatial and cultural logic are nevertheless imposed on the organization and control of most societies and cultures and thereby silence the possibility, or at least the practicality of other modes of being in official space. With the idea of heterotopia, Foucault provides us with conceptual tools to problematize reductionist and unilateral ways to think of space and place, and to pay closer attention to the “counter-sites” inherent in all official utopias.

Here I focus on Foucault’s Third Principle of Heterotopias, in which he defines them as spaces that carry the possibility of “juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible.” (Foucault, 1986 [1967], p25).

At a risk of digressing from Foucault's coinage of the term to re-conceptualize specific sites and places (cemeteries, cinemas, boats, brothels, etc), I interpret the idea of heterotopia, and the mapping logic of heterotopology as an alternative way *to think of the experience of space as a whole*, (any kind or area of space) and a conceptual lens through which to analyze and bring to light the multiple imaginations, experiences, embodiments, and inscriptions of space and place that are inherent in all sites.

*b. Epistemological perspectives and hegemony*

To reiterate my view of heterotopias, I contend that they are intrinsic to all spaces and places, and that consequently, a heterotopology is the mapping practice, usually discursive or narrative, that seeks to expose the multiple imagined and lived dimensions of space. My recurring use of the word "imagination" is not incidental, and needs to be elaborated upon in order to further problematize dominant views of space, and delineate the focus of a heterotopologic paradigm of ethnographic inquiry.

My insistence upon "imagination", then, echoes poststructuralist epistemological claims that knowledge and meaning are essentially derived from subjective and perspectival interpretations (Schwandt, 2000), a stance from which we might infer that what we know as space is not a stable *a priori* category-in-itself, but originates in a particular interpretation and experience of one's surroundings, which are in turn shaped or used accordingly, thus forming a sense

of “place”. Space as an interpreted category, moreover, is further problematized by a complex and paradoxical relationship with time, and the fact that it is often interpreted and fossilized in an imaginarily fixed “present”. Foucault lamented the dominant propensity to think of space as “dead, fixed, undialectical, and immobile”, while “time was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic” (Cited in Harvey, 1990, p205). Michel de Certeau, who wrote prolifically and creatively on spatial and temporal practices, beautifully captured this dilemma while emphasizing the fundamentally temporary, fluid, and perspectival essence of space:

...space is like the word when it is being spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformation caused by successive contexts. (de Certeau, 1984, p117)

Thus, a heterotopologic paradigm of inquiry should begin by emphasizing the fluid and changing nature of space—an emphasis on becoming rather than being—but also its actualization as a necessarily *perspectival* construct. As I demonstrate below, however, some people’s perspectives, or imaginations, carry more political authority than others, so, as Foucault would have pointed out, some people’s utopias—or ideas about the way space should be conceptualized and organized—are imposed as reality while others are silenced and subjugated. A nation as an “imagined community”, then, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson (1991), or, as Homi Bhabha (1994a) would have it, as a narrated entity, is really the work of a particular kind of dominant imagination or narration. As a result, the

official inscription of dominant fantasies onto a State usually fossilizes space and time, and censors alternative modes of knowing and being.

The poststructuralist epistemological perspective I mentioned above, I should add, owes much to critical theory, and does not posit that interpretations and imaginations occur in a vacuum, but rather that they are deeply conditioned by history, structural constraints, and various discursively constituted dimensions of culture such as gender, race, and class (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). In addition, this take on perspectival knowledge and the subsequent ordering of the world recognizes the issues of power tied to knowledge, or the interpretations of dominant groups (Foucault, 1980), and the role of hegemony in manufacturing the acceptance of an engineered reality that serves the interests of dominant groups and their social projects (Gramsci, 1992). Here, hegemony in its Gramscian sense is taken to mean the diffusion and legitimization of a particular kind of perspectival and ultimately oppressive and exclusive knowledge and possibilities of identity construction through a capillary network of state and cultural apparatuses, such as legal systems (Althusser, 1984), schools (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), the media (Baudrillard, 1983) or “the culture industry” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1982), put in place and regulated by social groups who own the means of cultural and economic production and have a vested interest in reproducing existing social orders (Gramsci, 1992; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

In light of the fossilization of time and space by State projects mentioned earlier, I should also point out that hegemony should be conceptualized along the axis of both *becoming* and *being*. The Latin Americanist Florencia Mallon (1995)

illustrated this complex idea well when she suggested that we think of hegemony as both process and product:

First, hegemony is a set of nested, continuous processes through which power and meaning are contested, legitimated, and redefined at all levels of society. According to this definition, hegemony is hegemonic process: it can and does exist everywhere at all times. Second, hegemony is an actual end point, the result of hegemonic processes. (Mallon, 1995, p6)

Accordingly, the critical ethnographer informed by a heterotopologic perspective should seek to uncover dissident voices that are silenced in the context of a hegemonic *endpoint*, but also recognize that these voices are constantly being renegotiated and struggle for self-definition in the continuum of hegemonic *process*.

### *c. Reification*

To recapitulate, a heterotopology acknowledges that space is only knowable through a historically conditioned subjective experience of one's surroundings, and that such surroundings have been shaped and defined at the level of official knowledge production according to the social projects of dominant groups. This official reification and redefinition of space is ominously noticeable at an unprecedented global scale through the world maps and atlases that document the latest stage of the Eurocentric colonization of planetary reality (see Rabassa, 1994). The contention that maps have reified physical space and the lived experience of space is not merely metaphorical but a felt reality for many state

and colonial subjects who saw their local economies and practices of land tenure radically altered to fit the simplifying geometric logic of central planning, mapping, taxing, and control, when they were not simply displaced, uprooted or killed in the process. James Scott (1998), in his study of the “transforming visions” of State planners in early modern Europe and its colonies, showed how centralizing States “transformed the reality they presumed to observe” (1998, p24) through a series of invented measurements (such as the metric system) and division of space and resources (such as the cadastral map). While Scott argued that local realities and practices were never transformed “so thoroughly as to fit the grid” (which may perhaps, as we shall see, allow room for resistance and heterotopologic remapping), these realities nevertheless underwent a profound, and often violent, reconfiguration. As Scott demonstrated, planners’ efforts to devise a legible system for recording landholding and tenure for the purpose of taxation had to entail the imposition of a national system of landholding that would fit the geometric grid of cadastral maps. Existing practices which, even in comparatively small areas such as France, were extremely “varied and intricate”, had to be altered to become standardized, and hence legible to state administrators, surveyors and tax collectors. The results were indeed disastrous for many, as it required inevitable dispossessions, relocations, and the creation of new hierarchies and hegemonies. Here, Scott also warned against the romanticization of local customs and practices which, he reminds us, are often “riven with inequalities based on gender, status, and lineage” (p34). He maintained, however, that such customs, as a “living, negotiated tissue of practice

which are continually being adapted to new ecologies”, lose their particularity, adaptability and plasticity for adjustment and change when they are frozen in the fictitious geometric present of centralized space control.

*d. Heterotopology of (post)modernity*

Now more than ever with the insights of global (Burowoy, 2000), postcolonial (Aschroft et al, 1998), and postmodern (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) ethnography in this context of postmodernity (Jameson, 1991; Harvey, 1999) and postcoloniality, the task of heterotopologically mapping postcolonial space and time with an emphasis on asymmetrical lived experience strikes me as particularly urgent. Surely, the different regimes and changes in perceptions of time and space in the global transitions from pre-industrialism to authoritarian modernism, and the more recent late-capitalist “aggressive restaging of the new world order” (Scheper-Hughes & Sargant, 1998) have long been a subject of study and debate for anthropologists and cultural theorists (See for example, de Certeau, 1984; Giddens, 1990; Jameson, 1991; Harvey, 1990; Appadurai, 1996). Indeed, there is a growing consensus in the so-called postmodernist edge of cultural inquiry that the planet has been spatially and temporally reified by the utopias of Eurocentric colonialism and neo-colonialism, and that transitions from pre- to postmodernity, and to be sure, modernity itself, have been, and continue to be “unevenly experienced” (Appadurai, 1996). In his essay on *Other Spaces* (1986 [1967]), Foucault also hinted at uneven and multiple experiences of time by coining the term “heterochronies”. In spite of much scholarly effort, however,

people at an increasingly global scale have come to think of time, and more worryingly, “progress”, as a linear and universally experienced process of evolution or “development” (stemming from the Judao-Christian teleological conception of time (Wright, 2004)), which, paradoxically, relegates most of earth’s peoples to the “past” of pre-modern, and now pre-postmodern times. Only recently have interdisciplinary scholars like Arturo Escobar successfully debunked the fallacious universal teleology of “development” that still justifies the aggressive time and space reification and colonization of the so-called “third world” (Escobar, 1995).

What is needed in this alarming context, thus, is grounded heterotopologic and heterochronic ethnographies that critically investigate the lived-experience of individuals who have been historically relegated to different discursive—but painfully materialized in the felt here and now—areas of time and space. Like Bakhtin’s Dialogic Imagination (and the related heteroglossia) that can help bring about a polyphony of previously silenced voices, the Heterotopologic Imagination should enable ethnographers to expose different embodied layers of space, place, and time in any given site and moment, and ultimately contribute to the democratic transformation or “real” heterotopologization of public space.

Lastly, the practice of heterotopology should be committed not only to an investigation (and transformation) of alternative ways of living in “official” space (such as the case of street children), but also to an exploration and historical situation of the new non-official “residual”, or “other” spaces (such as



shantytowns, inner-city and peripheral “ghettoes” and refugee camps) that emerged from the project of modernity.

*e. Brazilian heterotopias*

After outlining the scope and aims of heterotopologic inquiry, I shall present a brief example of the ways in which a heterotopologic paradigm informs this study. One might, for example, start investigating heterotopic experiences of street children and their middleclass counterparts from a given site within a city, such as, say, a shopping mall. Here, the cultural and material conditions of race and class alone might prove to be determining factors in shaping how they perceive and experience that space. For the middleclass children, whose realities echo that of other children throughout the globe living in conditions we might call “postindustrial” (Tourraine, 1971; Hardt & Negri, 2000), a shopping mall is, as the architect Rem Koolhaas sadly noted, one of the last vestiges of public space and public activity (Koolhaas et al, 2000). “Street” children, however, for whom the term “postindustrial”, is only problematically applicable, and who in fact cannot be classified along the dominant chronology from pre- to post-industrial—save perhaps as “residual categories” (Scheper-Hughes & Sargant, 1998) or simply victims, of modernism, are barred access from those privately owned and controlled “public” shopping spaces, but enjoy a more fluid—albeit hazardous—experience of streets, parks, and other open and formerly “public” areas of the city. Middleclass children, conversely, are prohibited from using and taught to fear the city’s open spaces, which, over the past few decades, have been

increasingly “criminalized” through a combination of cuts in public spending, intra-urban migration, and “stories” of violence (Caldeira, 2001). Thus, starting from such a site as a shopping mall within a Brazilian city, we can start charting a violently asymmetrical heterotopology that hints at radically different spatial and cultural experience of childhood and public space, and even incompatible experiences of time and “progress”. Equipped with such a conceptual lens, one might look closer inside shopping malls, and their array of shops, banks, and restaurants, and identify hundreds of toiling individuals who have internalized unspoken but highly enforced rules of race-and-class-based spatial segregation, and may in fact only experience the asepticized air-conditioned spaces of shopping malls, and middle-class apartment buildings as a janitors, security guards, or domestic workers. One might ask oneself why and how so many people come to accept that they can only experience these “private” spaces (that are other people’s public spaces) in such a way. How do they, in fact, interpret and experience these spaces? How do they interpret the racialized nature of these spaces? How can they come to interpret them in novel ways? How do children who grow up in different realities within and beyond those spaces come to accept their place and that of others as natural? How can young actors and shapers in and of these spaces learn to re-imagine them more equitably? These are questions that a heterotopologic ethnography can hope to elucidate.

