



ORANGE TSUNAMI

NOTES (IN PROGRESS) ON SOUVENIRS

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Intro

These notes meander. Sometimes they spin in place, restate the obvious; sometimes they shoot off in unexpected directions, de-tour into territories populated with ligers and primly-dressed frogs. Insensitive to proper form, they flirted with a weak welding of their parts. They