*f. The hermeneutics of resistance: Interstitial spaces and ethnographic flâneurism*

In spite of the desolating global image I described in this section, heterotopologic ethnography can perhaps provide a gleam of hope, because it seeks to recognize that in spite of the macro and micro-hegemonies that have inscribed fixed characteristics and usages onto every inch of planetary space, there still exist *multiple* imaginations, experiences, and definitions of space that can be given voice through ethnography. Following, but also digressing from the insights of (the mostly pessimistic) critical theorists, heterotopology is to be situated within a branch of political anthropology (such as that of James Scott, 1990; Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, 1985; Arturo Escobar, 1995; and Alain de Touraine, 1995) that analyzes the relationship between structure and agency with a belief that resistance to dominant modes of being and knowing is possible and does indeed exist. A heterotopologic paradigm of ethnographic inquiry, therefore, should look for interstitial cracks, and spaces of indeterminacy beyond the apparent fixed logic of dominant socio-spatial projects (see Lim, 2003) and search for resistance and alternative modes of being, knowing, and living in space and time. In such a paradigm, thus, the ethnographer should Old Port the belief that, as James Scott (1990) suggested, there indeed exists a “hidden transcript” through which subordinate groups express an understanding and critique of the dominant forces and individuals that oppress them. Scott famously argued that while there are often no “headline-grabbing” protests waged by the subaltern against their oppressors, one can nevertheless speak of an “infrapolitics” of

resistance; a “circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups, [which], like infra-red rays, lies beyond the visible end of the spectrum” (Scott, 1990, Chapter 7). This infrapolitical realm, proposed Scott, can manifest itself through “rumours, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes and theatre of the powerless, as vehicles, by which, among other things, they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understanding of their conduct” (Scott, 1990).

During her decade of fieldwork in a Rio shantytown, the feminist Anthropologist Donna Goldstein became sufficiently acquainted with many women of the *favela* to notice their often subversive use of jokes and laughter through which they expressed a clear understanding of the perversity of the system which confined them to the subaltern ranks of the social pyramid. Echoing Scott’s insistence that laughter was indeed one of the “weapons of the weak”, Goldstein approached the complex hermeneutics of Brazilian domination and resistance from “below”, and identified laughter and (often dark) humour as “a window that is key to understanding how people experience their lives [and] shows how the downtrodden perceive the hierarchies in which they are embedded” (Goldstein, 2003, p37)

With its emphasis on multiple juxtaposed layers of imagined and experienced space, therefore, a heterotopologic ethnography should aim to penetrate precisely such an infrapolitical and interstitial realm of resistance. Equipped with a heterotopological lens, thus, the ethnographer must, in Peter McLaren’s words, live “the dual role of the *flâneur/flâneuse* and critical theorist” (McLaren, 1997,

p77). Building upon Baudelaire's and Walter Benjamin's image of the *flâneur* as the quintessential seeker of multilayered knowledge and experience, and shifting dweller of in-between spaces in the modern city, McLaren describes the postmodern flâneur/flâneuse as the "primordial" urban ethnographer, ideally located within "postmodern, postorganized late-capitalist culture [and embodying the attempt] in urban settings to live within the blurred and vertiginous strategies of representation and the shifting discourse of capitalism's marketing strategies and discourses and merge with them" (ibid). Beyond the vertiginous pleasure of engaging with McLaren's fashionably PoMo™ jargon, I find his metaphors particularly helpful, because they capture the spatial and conceptual intricacy of the asymmetrical experiences of the public sphere with which I am confronted in this study, but also the complex and ambivalent politics of my own positioning in this context. Indeed, I like this reminder that spatially, politically, and epistemologically, the ethnographer is always somewhere "in between" the many geographies, communities, memories, and desires of the "research" context. Finally, McLaren's account of the pervasive marketization and commercialization of contemporary identity politics offers a precious conceptual clue and point of reference to investigate the subtle (and not so subtle) ways in which essentializing commercialized discourses of hybridity have emerged as new forms of oppression and hegemony, and how they have obfuscated the racialization of poverty.

As will be made evident in further chapters, thus, I approached the complex hermeneutics and heterotopology of race, class, childhood and place in Brazil

with one of my many eyes permanently set on the rampant commercialization of late-capitalist culture.

*Brazils: Asymmetrical readings of race, class and gender*

In the previous section, I gave an example of an “asymmetrical” heterotopology of childhood, shopping malls, and open city space in Brazil. I did not, however, explain why and how different kinds of “children” have come to experience life, time and space in such drastically different ways. Before returning in greater details to different experiences of space, time and childhood in Brazilian cities, I dedicate the subsequent parts of this essay to a historical synopsis of the conditions that produced such different experiences of the public sphere.

The story of public/private shopping malls hinted at the existence of an informal but severely enforced system of segregation which regulates the public and private spheres, and which in turn is partly the product and partly a determining factor of different and inequitable experiences of space, and even time. In this section, I give an overview of current debates around issues of race and class in Brazil, and discuss how multiply situated perspectives on race and class act as determinants in regulating space and place. I first present a brief historical outline of Brazil’s socioethnic organization.

*a. Socioethnic organization*

In *The Americas and Civilizations* (2004 [1969]) Darcy Ribeiro, the Brazilian anthropologist and statesman, drew a “national ethnic typology” of the people of Brazil, which he classified into three great historicocultural categories:

He called these categories Witness Peoples, New Peoples, and Transplanted Peoples (2004, p71):

Witness Peoples, he explained, are contemporary remnants of the aboriginal populations colonized by the Europeans. New Peoples were formed by the “fusion and acculturation of indigenous, black and European populations” (p72) as a result of the colonization process. Finally, Transplanted Peoples are the implanted (usually European) populations that have preserved some of their cultural traditions, which in Brazil, is not limited to the once-dominant colonizing Portuguese but includes among other sizeable groups, settler communities of Italians, Germans, Poles, Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, Japanese, and “Turks” (Syrian and Lebanese Christians who fled the Ottoman Empire and entered the country as Turkish nationals) among others (Bueno, 2002). Despite much publicized claims to hybridity and racial harmony, however, the notion that Brazil is a racial democracy is a misleading one (Hanchard, 1999; Gonçalves e Silva, 2004; Goldstein, 2003). Indeed, the small elite groups of individuals who enjoy the *de facto* privileges of full citizenship and impose their cultural codes as the norm for ‘civilization’ are predominantly descendants of Europeans, or consist of New Peoples of mixed Euro-African ancestry who consider themselves transplanted and are socially accepted as Whites because of their socio-economic status (Freyre, 1959; de Azevedo, 1978; Veissière, 2005a). As is the case in other settler societies whose nation-building relied heavily upon the expropriation, exploitation and extermination of native populations, and the forced labour of enslaved Africans, descendants of colonizers and “voluntary” immigrants (Ogbu;



1992; Ogbu & Simons, 1998) (such as the Italians, Japanese, etc.) generally reached the middle to upper classes, while Amerindians, descendants of slaves, and other “involuntary” immigrants forced into servitude, total exclusion, and intergenerational trauma, still occupy the subaltern ranks of Brazilian society (See Ogbu; 1992; Ogbu & Simons, 1998, for a discussion of the “performance” of “voluntary” and “involuntary” minorities in polyethnic societies)

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to present a comprehensive review of perceived racial categories and boundaries in Brazil, it is pertinent to our inquiry to point out the Eurocentric aspects of Brazil’s “socially White” elite-culture. Here, “Eurocentrism” is taken to mean “the conscious or unconscious process by which Europe and dominant European cultural assumptions are constructed or assumed to be the normal, the natural and the universal” (Ashcroft et al, 1998).

*b. Misplaced Ideas: Eurocentrism and elite cultural capital*

In his *Essays on Brazilian Culture* (1992) Roberto Schwarz, the Brazilian cultural and literary critic investigated the problem of subjective transplantedness and elite identifications with certain ideas of Europe; a cultural dilemma which he labeled “misplaced ideas” (1992, p9) To Schwarz, examples of such misplacements “range from the inoffensive to the horrifying”, and he cites the pastiche vision of Santa Claus sporting an “Eskimo” [sic] outfit in 40-degree heat. This predicament, he argued, dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, after which educated Brazilians have had a sense of living among ideas and institutions copied from abroad that do not reflect their social reality (Schwarz, 1992, p9).

Schwarz went on to critique facile denunciations of this misplacement problem and nationalist proponents of an “authentic” Brazilian culture based on the problematic essentialist desire for “an organic, reasonably homogenous national culture with popular roots” (p10) (See for example Romero, 1979). However, he also famously opposed the cultural rationalizations formulated by intellectual elites in the 1970s and 1980s, who drew upon the insights of French poststructural theorists such as Foucault and Derrida to validate their so-called “peripheral” identities and ideas as “their own center” without critically examining the multiple centers and peripheries inherent in these old “margins”. Simply debunking the idea of “copy” without examining the class structure of Brazil, maintained Schwartz, only led to presenting as a national characteristic “what [was] actually a malaise of the dominant class” (p15). Schwarz concluded that the “cultural transplantation” argument was misleading on several accounts because: (1) it perpetuated the false notion that imitation was avoidable; and (2) it obfuscated Brazil’s internal cultural and social contradictions and the grounding of such “misplaced ideas” in an exploitative economic substructure that has reproduced the exclusion of the poor from the realm of official cultural and economic production since the colonial era.

*c. Racial hegemony, commodified mulatas, and Black Cinderellas*

Schwarz’s argument is an important one and should serve as a reminder that so-called “high” “European” cultural capital has historically been an important

factor of social exclusion, and of the reproduction of a neo-colonial order in which blacks, Amerindians, and mulattos are almost systematically relegated to subaltern functions (Gonçalves e Silva, 2004; Dávila, 2003; Veissière, 2005a; 2005b). While Schwarz makes an important point about the co-optation of falsely universal notions that serve to obfuscate existing patterns of oppression, one could argue that he misses a more subtle but highly influential point about the racialized aspect of Brazil's class system and the claims to a "racial democracy" that have been part of dominant discourse in and out Brazil at least since the populist rhetoric of modernist dictatorships like those of Getúlio Vargas and Juscelino Kubitschek in the 1950s and 1960s. The misleading notion of a "racial democracy" has been prominent in the Brazilian public sphere, and in most Brazilianist scholarship, which, since the publication of Gilberto Freyre's monumental *Masters and the Slaves* in 1956 [Casa Grande e Senzala, 1953], has often portended the notion that "Brazil is different" (Goldstein, 2003), meaning that Brazilian citizens of different "racial" backgrounds enjoy degrees of prejudice-free relations and possibilities of agency unprecedented in other multiethnic societies like the United States or South Africa.

Gilberto Freyre, who had been a pupil of Franz Boas at Columbia University, was the first Brazilian social historian and anthropologist to attempt a hybrid depiction of the national Brazilian psyche that incorporated many African elements. While this could have led to an actual democratization of the then racially-stratified public sphere, the book was alas written in a highly essentialist, paternalistic, and phallocratic manner. In *The Masters and the Slaves*, his

blatantly nostalgic ethnohistory of the antebellum slave plantation days, Freyre painted a highly paternalistic and depoliticized picture of quasi-harmonious miscegenation between “white” Portuguese Masters, and lascivious Black and Mulata slave-girls—practically presented as a luscious love story—which supposedly led to the present day “socially plastic” and hybrid racial democracy. While there have been several critiques of Freyre’s work in academic circles (see for example Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Goldstein, 2003; Veissière, 2005b), its devastating influence on the public sphere and on Brazil’s international image has yet to be thoroughly examined.

First, Freyre’s exoticization and eroticization of the Black and Mulata woman strongly contributed to an epidemic of “tropicalist” literature, TV programs and lavish travel brochures depicting the overly kinesthetic and libidinous feather-clad carnival mulata that has, in many circles, become the emblematic image of Brazil. This sexualized mulata imagery, as Donna Goldstein noted, has remained unexamined at international and intranational level, and contributed not only to the commodification of female bodies in the public sphere, but also to the “self-commodification” of mulata women who, through a saturation of representations of their eroticized bodies, come to buy into the notion that they can only be valorized as sexualized beings, and that commodifying their bodies is their only hope of social mobility. Goldstein also aptly demonstrated that the eroticization of the mulata body does not preclude the predominantly Eurocentric character of aesthetic hierarchies in dominant discourse, and she pointed out that Black female bodies are only made beautiful

by possessing certain “white” characteristics, such as lighter skin, straight hair and “thin” noses. Thus, in this pastiche carnivalized celebration of *mestiçagem*, “blacks” (that is, those with mostly “African” features) still occupy the lowest ranks, and mulatas are only valued for their eroticized and commodified bodies. Consequently, in the popular Brazilian imagination, one still encounters the adage which claims that Brazilian men typically hope to marry a white woman, have a mulata mistress, and a black maid (Goldstein, 1999). Thus, in problematizing the gendering and sexualizing of official discourses of *mestiçagem*, we should not only pay attention to the violently essentialist commodification of black and mulata female bodies, and the demeaning forms of agency that it promotes, but also, as Diane Nelson pointed out, to the fact that the unifying discourse of *mestizaje* articulated by white elites “obsessively covers up the rapes” that initiated miscegenation and the “violent policing of white women’s sexuality” by feudalistically promiscuous white males (Nelson, 1999, Chapter 6). Nelson’s powerful critique of the official celebration of *mestizaje* in Guatemala echoes Goldstein’s outrage at the Freyrian myth of harmonious miscegenation between the white settlers, African, and Indigenous women, and she reminds us that “racial mixing” was a mostly violent extramarital affair between slave or peasant girls and white males who expressed their machismo and tried out their manhood on the disposable bodies over which they ruled<sup>91</sup> (ibid).

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<sup>91</sup> In unashamedly depoliticized sadoerotic nostalgia, Freyre recalls in his *Masters and the Slave* the souvenir of the “the female slave or “mammy” who rocked us to sleep, [w]ho suckled us, [...] the influence [...] of the mulatto girl who [...] initiated us into physical love and, to the creaking of a canvas cot gave us a complete sensation of being a man” (1956, p278, emphasis original). Later, after pondering the Oedipal causes of the Portuguese planters’ love affair with the “exotic” woman, he settles for a cultural-ecological explanation and observes that young white men grew

The second major problematic to emerge from Freyre's celebration of a Brazilian racial democracy is the deceptive notion that everyone, regardless of race, is not only seen as "equal", but is supposedly "valued" for contributing his or her "rich" ethnohistorical background to the "nation". This is of course a grossly ahistorical and apolitical denial of past and existing racialized patterns of cultural and economic oppression and exclusion. As Goldstein (2003) pointed out, the relationship between race and social exclusion, and indeed the idea of race itself, is censored in Brazilian public discourse, in much the same way that talk of class is a taboo in the United States. Goldstein explained that "foundational myths having to do with meritocratic routes to success" (2003, p103) and a strong cultural bias against Marxist phraseology in the United States have effectively censored the concept of class-based power from mainstream American discourse, in which race, however, figures prominently. In Brazil, conversely, powerful narratives of *mestiçagem* added to the absence of any race-based civil-rights movement or affirmative action program, and a historically less readily identifiable prevalence of social rather than legal racism contributed to the absence of a mainstream language to discuss race-based inequalities, and to the received notion that race is "not an issue" (Goldstein, 2003). Yet, a look at the actual racial stratification of poverty, and the popular skin-tone colour codification in which darker pigmentations almost invariably indicate a lower socio-economic status strongly suggest otherwise. Indeed this brutal contrast with the fluffy rhetoric of inclusivity that dominates talk in and of Brazil often strikes

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up on plantations where "the young one is constantly surrounded by the Negro or Mulatto girl who is easily to be had" (ibid, p279).

visitors and observers as violently absurd, and leaves one to wonder, as Goldstein confusedly inquired, how Brazil was at all able to avoid the emergence of a large-scale, class-and-race-based revolutionary movement (ibid).

The best answer to that question was perhaps proposed by Michael Hanchard (1994; 1999) when he put forward that the myth of racial democracy and its maintenance by white elites produced what he called a “Brazilian racial hegemony” (Goldstein, 1999; 2003; Hanchard, 1994). Through his critique of a legal racial discrimination suit filed in 1993 that came to be popularly know as the “Black Cinderella case” after being reported by the news magazine *Veja*, Hanchard exposed what he thought was a “nail in the coffin” of the racial democracy myth (Goldstein, 1999; 2003; Hanchard, 1994). In 1993, Ana Flávia Peçanha de Azeredo, a young black woman, was violently beaten in the lobby of a middleclass apartment building because she had delayed an elevator. Her white assailants (a forty-year-old woman and her eighteen-year-old son), assuming an inevitable correlation between blackness and poverty, had “mistaken” her for somebody who could not possibly belong in that building—other than as a domestic worker who would have used the “service” elevator—and could therefore be discarded accordingly. It emerged, however, that Ms de Azeredo was in fact the daughter of the governor of the State of Espírito Santo and was visiting a friend in the building. Goldstein suggested that the media labeled her “Cinderella”, because her attackers probably felt that they were “rightfully throwing her out of the ball” (2003, p107). The crucial point of this case, she argued, is that the attackers’ perceptions of the girl’s race “made them unable to

see that she belonged at the ball”, which “highlights the systemic relation between race and class in Brazil” (ibid). Here was a case, then, where an individual who was wrongfully suspected of violating unofficial but highly enforced rules of *racialized spatial segregation* was physically punished. While we might posit that such grim cases occur frequently and go unreported, the difference with this incidence is that, against all odds, the victim actually had the power to expose her mistreatment and spark a public debate. In his 1994 article in *Public Culture*, Hanchard (1994) used the Black Cinderella case to debunk the Brazilianist myth of exceptionality (Brazil is different), and argue that there still existed clear-cut and class-based black and white categories in Brazil. In a series of response to Hanchard, the British-Brazilian anthropologist Peter Fry (1995; 1996), a self-confessed “neo-Freyrian” (Fry, 2000), accused Hanchard of projecting a myth of racial bipolarization onto a fluid and in fact “highly-situational” racial-perception scene which couldn’t be interpreted from a North American point of view. This bipolarization, Fry commented, was more a “desire of the politically correct North Americans and elite Brazilian classes, and less a reality among the poorer segments of Brazilian society” (cited in Goldstein, 2003, p108). While I ultimately wish to distance myself from Fry’s neo-Freyrian Brazilianist stance, and concur with Hanchard’s and Goldstein’s call for the urgent demystification of the racial democracy fallacy, I nonetheless take his point about the non-commensurability of “North American”, “elite”, and working class interpretations and readings of colour and race. While there is more than sufficient evidence that Brazil’s middle to upper-classes do not subscribe to the myth of racial democracy



beyond the level of politically-correct “public” discourse, further research needs to be carried out to investigate how members of the subaltern classes read the local and national ethnoscape, and the degree to which they can see through the deceiving racial hegemony. Given the deeply subjective and socially-constructed nature of “race”, I borrow Appadurai’s term “ethnoscape” to refer to this construct. Here, the suffix *-scape* indicates that the concept at stake does not constitute “objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision, but rather, that [it is] a deeply perspectival construct, inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors” (Appadurai, 1996, p33).

During my own fieldwork carried out in the São Paulo region in 2004 (Veissière, 2005a), in which I investigated the role of schooling and other societal apparatuses in producing racialized subaltern subjects, I was surprised by the degree of fluidity with which the adolescents who spoke to me interpreted issues of race, identity, and agency. During participant observation and open-ended group interviews with marginalized youth (who would have been phenotypically categorized as “black”, “mulatto”, “mixed-race”, and/or “non-white” by most North American observers), I had expected to find clear evidence of direct oppression from a Eurocentric dominant cultural capital and inequitable patterns of ownership of means of production that would have weeded them out of schools and positions of power. The participants in the discussions, however, invariably defined themselves and their perceptions of a “national identity” in vague or fluid racial terms, as if race indeed “did not matter”, and regurgitated dominant

discourse of racial democracy and social mobility. "Discrimination", if there was any, they told me, had nothing to do with colour, race, or geographical origin, but was linked to "what one did". Similarly, what ultimately signified prestige was not one's race, but the status one was able to reach through one's occupation. To complicate matters even further, my middle and upper-class friends and informants consistently spoke of these "marginalized" youth in racialized and class-laden terms, and told me that they could instantly identify them as "poor", and "from the slums" (Veissière, 2005a). I had at the time read too much Schwarz and Bourdieu, and not enough Hanchard and Goldstein. By outrightly dismissing the Freyrian myth of racial democracy and assuming that oppression was so blatant as to be visible to all, I had also dismissed the powerful racial hegemony that holds this oppressive social order together, and the capillary network of formal and informal channels through which it travels. What is worse, I had fallen victim to the commercial discourse of hybridity, and had at first celebrated what I had perceived as the democratization and hybridization of visual language in the "public" sphere when I was pleased to notice a decrease in Eurocentric images and increase in the presence of non-whites in the media and advertising that indicated a departure of sorts from what I had observed in during the past five years. Comfortably wrapped in my own wishful fantasies about the democratic potential of populist Luic Ignacio "Lula" da Silva's new presidency, I had not only failed to discern the commercial and privatized nature of this "public" visual sphere (and the vested interests of its white owners), but had also failed to identify this "public" discourse of hybridity as the most up-to-the-minute

late-capitalist development in hegemonic oppression through pseudocelebrations of *mestiçagem/mestissaje*. Here was a reminder that, as Shohat and Stam insist, hybridity is a highly cooptable concept which, as they argued about nation building in Latin America, has often been used to articulate national identity “as hybrid and syncretic through hypocritically integrationist ideologies that have glossed over subtle racial hegemonies” (cited in McLaren, 1997, p89).

A closer look at Brazil’s new visual language of hybridity and inclusivity in schools and the media now revealed this racial hegemony, revamped with an assault of hyperreal late-capitalist simulacra that legitimated illusory possibilities of agency for peoples of all shades and shapes while further obfuscating existing and strengthening patterns of oppression. As was the case with the shantytown women who spoke to Nancy-Scheper Hughes in Pernambuco and the *Nuyorican* crack-dealers in East Harlem who were the subject of Philippe Bourgois’ ethnography of street-culture, the marginalized adolescents I encountered in São Paulo blamed their social position entirely on themselves, and seemed to conceptualize agency as a possibility mediated by individuals only (Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Bourgois, 2003; Veissière, 2005a).

Thus, in Brazil, a Black person who sees a giant Bank of Brazil billboard with a Black banker serving a blond customer has to work through many layers of “inclusive” discourse in order to identify the patterns that oppress her and stop blaming herself for her “failure”. What is more, that same person has internalized the unspoken rules of race-and-class-based spatial segregation. Here, I wish to stress this “internalized” aspect of segregation to recall what in my view is the

fundamentally hegemonic nature of oppression in Brazil. Remembering Florencia Mallon's comments about hegemonic processes and hegemonic endpoints, we must also take note of Goldstein's assertion that "where hegemony is realized, coercion is unnecessary" (2003, p37). Reiterating the internalized nature of hegemony through Jean and John Comaroff's definition is useful here:

We take hegemony to refer to that order of signs and material practices [...] that comes to be taken for granted as the natural, universal, and true shape of social being [...] This is why its power seems to be independent of human agency, to lie in what it silences [...] (Cited in Goldstein, 2003, p37).

In light of such pessimistic definitions, I should perhaps clarify that the bleak findings I presented above about my fieldwork and my call for more research on ways in which subaltern Brazilians read their ethnoscares should not infer that I am constructing these individuals as irremediably complacent to racial hegemony. Another possible interpretation of my "findings" is that the youth who spoke to me mightn't have felt comfortable, or simply willing, to discuss issues of "subordination" with me, in spite of a deeper awareness of such issues, and that the short amount of time I spent in their company did not allow me to discern the infrapolitics of resistance in their day-to-day engagement with economic and cultural dominance. Indeed, as subsequent parts of this paper will highlight, I am in fact quite hopeful that there exist infrapolitical, and, in the case of street children, outwardly subversive modes of knowledges and practices that can be further understood through ethnography and empowered by popular education.

*The Postmodern Brazilian City: (talk of) Violence, Sustainable Segregation, and the Disintegration of Public Space*

Before elaborating on different lived experiences of childhood and the possibility of resistance in the next section, I further set the scene by briefly describing Brazil's racial and spatial segregation system, with an emphasis on the postmodern Brazilian city. Here, the term "postmodern" literally refers to a "post" postorganized era; one which indicates a rupture from the State-led urban planning and social engineering schemes that prevailed in Brazil and elsewhere until the 1980s (Holston, 1989; Scott, 1998). Thus, the postmodern Brazilian city as an object of ethnographic inquiry is to be situated within the current context of late-capitalism (Jameson, 1991) that saw the radical transformation of the public sphere and the aggressive restructuring of rural and urban lived experiences and patterns of social interaction (Caldeira, 2001)

*a. Modernist, Postmodern, and Sustainable Modes of Segregation*

After the abolition of slavery in 1888, and unlike pre-civil rights United States or Apartheid South Africa, Brazil, never developed a legal, organized, and formally enforced system of racial and spatial segregation (Goldstein, 2003). The existing informal, covert, "social" system of segregation, as we have seen, muffled by an all-permeating "racial hegemony" (Hanchard, 1999), encountered next to no organized resistance, and has in fact proven to be much more durable

and adaptable, and has served the interests of the Brazilian dominant class longer, more efficiently, and at a lesser human, financial, and organizational cost than the authoritarian high-modernist experiments of the United States and South Africa. Here, I borrow Scott's (1998) use of the phrase Authoritarian High-Modernism to describe State-led social-engineering schemes, which, among other characteristics, were highly organized, centralized and hierarchical, and sought to emulate the "modern" machine through processes of standardization, rationalization, Taylorization, and compartmentalization. Following Plato's axiom that a state is "man writ large", the modern state was built to emulate the new Man as Machine. As in the hierarchical separatism of the different components of a machine, factories and societies relied on the highly compartmentalized division of labour. The alienating effects of such schemes were, indeed, beyond measure, which prompted David Harvey to comment that the organized "detail division of labour [...] reduce[d] the labourer to a fragment of a person" (Harvey, 1990, p104) In institutionally racist societies like the United States and South Africa, giant functional-separatist social-engineering schemes relegated individuals "of colour" to subaltern ranks and spaces in a legally (and brutally) enforced manner. This institutionalized and hence "visible" violence, arguably, led to organized unrest and the dismantlement of the modernist segregation systems. Brazil did indeed embrace many Authoritarian High-Modernist schemes, most notably in urbanism (Holston, 1989; Caldeira, 2001), but never "modernized" its segregation system. Brazil's racial and spatial segregation system is, as I argued, at once pre-modern and postmodern: it is decentralized but cosmologically internalized;

socially rather than legally enforced (which does not preclude brutality); patently evident but maintained by invisible and silent laws; and, finally, it is *highly adaptable*, and has survived the various transitions and juxtapositions of colonialism, industrialization, high-modernism, and post-industrial decentralization and neo-colonialism. Thus, I propose that, for lack of better term, we think of the Brazilian segregation system as essentially *sustainable*.

b. *Race, Class, and patterns of spatio-social separation*

The spatio-racial segregation in Brazil's colonial times (the predominantly rural coffee and sugar plantation days) was epitomized in the Portuguese title of Gilberto Freyre's magnum opus of Brazilianist scholarship: *Casa-Grande e Senzala*, (*The Masters and the Slaves*, 1956 [1953]) which roughly translates into "Master's farmhouses, and Slave-quarters". This division delineated the official spaces for masters and slaves in the then institutionalized segregation system. The epigraph of Freyre's lesser known sequel, *The Mansion and the Shanties* (1986), symbolizes the evolution of the original master/slave separation into the post-slavery urbanizing "modern sugar factory" era that followed the old plantation days in the 1880s (Scheper-Hughes, 1992). Here, I note the binary taxonomical tendency of most social scientists (of which I am also guilty) to categorize complex social phenomena into artificially clear-cut Either/Or categories like Master/Slave, Black/White, and Mansion/Shanties. If I cannot speak to every minute detail in the intricate spectrum of spatio-social Brazilian stratification, I can nevertheless acknowledge that there are indeed multiple, complex, and

contextually diverse categories of difference in the dominant/subordinate Brazilian continuum that is too often referred to as “the two Brazils” (see for example Maxwell, 2003). Nancy Scheper-Hughes, in her richly detailed ethnography of a Pernambucan city and shantytown, gave a more multifaceted description of the local social pyramid, with its remnants of old sugar-baron aristocracy, its “new-wealth” class of enterprising industrialists, and its “middle” class of professionals which “[felt] itself squeezed by both a predatory wealthy class from above, and a desperate and “parasitical” mass of poor people from below” (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p83, emphasis original). Scheper-Hughes presented a compelling portrait of this “middleclass”, which, lacking inherited wealth, “struggled” to maintain high standards of living in the light of high inflation, frequent currency devaluations, and random prize-freezes. She described the life of Claudinho, a young dentist who worked long hours at a public health post in addition to numerous shifts in the rented office of a private clinic and teaching high-school biology two nights a week. In his own words, Claudinho could barely “make ends meet”, paying off his debt and feeding his wife, baby, and “small staff of domestic servants”. Despite his live-in maid, part-time cook, gardener, chauffeur, and nursemaid, the young dentist was by no means considered rich by the local upper-classes with whom he tried to keep up. His monthly grocery bill, however, and he claimed to eat “simply” (*nada de luxo*) amounted to more than five times the minimum wage earned by 80 percent of the town’s population (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p84). This remaining 80 percent, Scheper-Hughes elaborated, constituted the predominantly black “undifferentiated



mass known politely as “the humble” populations or simply as *os pobres*, “the poor” (ibid).

She pointed out, however, that *os pobres* among themselves made finer distinctions of class, and recounted how Antonieta, her friend and informant who grew up in a shantytown but subsequently moved to a working class *bairro* where she raised a family of ten, explained the social hierarchy among the poor. There were, according to Antonieta, three distinct classes between the poor: *os pobres*, *os pobrezinhos*, and *os pobretões*. *Os pobres*, along whom she categorized herself, “have to work at least twice as hard as everyone else”, and must rely on a collaborative network of extended relatives to be able to survive. Further down the ladder, the *pobrezinhos* were the “truly poor”: the men who were dependent upon charity and back-breaking temporary work (cane-cutting, weeding, milling, etc) while the women had little choice besides working in the homes of the rich. Finally, the *pobretões* were the “truly wretched”, the “walking corpses”, and the “sick-poor” who have nothing, who are “chased from hovel to hovel”, and have to beg for a living. (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p85)

In Brazilian cities, thus, families from different dimensions of the racialized socioeconomic pyramid have historically inhabited, or been relegated to different parts of the city. The “public” parts of the city, in turn, have historically been experienced, used and occupied differently by different groups. Teresa Caldeira, in her detailed and insightful ethnographic study of crime, segregation and citizenship in São Paulo traced this historical pattern into three phases she labeled “the concentrated city of early industrialization”, the “center-periphery” model

(also referred to as “the dispersed city”), and the “proximity and walls” model of the 1980s and 1990s (Caldeira, 2003).

The first phase of social segregation in São Paulo, which may be extrapolated to most of urban Brazil, explained Caldeira, was the result of rapid and mostly unplanned urbanization in which groups and functions were not spatially separated, and factories, commerce, services, and elite and working class residences were quickly built next to one another in order to accommodate the unbridled pace of industrialization.

The second, “center-periphery” phase, beginning in the late 1940s, saw the massive departure of the working classes to the periphery, while the middle and upper classes occupied residential central areas. This was instigated partly by greater state involvement in modernist urban planning that emphasized the functional separation of home, work, recreational and shopping areas (Scott, 1998; Holston, 1989; Caldeira, 2003). The exodus of the urban poor was further prompted by rent increases in the central areas, the relocation of factories to the periphery, and the rise of modern heavy industry like automobile manufacturing, which also set off massive immigration to urban peripheries from rural areas and, in the industrialized south, from the poor states of the Northeast. This “dispersed city phase”, which lasted until about the 1980s, was thus characterized by legal, organized, and well-equipped middle to upper class residential areas in city centers, while the ever-expanding and precarious peripheries were occupied, mostly illegally, by the poor.

The latest phase of urban development, characterized by new dispersions and fragmentations of both formerly “public” rich centers and poor peripheries, is concurrent with the economic crisis of the 1980s, and the aggressive wave of World Bank-led global late-capitalism and “structural readjustments” that triggered new decentralizations, and a decrease in state planning and involvement in the public sphere (Arnove et al, 2003; Caldeira, 2003; Torres et al, 1997; Escobar, 1995). The new forms of segregation that took form in São Paulo during this era, argued Teresa Caldeira, are not only comparable to similar occurrences in other Brazilian metropolises, but reflect a wider global trend that can be noticed in such “global cities” (Sassen, 2001) as Los Angeles, Johannesburg, or Bombay. In the case of São Paulo, Caldeira explained that the periphery first undertook a public “improvement” in the 1970s and early 80s resulting from the legalization of “autoconstructed” land after pressure by social movements and action by local governments. As the periphery’s infrastructure “improved” and became more expensive, however, proletarian wages and industrial jobs were decreasing, and many among the poor had to put aside their dream of home ownerships, and found themselves relegated to the *favelas* that sprung up in the interstitial spaces of the periphery and the city, or to insalubrious vertical housing projects that reappeared in the city after failed slum-clearance schemes. Meanwhile, former industrial areas were abandoned, which attracted new investments, the creation of office and commercial space, and the arrival of wealthy new residents. Not surprisingly, the massive wave of unemployment elicited by the closing of factories also triggered an upsurge of violence and criminality. This in turn

generated a new exodus of the rich behind newly erected walls around their horizontal and vertical condominium developments in and around the city. The result of this latest phase, then, was a return to physical proximity between rich and poor, but new—and more effective—forms of separations in the new “Cities of Walls” (Caldeira, 2003).

*c. The implosion of public life and the separation paradox*

Formerly “public” city space was now the realm of the new urban poor (which we might take to mean *pobrezinhos* and *pobretões*), the criminal, the “marginal”, and the unemployed. Caldeira explained that “as fear and crime increased, prejudices related to the talk of crime not only exacerbated the separation of different social groups, but also increased the tension and suspicions among them” (2003, p232). As public space disintegrated and became criminalized while the rich retracted to “fortified enclaves”, thus, the *whole of modern public life* underwent a process which Caldeira aptly called “implosion”. In a City of Walls where the experience of community is marked by fear, segregation, and privatized security and enclosure for those who can afford to wall themselves from the chaos of reality, the general sense of community doesn’t so much as disintegrate, but implodes into private and separate fragments. Caldeira is worth quoting at length here:

By transforming the urban landscape, citizen’s strategies of security also affect patterns of circulations, habits, and gestures related to the use of streets, public transportation, and all public spaces. How could the experience of walking on the streets not be transformed if one’s environment consists of high fences, armed guards, closed streets, and video cameras instead of

gardens and yards, neighbors talking, and the possibility of glancing at some family scene through the windows? The idea of going for a walk, of naturally walking passing among strangers, the act of strolling through the crowd that symbolizes the modern experience of the city, are all compromised in a city of walls. (2003, 297)

To further complicate the implosion of public life, as Caldeira also pointed out, the idea of community—even a private one—has never been emphasized by walled condominium developers, or by the resident themselves. In contrast with American private collective housing complexes that are usually advertised using (exclusive) family and community rhetoric, Brazilian fortified enclaves typically appeal to wealthy residents who are in search of privacy, “peace”, and “freedom”, usually interpreted as leading a separate, independent life. In this climate of private lives, one is again reminded of Rem Koolhaas’s observation that shopping malls—private, privately-controlled—represent the last bastion of public space and activity. Yet, this new paradoxically private-public sphere, is only accessible to a privileged few, while relying exclusively on the labour of the excluded many for its construction and maintenance. Herein lies the profound and violent paradox of this postmodern spatial organization of the city. Once again, quoting Caldeira’s prose in detail is essential for conveying an in-depth grasp of this complex phenomenon:

The middle and upper classes are creating their dream of independence and freedom—from the city and its mixture of classes, and from everyday domestic tasks—by relying on services performed by working class people. They give guns to poorly paid working-class guards to control their own movement in and out of their condominiums. They ask their poorly paid “office boys” to solve all their bureaucratic problems, from paying bills and standing in line to transporting astronomical

sums of money. They also ask their poorly paid maids—who often live in the favelas outside of the condominium wall—to wash and iron their clothes, make their beds, buy and prepare their food, and frequently care for their children all day long. The upper classes fear contact and contamination by the poor, but they continue to depend on their lower-class servants. They can only be anguished about finding the right way to control these people, with whom they have such ambiguous relationships of dependency and avoidance, intimacy and distrust (2003, p271)

In this section on the historical development of spatio-social segregation in Brazilian cities, we have seen that cartographies of rich, poor, public and private space have undergone a series of radical shifts. In spite of these shifts, however, we have also seen that the shifting areas of public space have continually been *unevenly conceptualized and experienced* by Brazilians of different socioeconomic backgrounds. More than anything else, it is class—which, as we have seen, is a racialized construct mediated by material and symbolic inheritance—that determines how one conceives, uses, and is used by “public” space. In the next section, I discuss how another socially-constructed category, “childhood”, provides yet another heterotopic dimension to this fragmented picture, and I elaborate on the concept of “street children” who are both products and transgressors of this fragmentation.

*Fractured Cartographies of Childhood*

*a. The invention of street children: Nurtured and nurturing  
childhoods*

Ever since the scandal around the assassination of eight homeless children—so-called *meninos de rua*—by a small group of off-duty police officers while the kids were sleeping in a huddle near Candelaria church in Rio de Janeiro on Friday, on 23 July 1993, the existence and harsh living conditions of Brazilian “street children” has come to the attention of the world’s media, and exposed a sizeable thorn on the side of Brazil’s carnivalized celebration of its modern democracy. While the Candelaria massacre triggered local and international protests of child-rights advocates, and uncovered further scandals involving organized police and paramilitary death-squads, it also emerged that a significant part of the Brazilian public sided with the police and militias, and called for the control—and, when privately questioned, the extermination—of this “criminal” street “vermin” (Goldstein, 2003; Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998; Diversi, 1998; Hecht, 1998). If the human-rights activists and these “assertive” members of the Brazilian “public” do not seem to agree on the outcome of “what is to be done about street-children”, they would nonetheless concur that the streets is indeed “no place for children”, and are in fact all eager to see these small human

beings reintegrate some sort of a status quo. In a hypothetical discussion between an activist and a conservative “concerned citizen”, there would no doubt be considerable disagreement around the extent to which the structural conditions that produce situations where children come to live and work in the streets have to be altered. Where the argument would end, however, is on the consensus that unsupervised children do not belong in the streets, and on the fact that the indeterminate, unrestrained, “sexual”, and “criminal” living conditions of *meninos de rua* are not appropriate for children. From this agreement, which is itself part of a wider cosmological and teleological consensus on the ordering of space and time, we begin to form the idea that street children are always perceived as a violently incongruous and “disorderly” vision, because they not only live outside the spatial and social boundaries where the laws of socioeconomic segregation would have relegated them, but also outside the very discursive boundaries of what most of us have come to understand as “childhood”. In his compelling ethnography of children’s lives on the streets on Recife (1998), Tobias Hecht raised important questions about culturally-constructed categories such as “childhood” and “adulthood”, and pointed out that the general consensus that street kids have been “robbed of their childhood” sheds light on what is meant by “childhood” in the western liberal tradition. By their very existence, argued Hecht, street kids destabilize conventional notions of the relationships between age and behaviour. While, as he reasoned, we might all wish for better living conditions for children that live on the streets, we are forced to acknowledge that there are indeed different ways of expressing and living one’s “childhood”.



Expanding on the concept of childhood as a discursively-constituted category, Hecht critiqued other dimensions of this childhood-consensus in which children are typically seen as vulnerable, passive, and incomplete beings-in-the-making whose sole purpose is to be the happy and docile recipient of adult culture. While Hecht did situate himself as one who ultimately wished to “rescue” street-children, he also confessed ample admiration for their resilience, insisting that it provided a strong reminder that children are also whole beings and cultural producers who are active shapers of their cultural environment. The fact that children are traditionally seen as passive and voiceless has in fact been widely critiqued in the interdisciplinary study of childhood, and prompted some scholars in the anthropology of childhood to describe children as colonized populations.

As the American ethnographer Herb Childress noted:

Developmental terminology is often dangerous, because it presumes that some people—that is, the definers of the terminology—are developed and have reached some pinnacle of being that all other groups are both preparatory to and desirous of. Like earlier non-modern groups and the present day equatorial and southern hemisphere worlds, which we often call “pre-industrialized nations”, [children and] teenagers are seen as pre-adult, which means that [...] they are about to be colonized by a greater power, and that they should appreciate the intervention (Childress, 2004, p196).

The critical pedagogues Shirley Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe raised similar concerns in their pioneering work on “Kinderculture” in which they critiqued the positivist and universalist dominant conception of childhood. Developmental psychology’s universal rules of child development, they argued, created a myth that transformed the cultural dimensions of childhood as “something produced by

nature" (Steinberg & Kincheloe, p5). The notions of "proper" and "normal" childhood and development aggressively universalized by the project of psychology, they explained, failed to account for social, cultural, political, economic and epistemological variations and changes, and were based almost exclusively on American and Eurocentric, white, middle-class norms, assumptions and experiences. Echoing Hecht's concerns, they pointed out that this dominant paradigm typically constructs children as passive, innocent, and voiceless incomplete entities on their way to adulthood, which not only fails to recognize them as "active agents capable of contributing to the construction of [their] subjectivit[ies]" (p7) and worlds, but also denied them the possibility of being "intrinsically valuable for who they presently are" (p5). In the context of dominant Brazilian discourse, Hecht also remarked that there was no place for autonomy in dominant "colonizing" views of childhood, and located the main distinction between "normal", or "home" childhoods, and those that were "robbed of a childhood" around the idea of *nurture*. "Normal" children, argued Hecht, were essentially "nurtured" beings, who were clothed, fed, loved and cared for by their parents, families, and other cultural, social and economic structures. "Nurturing" children, conversely—who, in urban contexts, are seen roaming, working, begging, or "living" on the streets—have to fend for themselves, and often contribute their meager earnings to feed their families. Several ethnographic studies found that a majority of those who are traditionally described as "street children" return home at night after working in the streets, while a few alternate between sleeping at home and in the streets, and an even smaller group resides in the streets permanently

(Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998; Hecht, 1998; Diversi, 1998). The fact that children often migrate between these categories makes it difficult to quantify the number of truly homeless children. Whatever the numerical consensus and spatial practices, however, "street kids" represent a small, but most visible, portion of the disenfranchised Brazilian population. Yet, the crucial issue in this politics of definition, as Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Daniel Hoffman pointed out, is that the insistence on calling working, nurturing children "street kids" and the frustration over their visible existence reflects the preoccupations of one class and segment of Brazilian populations with what they wishfully perceive as the "proper place" of another. As they aptly put it:

Mary Douglas's definition of "dirt" as perfectly ordinary soil that is out of place comes to mind in this regard. Soil in the ground is clean, a potential garden; soil under the fingernails is dirt, a potential contaminant. Similarly, a poor, ragged child running unsupervised along an unpaved road in a *favela* or playing in a field of sugarcane is just a "kid", an unmarked *menino* or *menina*. That same child transposed to the main streets and plazas of town, however, can be seen as a threat or a social problem: a potentially dangerous (or potentially neglected) *menino de rua*, a "street kid". (Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998, p357)

*b. The tip of the iceberg: The structural production of  
nurturing childhoods*

The presence of autonomous children in the streets, as we have seen, taunts affluent Brazilians with a painful reminder that the exploitative system in which they enjoy privilege has reached a cancerous phase. This "reminder", however, is to them the only naggingly visible part that lies at the fringe of a gigantic sphere of

human misery produced by the Neo-colonial machine. This neo-colonial disaster, as we have seen in earlier parts of this paper, is the product of an oppressive racialized class system in which the affluent have always sought to exploit and control the poor, while paradoxically seeking to shield themselves from their “contaminating” presence, and concealing uncrossable social fractures through the dissemination of a deceiving “racial hegemony”(Hanchard, 1999; Caldereira; 2001; Goldstein, 2003) that perpetuates the false notion of a Brazilian racial democracy (Hanchard, 1999; Goldstein, 2003; Veissiere, 2005a)

Since the 1980s, equally exploitative trends in the global economy significantly worsened conditions of employments for the poor while reducing the quantity and quality of state involvement in the public infrastructural sphere. In the light of the recent neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) education systems and other health and social safety nets rapidly disintegrated and were forcibly decentralized, privatized, and thrown into the “free lay of the marketplace” (Torres et Al, 1997; Arnove et al, 2003). Although such policies were designed to reduce Brazil’s fiscal deficits and bring inflation under control, they contributed to increasing poverty and a widening of the gap between rich and poor while benefiting a small elite (ibid). Research from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC/CEPAL) showed that in the 1980s in early 1990s, 25 percent of the poorest households in the metropolitan areas of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo lost 15 percent of their income, while 5 percent of the richest

saw theirs increased by approximately 25 percent. Furthermore, the Commission revealed that such losses were not only experienced by the poorest, and that as much as 50 percent of families located in the “middle” lost between 3 and 10 percent of their income (CEPAL, 1991, cited in Torres et al, 1997)

Extended family structures, which had traditionally played a strong nurturing role in Brazilian public life, underwent a similar disintegration as men and women were forced to migrate regularly in search of work. Thus, “typical” working-class family structures increasingly became matrifocal, with a single, toiling mother as the head of a household in a favela. Children of such households typically become “nurturing” children, because the absence of state and family support forces them not only to become autonomous, but to become nurturers for other members of the household (Moulin and Pereira, 2000; Diversi, 1998; Hecht, 1998). Moreover, what little “public” state involvement that subsists in the form of schooling is not only structurally inadequate because of lack of funding, but also culturally and economically inadequate for favouring an alienating Eurocentric cultural capital, failing to address the living conditions of working class and favela children, and failing to provide them with immediate and long-term resources for feeding themselves and their families and overcoming their situation of poverty (Gonçalves e Silva, 2003; Arnove et al, 2004). Indeed, as Torres et al demonstrated, Brazilian and other Latin American elites have successfully managed to maintain people of their social groups in positions of power by under-funding public primary education, and investing in “public” universities that are only accessible to the

wealthy who received a private primary and secondary education (Torres et al, 1997).

*c. Non-formal/popular education and NGOs as agents of hegemony*

As the presence of children in the streets is universally recognized as “a problem”, there exist many state, non-governmental, and religious organizations put in place to offer alternatives for street children, such as shelters, drug rehabilitation centers, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and the infamous reform schools of the State Foundation for the Well Being of Minors (FEBEM). Indeed, Tobias Hecht calculated that from mid-1992 to mid-1993, there was approximately one adult working for each child sleeping in the streets of Recife (Hecht, 1998, p23). This approximation, we should point out, does not amount to one educator for every working child.

All ethnographic studies that investigated the interaction of street children with these organizations, and particularly the FEBEM reform schools, however, found that they most often only served to send them back into the silent status quo of poverty, or even reinforce the status of “criminal” imposed on them by the affluent society (Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998; Hecht, 1998; Diversi, 1998). This phenomenon echoes Erving Goffman’s pioneering study of asylums in which he demonstrated that mental institutions do not “cure” patients of their “illnesses”, but ultimately inscribe the illness onto them by implicitly teaching them how to assume to role and display the symptoms of deviance. Such “total institutions”,

argued Goffman, typically produce the illnesses they are intended to treat (Goffman, 1961). Accordingly, FEBEM reform schools in Brazil have traditionally produced, or significantly contributed to the marginality of street-children by incarcerating them in institutions where they effectively learn to become what they are accused of being (Hecht, 1998; Diversi, 1998). As a result, street kids' narratives reveal that institutions created for the "well being" of "minors" have characteristically apprehended individuals who were forced to work in the streets in order to survive, and punished and incarcerated them for not being the right kind of minor; and thus, street children who were imprisoned in reform schools consistently recount how they learned to become violent, "tough", and cunning as a response to the violence inflicted onto them, and the systematic expectation from all authority figures that they could not be trusted (Hecht, 1998; Diversi, 1998).

Despite Lisa Markowitz's call for the ethnographic investigation of NGOs, and of the political sphere of interaction between international, institutional, and local "recipient" actors (Markowitz, 2001), there is at present little known work on the relationship between street-children, NGOs and social change, other than that written by NGOs staff (*ibid*). The few examples that can be drawn from current literature dealing with street-children and NGOs in Brazil indeed seem to suggest that such organizations operate more within the realm of social reproduction than that of social change, though not all agree on the extent to which they inscribe criminality onto "beneficiaries". Tobias Hecht found that while FEBEM reform schools tend to reinforce the status-quo of street-children's

marginality, other NGOs typically aim at reinserting them into the cultural status-quo of nurtured childhoods, which alas often turns out to be matrifocal households of the *favelas* where children are forced back into nurturing positions. Hecht pointed out that some UNICEF-sponsored programs and other international NGOs (such as Childhope) dealing with street-children in Brazil have received considerable media attention. He argued, however, that such media coverage is generally intended as a way to raise funds for these institutions, while little is been said on their impact on society and the way the children perceive them. Hecht's exegesis of this thorny issue is most pertinent to our argument, because it enables us to look beyond the Goffmanian cliché of authoritarian total institutions, and identify more subtle and ambiguous ways in which NGOs come to operate within the status-quo. Hecht observed that these institution's motives for "rescuing" street-children are habitually situated within narratives of "salvation", "reclamation", or "citizenship" (1998, p23), while the kids characteristically come to view these social agencies as "an integral part of street life", but not as a "way out" (p24). Spending time with street-children and discussing their relationship with NGOs, thus, he found that the street children of Recife often referred to these institutions as *freguêses*—which he roughly translated as "clients"—meaning one of several alternatives to stealing and begging in order to secure food, clothing, and money. As one youth explained to him about his resilient approach to survival: "I beg, panhandle, steal, whatever falls in the net is fish [*o que cair na rede é peixe*]" (p180). Hecht concluded that to a large extent, NGOs and other non-formal social institutions are viewed by street-children as "one type of fish



that falls in the nets” (ibid). In a similar vein, Robert Cubillos, who investigated the streets of Recife after Tobias Hecht’s insights, argued that given the current socio-economic landscape, street children will continue to inhabit the streets, and will keep using the “resources” provided by NGOs in order to “secure their survival and success” in the streets (Cubillos, 2002).

During his fieldwork carried out over several years with the street-children of Campinas in the state of State of São Paulo, Marcelo Diversi (1998) encountered similar cases of non-formal state institutions that reinforced the children’s marginality, and salvation-driven NGOs with superficial understanding of structural constraints and the kids’ lived experience with which the children had ambiguous relationships. He came to realize that many of the street youth often utilized these institutions as temporary resources or shelters, but also that those who entered programs of institutional care in the hope of “curing themselves” from street-life typically received confirmation that they were “not fit for normal life” as a result of their interaction with the institutions and their personnel, and found themselves violently ushered back into the status-quo with their hoped shattered.

*d. Cartographies of resistance? Tenure, territory and the experience of public space*

I can relate to Donna Goldstein’s experience during her fieldwork in a Rio shantytown, and her ongoing effort “to resist as much as possible the seductiveness of seeing resistance wherever [she] turn[ed]”. During the

“imperfect work of unravelling and representing how domination works” she argued, one should come to the realization that not everything that takes place in the context of domination is resistance (Goldstein, 2003m, pp9-10). While she remained cautious not to project illusory fantasies of resistance in her interpretation of the daily drudgery of favela women, however, Goldstein was able, as I mentioned earlier, to discern an infrapolitical realm of what could only be called “resistance”, in which her friends demonstrated through their humour and sarcasm that they had reached a critical understanding of the structures that exploited them. Later, in her analysis of the life of the gangster Pedro Paulo, the firstborn son of her friend and main informant, she found that she could not condemn the conscious choices that the boy had made after a series of painful episodes in FEBEM reform schools. Understanding at any early age that he would never reach comfortable standards of living and be able to care for his loved ones by slaving away for a pittance in the homes of the rich like his mother had done all her life, Pedro Paulo joined a local favela gang at an early age, and though he encountered some material and interpersonal “success”, he spent his life in an out of state prisons and died in his early thirties in a violent encounter with the police. Goldstein had met Pedro Paulo while accompanying his mother to a prison visit, and had been impressed by the degree of lucidity with which the young man had described the exploitative socioeconomic system that maintained people of his social class in the subaltern ranks of society. While he was ultimately destructed by the very system he had tried to resist, Pedro Paulo had refused to accept the reality that was presented to him and had used creativity and resourcefulness to

exercise agency (Goldstein, 2003). The same line of reasoning and desire to investigate the possibility of agency exercised by individuals facing considerable structural constraints led the anthropologist Philippe Bourgois to realize that practices of crack dealing in East Harlem were in fact complex survival strategies designed with considerable ingenuity by marginalized Nuyoricans who faced an almost total economic and cultural exclusion from mainstream American society (Bourgois, 2003). Following this same line of reasoning, one might look at the situation of nurturing children, and most particularly at the life of those who have opted for what they call “that life” (*essa vida*) of “crime” on the streets (Hecht, 1998), and think of their refusal to live in the subaltern spaces where history relegated them as resistance. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, who has consistently written about poor women and children as the “residual categories” of the modernist project (Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998) and who often despaired at subaltern groups’ inability to discern the structural patterns that oppressed them (Scheper-Hughes, 1992), presented a more hopeful picture in a chapter written with Daniel Hoffman on what they call the “Brazilian Apartheid”. Street children’s use of the streets and public city space, they argued was essentially subversive:

unlike other forms of refuse, these “garbage” kids refuse to stay in the dump (the favelas and slums of Brazil) and they stake out the most elegant spaces of the city in which to live, love, and work, thus betraying the illusion of Brazilian “modernity”. (Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman, 1998, p353, emphasis original)

While we should certainly problematize unexamined notions of “choice” and “refusal”, and exercise caution about romanticizing the “elegance” of the

rapidly disintegrating public city space, we should nonetheless acknowledge that there is a degree of subversion, and even perhaps of resistance and resourcefulness in the fluid usage of city space demonstrated by these youngsters. In the same way that I am forced to recognize that it is the very structural conditions that street children seek to escape that brought them to the streets in the first place, I must concede that the so-called “fluidity” with which street kids navigate through urban space is plagued by a constant risk of violence, abuse and incarceration. Yet, as Tobias Hecht, pointed out, street children are on average a lot better nourished than their counterparts who stayed in favelas or working class homes, and they enjoy a degree of spatial and existential freedom that would be unthinkable for nurtured children (Hecht, 1998). Herb Childress (2004), in his ethnographic study of adolescents and the appropriation of space, observed that children and adolescents in postindustrial societies—his focus was the United States—live in hyperregulated spatial regimes, and always navigate through cultural and physical space owned and controlled by adults. Childress reminds us that our contemporary landscapes are almost exclusively organized around practices of *tenure*, which contrast with the mobile concept of *territory* prevalent in nomad hunter-gatherer cultures. He cites the work of the ethnologist Tim Ingold to illustrate that difference:

Territorial behavior is basically a mode of communication, serving to convey information about the location of individuals dispersed in space. By contrast [...] tenure is a mode of appropriation, by which persons exert claims over resources dispersed in space. (T. Ingold, 1987, cited in Childress, 2004)

While contemporary modes of spatial organization and communication are based on principles of tenure for the individuals who accept or are made to accept the rules of their societies, Childress pointed out that a good deal of adolescent time and effort is spent *transgressing* those modes of communication, and establishing territorial claims and behaviours through adult space.

Thus, it is possible to argue that the dissident use of city space by Brazilian street children constitutes an extreme case of subversive territoriality over oppressively tenured space. Further ethnographic investigation is needed therefore, to better understand the heterotopology of the postmodern Brazilian city from the point of view of children's subversive cartographies and territorialities. Once more, I should point out that my insistence that such heterodox uses of space and modes of childhood can be conceptualized as resistance is not grounded in an idealization of the harsh street life faced by these young individuals. Undeniably, these children are in the streets not simply as an act of resistance, but because of the structural constraints that allowed them no other choice. The concepts and usage of the streets they have come to develop, however, are perhaps better described as subversive. Thus, we cannot deny that *agencies always occur within structures*, and are therefore to a large extent *produced by these structures*. Here, we are contemplating new structures, along with new modes of organization, communication and resistance that we do not yet fully comprehend. It is in this context of fragmented geographies, thus, that a heterotopologic ethnography hopes to shed new lights.

*Mobilizing subaltern livelihoods:**Concluding notes for a participatory ethnographic praxis*

In the previous section I highlighted how a heterotopologic paradigm of critical ethnography enabled me to identify radically different and violently inequitable experiences of space, place, race, gender and childhood in contemporary Brazilian cities. I went on to describe how such a perspective also helped me discern local modes of knowledges and resistance, such as the case of street-children's subversive use of city space and their ability to survive and in harsh environments. In this chapter, I focus on ways in which these insights gathered from ethnography can in turn be used to generate emancipatory popular education initiatives through which these individuals can re-imagine their sense of place and reshape their environment.

Building upon Kapoor's definition of participatory popular education based on his fieldwork in India (Kapoor, 2004), key works in critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2004; Freire, 2000), and recommendations from anthropologists of development (Escobar, 1995; Markowitz, 2001), this section explores the potential of supplementing critical ethnographic methods with a popular education agenda informed by critical pedagogy and investigates the possibilities of engaging Brazilian street children and middle to upper class youth in such a process.

In the previous section, I argued that most of the popular, non-governmental, and non-formal institutions that have been put in place to "rescue"

or empower street-children in Brazil fail in their mandate at best, often simply reinsert nurturing children into the silent status-quo of wretched poverty, and at worst reinforce and accentuate the pain and experience of marginalization of children who already suffer from social exclusion. I have also shown that these conclusions were most often reached not by NGO personnel, but by ethnographers, who by definition are positioned ambiguously, but also more fluidly, as different kinds of insiders and outsiders in the various social, political, interpersonal, cultural and institutional sites that come in to play in “the field”. In Appendix 1, I borrowed McLaren’s image of the ethnographer as *flâneur/flâneuse* to illustrate the fluid and multiple spatial, cultural, epistemological and political positioning of ethnographers in the context of their research. While the ambiguity of this multiple positionings can indeed be problematic, a predicament which I explore in greater depth in section 4, I could posit, for the sake of this argument, that the plurality of visions that can be learnt through multiple positionings constitute a definite asset for an activist type of ethnography aimed at meaningful emancipatory social change. Indeed ethnographers typically (or hopefully), benefit from hindsight, a systemic view, trust, and a plurality of micro-perspectives, as well as access to and interest in narratives of lived-experience that are hidden to the vast majority of local actors, who are confined to their habitus and to mutually exclusive specific social and spatial positions (Markowitz, 2001).

Thus, I argue that these multiple perspectives inherent to critical heterotopologic ethnography are *lacking* from most popular education initiatives

and structures concerning themselves with the fate of street children, and that they need to be more actively incorporated in such programs.

Before exploring in greater detail the ways in which ethnography and popular education can be utilized synergistically to engender participatory grassroots social change I should perhaps speak more specifically about my conceptualizations and visions of popular education. In the previous Chapter, I critiqued the role of a broad range of non-formal educational structures (meaning state or independent institutions that lie outside of formal public schooling) and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) social initiatives which I broadly defined as “non-formal” and/or “popular”, and exposed what I saw as the theoretical and pedagogical inadequacies of dominant approaches to “deal with the street children problem”. Here, however, inspired by Dip Kapoor’s critical involvement with marginalized rural and indigenous communities in India (Kapoor, 2004), I define what I perceive as an *ideal* paradigm of popular education as *an emancipatory initiative which draws upon marginalized people’s own resources, knowledges and priorities, while facilitating critical dialogues through which they can become aware of cultural and structural conditions of oppression, and organize themselves to take action.*

There is therefore a difference—in quasi-Platonic tradition—between the “actual” popular education structures I am critiquing, and the “ideal” model I am proposing. The ideal definition of participatory and emancipatory popular education I proposed above, however, is grounded in a tradition of radical “adult” education for grassroots social change from which “children” are alas almost



always excluded, or at best, not considered as meaningful potential actors. In my view, denying “children” a place in a struggle for liberation is not so much grounded in a naïve desire to shield or “protect” them from hypothesized harsh conditions (which they are already braving in their daily struggle for survival), but implies a denial and silencing of children’s vision for change, and of their role as active shapers of their environment. Thus, the exclusion of children from most radical adult education initiatives and social movements is to be situated within the positivist-teleological view of childhood I denounced in Chapter 1, that is, within the broader cosmological discursive formation (mis)informed by Eurocentric hegemony which relegates children to silent, dependant, vulnerable, and incomplete positions in the Universe. As a result, the field of “adult” education, despite its grounding in the counter-hegemonic tradition of critical pedagogy<sup>92</sup>, defines itself around hegemonic binary constructions of “childhood” and “adulthood” which in turn rely on dominant notions of “development” (In this case, cognitive development, and the so-called universal “stages”; see Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004).

If one is concerned with the place of “street children” in social struggles, then, such notions are necessarily problematized when we examine the lived-experience of these human beings who, by their very mode of being, shatter conventional notions on the relationship between age—or “development”, behaviour, place and agency. As Paulo Freire famously argued, the Adult/Child binary that separates legal agency from passive adult-imposed supervision in most official political landscapes is also reflected in formal education systems, which

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<sup>92</sup> Joe Kincheloe reminds us that the “critical” in critical pedagogy refers to critical theory

construct child learners as voiceless recipients of adult knowledge and culture. Critical pedagogy, conversely, recognizes the role of learners as cultural producers, active co-investigators, and whole beings, as opposed to incomplete beings-in-the-making (Freire, 2000). The fact that such a critical paradigm has prevailed in many adult education initiatives while being almost systematically absent from formal schooling or any project dealing with children, thus, is undeniably a reflection of that legal binary opposition in which “adults” only are recognized as the owners of their existence.

Yet, beyond the sadly obvious fact that they subsist in that contested space where popular education initiatives are an urgent necessity, I would like to further justify the place of street children in the realm of “adult” and popular education, and emphasize their capacity as active and resilient “whole” human beings who can draw on their resourcefulness and local knowledges to generate collaborative and emancipatory practices and become actors of meaningful social change. Indeed, I strongly believe that there is something to be learnt from street children’s modes of livelihoods, that is, from their ability to survive in extremely harsh social and economic conditions, or what political scientists would call their “creative response to shifting political systems and economic transitions” (Radcliffe, 2004, p193). The focus, then, is not solely an ethnographic scrutiny of such livelihoods, but mapping out and facilitating the potential organization of this creativity, energy, and strategies to generate the articulation of visions and the practical enactment of emancipatory social change. The slippery political questions of how to organize, on what basis, and for what kind of social change

(and *whose* vision of social change) will be explored more substantially in the rest of this section. At this point, however, I feel it is necessary to elaborate, but also voice reserves and cautions about what has been termed the “livelihoods approach” to grassroots development (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Bebbington, 2004; Radcliffe, 2004). Originally developed by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway at the United Nations conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, 1992 (Chambers & Conway, 1992, based on earlier work by Conway), the livelihoods approach to sustainable development sensibly argued that any vision of sustainable development should be articulated from the point of view of “the rationalities that poor people manifest within their existing livelihoods” (Bebbington, p176). Livelihoods approaches, then, typically focus on assets, that is, on what poor people *do* have at their disposal, as opposed to what they do not have. Thus, an ethnographer informed by an asset-based livelihoods paradigm would look for creative ways in which the downtrodden secure access to these “assets” and reorganize them in innovative ways to transform them into “livelihoods outcomes”. The kinds of assets highlighted in such approaches are usually different types of “capital”, namely, human, social, produced, natural, and cultural capitals (ibid). Bebbington defines these “capitals” thus:

- Human capital - the assets that one has as a consequence of one’s body: knowledge, health, skills, time etc.). This can include labor, though some frameworks (e.g. Moser, 1998) prefer to identify labor as an asset in and of itself.

- Social capital - the assets that one has as a consequence of one's relationships with others and one's membership in organizations—such relationships in turn facilitate access to other resources
- Produced capital - this includes both physical assets (in the form of infrastructure, technology, livestock, seeds etc.) and financial assets (in the form of money, working capital and physical assets that are easily converted into money)
- Natural capital - in the form of the quality and quantity of the natural resources to which one has access
- Cultural capital - the resources and symbols that one has as a result of the cultural relationships of which one is part

In the case of street children, then, one might pay particular attention to the kinds of human and cultural capitals they have developed to gain access to social, produced, and natural capitals. In this sense, Hecht's ethnography provided a rich and detailed account of the modes of livelihoods of the street children of Recife, and their ability to survive through theft, begging, occasional hazardous employment, drug trafficking, prostitution, temporary adoption, and negotiating access to further "assets" through "charitable" organizations and individuals. In the same way, Philippe Bourgois' study of crack dealers in New York's Spanish Harlem offered an insightful description of the extraordinarily resilient livelihoods of individuals facing severe social and economic exclusions (Hecht, 1998; Bourgois, 2003)

The risk in studying and emphasizing livelihoods, however, lies in its potential reductionism; a predicament also dangerously present in detailed ethnographies of “the culture of poverty” (Lewis, 1959; 1966) that fail to situate the context of their research within the political economy that produced—that is, constrained—those contexts in the first place. Indeed, as Bebbington argued, our celebration of popular agency and creative modes of livelihoods should not obfuscate our understanding and analysis of the economic systems that constrain these livelihoods. In other words, theorizing livelihoods in a vacuum can be dangerously naïve, or worse, unashamedly neoliberal, as is the case in Hernando de Soto’s study of economic strategies of survival in Lima during the crisis of the 1980s which focused on the constraining aspect of “bureaucratic” economic regulations and argued for a *laissez-faire* approach, instead of looking at the devastating effect of the *lack of* regulations that forced the poor into such “creative” strategies (de Soto, 1989; Bebbington, 2004).

To sum up, then, I contend that focusing on livelihoods should constitute an important aspect of the study and organization of grassroots social change, but that the activist-researcher’s minutious ethnographic gaze should be supplemented with a broad and critical political-economic perspective in order to discern and appropriately combat the economic conditions that engender the livelihoods.

The key aspect in such an approach, it seems to me, is the hopeful message and timely lessons it carries about the *possibility of subaltern agency*. Thus, this study seeks to emphasize as well as mediate the agency of street children in their own emancipation from the political, economic, and cultural systems that exclude

them. With such a focus on agency in mind, I have argued for the place of street “children” at the forefront of emancipatory social struggles by including them in “radical” popular education initiatives that are usually only accessible to adults.

As I have proposed, thus, restoring the place of young humans in social struggles and popular education is only the beginning of a painful process for meaningful change must be complemented by a cautious cultural and political vision that can only be acquired through ethnography. Indeed, the problematic views of childhood I discussed above are also linked to uncritical notions of social inclusion to which most popular education initiatives aiming at empowering street-children subscribe. In sum, I will repeat my concern that the vast majority of popular education structures available to street children not only lack the critical outlook to involve them actively in their emancipation, but ultimately fail to understand the realities faced by these kids, not to mention the structural conditions that produced these realities

An ethnographic paradigm, thus, could revitalize popular education institutions and programs on two counts: one critical/theoretical; and one pedagogical/practical.

On a theoretical level, adding an ethnographic dimension to popular initiatives not only seeks to critically understand the realities, constraints, and livelihoods faced and developed by these children, but also to situate them within broader historical, social, cultural and economic structures, thus trying to understand as well as address the systemic causes of the “problem” instead of focusing on the symptoms. In the Brazilian context, it is thus imperative to

understand and tackle the cultural and economic issues (the “iceberg”) that produce street-children (the tip of the iceberg), and to situate these issues within a global neo-colonial framework (the global environmental conditions that produce the icebergs).

This conscientization to local and global political mechanisms should then be followed by action at micro and macro level. Earlier in this chapter, I explained how the polysemic nature of ethnographic thinking prompted me to identify “children”, and particularly “street-children” as resilient cultural producers and “whole beings” who were not only capable, but also in need of drawing upon their own epistemologies and livelihoods and visions to mediate social change through popular education. Popular education’s focus on organizing people to take collective action (Kapoor, 2004), therefore, should not be forgotten. Thus, the task of the ethnographer-educator is to draw upon insights such as those enunciated in this chapter, and facilitate the encounter, organizing, and conscientization of marginalized youth, and assist them in formulating their visions and priorities for social change.

Given the systemic character of the issues at stake, the facilitation of collective action should be organized between different local groups and wider social movements, as well as legal, political, and institutional actors to work toward legal, social and land reforms. In Brazil, this might entail revitalizing and extending the local ramifications of the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls (*Movimento Nacional de Meninos e Meninas de Rua*) (MNMMR), whose 1989 Second National Congress in Brasilia to denounce poverty and police

violence had led to the constitutional formulation of a Children and Adolescent Act (Hecht, 1998).

In speaking of and advocating such processes of democratization from below, however, I wish to remain cautious and prudently skeptical about the role of state apparatuses in responding to the demands of civil society. In the case of the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls in Brazil, I can only celebrate the initiatives and vitality of these young people and appreciate the attention and response given to their claims, and yet, I remain anguished at frustrated at the persistence, and, in many ways continued deterioration of the issues actively contested by these individuals over 15 years ago. What, then, I ask, is the meaning of democratization and democracy in a context where a much publicized law against child labour and child abuse prompts media-hungry politicians to order a “cleaning up” of the streets by sending poor children who are forced to work in the street to total institutions where they will be criminalized and pathologized \)? The seemingly paradoxical fact that street-children-led processes of democratization led to practices of “law-enforcement” that *produce* more street-children is a powerful example of the double-edged quality of “democratization”. Another example of this to which I referred earlier is Teresa Caldeira’s study of the other side of grassroots urbanization in São Paulo, where government recognition of “autoconstructed” neighbourhoods after pressure from local social movements had led to an increase in rents, property values, and cost of living that contributed to a new exodus of the poor to favelas (Caldeira, 2000). Because of governments and international development agencies’ propensity to cannibalize



visions and projects of democratic social change, then, many New Social Movement theorists have argued that the possibilities and responsibilities for meaningful social change were to be situated almost exclusively at the level of civil society (Escobar & Alvarez, 1992; Ferguson, 1994). This cautious stance has often been interpreted as anarchistic because it seems to suggest that there is little hope for democracy in its institutional form. A closer reading of NSMT, however, reveals a more hopeful vision for macro-level change grounded in a harsh critique of the shortcomings of present systems. As Escobar and Alvarez argued:

...we are not suggesting that political scientists should not be concerned with crafting viable and democratic political institutions. Rather, we are arguing that we need to explore how more inclusive and meaningful democratic institutions might be designed, and that we must concern ourselves with the quality as well as stability [of democracy] (1994, p329)

In accordance with Escobar and Alvarez's sensible critique, I suggest that ethnographer-educators working in grassroots contexts should concern themselves with an ideal of development and social change that is not entirely disarticulated from the apparatuses of democracy, but which promotes a de-centralized and laterally-organized dynamic exchange between different civil society groups and flexible government bodies. During the long and painful process of making this happen, however, we must entertain the idea that we will be operating under considerable scarcity without the support of official bodies, and should therefore foment the revitalization of "autonomous" civil society groups while working on vertical and lateral linkages.

## APPENDIX 1

### THE POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIAL RESEARCH AND PRAXIS 1

#### **Epistemolo-what?**

#### **Imagined Educational Communities:**

#### **Who are we? What are we doing? Where are we going?**

*Invited address delivered at Dean Roger Slee's roundtable "Rethinking the Work of an Education Faculty: Walking Backwards or Stepping Out!". 5<sup>th</sup> Annual EGSS Conference, March 17, 2006*

I must begin by apologizing for what I am about to do and say. I must apologize for standing on my soap-dish, for pointing a trembling and presumptuous finger, and for reinforcing existing divides by constructing grossly simplified stereotypes of the many groups and actors within and beyond our "community". Here, I wish to recall the message of our postmodernist friends—or foes?—about language's relationship with reality which is, at best dangerously ambiguous, and at worst hopelessly cannibalistic. In short, please take no offense at the strategically essentialist and necessarily flawed caricatures that follow.

To understand who we are and where we are going as a faculty of education—that is, to understand how we imagine ourselves—we must look at how multiple and seemingly incompatible imaginings of what we are and do are envisioned, articulated and co-constructed, and in turn how we are imagined by the

broader academic and non-academic communities. The boundaries that mark these different imaginings of what we are about are reflected in the bureaucratic divisions—spatial and discursive—that separated us in the first place. I could argue that our divisions began with an argument over epistemology, over what counts as knowledge, and the ways of knowing and speaking about what counts as knowledge. Or did they? How deliberate is this disagreement?

We are told we live in a postindustrial era; a postmodern age in which boundaries and identities are no longer fixed and float indeterminately in postcolonial ether...but I see no tangible evidence of that in the landscape of academia and educational research. It seems to me that we are still deeply entrenched in hyper-industrial time and space, in a world where knowledge has been taylorized and compartmentalized into discrete units; into a gigantic privatized Machine operated by schizophrenic automata that are unaware of the existence of the Machine and of the necessity to dismantle it and to re-imagine its dynamics and its very purpose. Who are we then? Who are these different subjects and “departments”; who are the robots in these compartments produced by the Machine who reproduce the Machine day after day, year after year?

I will begin with my own cog in the Machine: the Culture and Values part in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE). Ask anyone from its archenemy department, “Educational and Counseling Psychology” (ECP), and they will tell you: We are the radical-chic, the academic fashionistas, the pastiche theorists, the pseudo-revolutionaries, what the French call the *gauche caviar*. We get to hang out with da boyz from da hood, write poems about it and call it research.

We get grants and awards to write about other people's misery and claim to "give them voice" while they stay in the dump. We know that we know nothing, and that we will be oppressors in whatever we do or say, and we gain more academic prestige from writing about our own political paralysis. Ask us about ECP and Second Language Education—Mela Sarkar notwithstanding—and we will tell you. These people have never heard of phallogocentrism, Enlightenment metanarratives, Neo-colonial hegemony, standard-language ideology, and of the Eurocentric teleological fallacy in the idea of "child development". They are so infected by dominant positivist epistemology, and so narrowly trapped in reductionist questions about "proper" development, pronunciation, or learning responses, that they don't just reinscribe hegemony, but brutally carve it onto bleeding bodies. As for the kinesiol-*what?*-people, the library studies girls and the faraway first nations office....nobody knows who they are and what they do....

But there are more fractures in our mutually imagined bureaucratic communities. Since Plato and Descartes duped us into believing that mind and body were two separate things, and after the Machine constructed us accordingly, we also define ourselves along the Theory/Practice divide. Ask any practitioner about us PoMo™ theorists, and they will tell you: These guys think they sound so cool with their theory-crap, deconstructing everything, but they've got no idea what it's like in a real classroom in the real world. Put 'em in an inclusive classroom for a day to see how they like their wonderful reforms. Ask "us" about "them", and we will tell you. How can you blame them? They are produced by an anti-intellectual system that breeds philistines and agents of hegemony. Further down on campus and in the

academic world, they will confirm that we are *all* philistines in the faculty of Education, that we are responsible for grade inflation, and that we punctuate our triple-spaced, purple 14-point-font two-page final papers with smiley faces and teddy bear stickers. Thus, over the years, as I got increasingly tired of being asked about smiley faces and whether I was studying to become a teacher, I went from referring to myself as an educator, to a sociologist of education, to an anthropologist of education, to...simply, an anthropologist.

Allow me to follow this train of thought to address the question of what we do, and what we should be about. The shift in the series of labels in which I've been wrapping myself over the years also mirrors the story of my hopes and disillusionments with faculties of education, and the circular journey of my delusions of grand social change from micro, to macro, back to micro. My desire to participate in meaningful social change first brought me to the practice of "special" education. I continued my journey into graduate research as a would-be social engineer and curriculum reformer, but alas lost most of my faith in the hegemonic machine of schooling after traumatic ethnographic encounters with its residual human categories. I am now floating in an interdisciplinary doctoral program between popular education and anthropology, which, as I now like to fantasize, enables me to operate deeper and wider at ground-level.

I would like to conclude, then, with a note on teacher-education, which is, to a large extent, what faculties of education are about. Nearly 30 years have passed since Bourdieu's critique of schooling and social reproduction, and Apple's argument about curriculum and ideology. For over a decade, Henry Giroux and

others have argued for the place of cultural studies in colleges of education, and for the creation of faculties of education who, in Joe Murphy's words, "give the students sensibility to understand political, economic and cultural forces so they don't just become victims of those forces but learn to act on them effectively" The past decades have seen the exponential proliferation of Giroux, McLaren, Kincheloe, Kellners, Aaronowitzes, hookses, Macedos, and others, and while their publications, doctoral offspring, polysyllabic neologisms, and digits in their bank accounts grew correspondingly, public space has disintegrated and the DSM IV® replaced the bible in schools®. These schools have followed their course toward privatization and hegemonization through commercial and biomedical discourses of inclusion™ and multiculturalism™. Meanwhile, faculties of education continue to produce uncritically apolitical and positivist agents of hegemony who legitimize falsely inclusive and oppressively normative late-capitalist cosmologies.

Once more, we must ask ourselves, what are we doing?

I would like to end this rant with a hopeful (and hopefully not too blatantly sycophantic) note about this faculty. In spite of the pessimistic warning I issued in this talk, I would like to express my feeling that this faculty harbours the possibility of being at the forefront of meaningful social change, and that we are now living a very exciting historical moment. In the three years that I have been here, I have been sufficiently impressed by many of my fellow graduate students and member of the faculty, and am in fact quite hopeful that meaningful change is in the process of taking place under the critical leadership of Roger Slee (and his precious social perspective in disability studies), and the recent arrival of Shirley Steinberg and Joe

Kincheloe who are developing a center for critical pedagogy. My only hope is that such initiatives will resonate beyond the jargon-woven papers of graduate fashionistas such as myself, and will be deeply felt in the undergraduate programs and its offshoots in civil society.

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## APPENDIX 2

### THE POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIAL RESEARCH AND PRAXIS 2

#### Postcolonial pimping, and wall-mart plastic bags

*Address delivered to the Faculty of Arts, University College of the North, Manitoba.*

April 27, 2007

Here I am standing before you today for this ritualized, and, well, more than a little absurd “interview” exercise where I am to perform my little act, present myself, invent myself, produce an illusion of myself, construct myself, *market* myself really, make a fool of myself no doubt, and talk about *my* research, which, in this context, strikes me as even more absurd and violent.

Everything strikes me as absurd and violent about this particular topic, which however, is so important to me, so *viscerally* important, and which I so desperately hope could *matter*—by which I mean something non-metaphysical, something terrestrial, carnal, grounded. I am referring to this awful thing we call research of course, and the even more awful act of reducing it to a noun and attaching it to the possessive “my”. But then again, how could it be otherwise? Isn’t this what it really is, what research “really” is, does, and produces? Empty words again, “real”, “really”; after all these years of “study” and “research”, I don’t believe in anything anymore, I’ve stripped everything of its hegemonically-



engineered meaning, and I am left with the chilling void of meaninglessness. I've withdrawn so far in my mind, in this painful metaphysical space, which I suspect does not "really" exist, but which I nonetheless have created by cutting myself off from my body, from other bodies, and from the ground that connects us all. All of this, all this research stuff, of course, was supposed to be about the exact opposite, about reconnecting, about *us*, about the real world, about the human condition, and about healing.... But if I slap myself in the face, knock myself out my fashionably but painfully embodied solipsism, and probe for the impact of "my" research on the lived experience and embodied realities of those I have "researched", I find, at best; nothing. If I probe deeper however, I will be faced with "the horror, the horror", as the colonial cliché goes; with the infinite violence of what I have done. Sure, we all know the dilemma, it is condescending, and really "not very nice" to speak for other people, and to become an "authority" on their lives based on our own fantasies and rhetorical devices. But that is not where the violence begins or stops. The violence, to return to my earlier pronominal lamentations about using the word "my", lies in what I have done to the suffering others; how I have appropriated, commodified, exploited, pimped, raped...and really created, the suffering of others: I have turned it into something that is mine, something that benefits me, that glorifies me, that pays my bills and foreign holidays (where I can pimp more photogenic suffering), and that canonizes me in those days of neo-positivist corporate research, where I alone have dared to point a trembling finger at the white guys, and expose "compelling" and "critical" accounts of the lives of the downtrodden.... Let us examine a little further what it could mean for me to come here today, market my

fashionably critical-humanist postcolonial research agenda, and get hired as an assistant professor in the community-based program. Great. I am given a remote community where I can play Che Gueverra, or Subcomandante Marcos, or whatever, and try my hand at teaching on disposable people (because really, I don't have the guts to go work at a *real* university); I get to exploit my wife at home, I make good money and pay off my loans, and I get to produce lots of "compelling" and "critical" ethnographic writing that gets ME grant money for academic tourism and a bit of adultery, a fantastic publication record followed by a reputation as an "activist", and remarkably critical but "grounded" (because I market that word a lot) postcolonial scholar. After I get tenure, but not too long after, I negotiate a top position at Duke or Colombia, and leave it all behind. Once at Colombia, I am little embarrassed about having my wife, who has put on 20kgs, around at faculty dinners, but soon, I start having multiple affairs with my park avenue grad students, and I do a pretty good job at blanking it all out.....

This is, it seems to me, is what postcolonial research is all about: it is all about me, my own glory, my own monstrous lies, my own decay, and my own putrefaction, but it has done nothing to empower the downtrodden, or to better the human condition. In fact, postcolonial research, as a particular ghost that animates the body-machine of superstar or second rate academics has perhaps even worsened the human condition. I often wish I was an engineer, a mining engineer, an orthodontist, a corporate lawyer, a real-estate agent: at least it would be plain, it would be obvious: I want to make money, I don't give a damn about the human condition. But as a would-be postcolonial researcher, as someone posing as a

postcolonial researcher, as someone who makes money by saying that he “cares”, what I am doing is so much worse. The pretense. The horror, the horror. I am standing on such thin moral ice; there’s no ice really; the carbon monoxide has long since melted it; there’s just dirty mud and two-years’ worth of wall mart plastic bags; just shit. I am standing in shit and wall-mart plastic bags.

I remember the opening words of Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, the renowned Maori scholar from Ao Teā Roa (NZ) at a conference in Illinois. (see how I am casually name-dropping). “For indigenous peoples”, she had said, “research is a dirty word”. I think I know what she means. Not from the perspective of a “researched” other, but from that of a researcher who soils the bodies of “others” by trampling upon them and dragging them in the shit-and-mud and wall mart plastic bags.

Later, at another conference, I heard one of Linda Smith’s keynote addresses again. They were questions afterwards. There are always questions. Well, not questions, really, but monologues and name-dropping from other pimps with their feet in the mud. Then I asked a question of my own. Samuel Veissiere, coma, McGill, I spoke in the mike, doing my own bit of corporate name-dropping. I asked her about my desire to do something meaningful, my being a pimp, and my fear that it was not my place to do or say anything about the postcolonial condition. If I’d had more time and eloquence, I would have probably told her of my desire to never to speak again, and to retire in a wooden cabin, like Wittgenstein, or maybe of my desire to become an orthodontist, or maybe of my urge to cry, or to lie down for days and stare at the ceiling, or about the tightness in my chest, and the dizziness.

But that is all I asked. I asked about my place. My place in the struggle as an affluent bourgeois white academic male. Her answer was detached, almost bored really. After she delivered her answer, the last answer, she didn't stay for the ceremony that was to take place with a member of the local royalty for whom a throne had been wheeled to the front row. With her head down, she wheeled her little suitcase across the red carpet, and disappeared through the glass doors. But the aloof tone of her answer hadn't saddened me. Her answer had been simple, almost pragmatic, but it had actually given me hope; hope and strength. She had said two simple things that had made this whole absurd conference-performance-event meaningful to me.

"We need friends, and we need allies", she had said.

That is all I have to say today. I wish to come here as friend, and ally. I come with my feet in the moral mud from which I will do my best to remove the wall-mart plastic bags.

That is my research agenda.

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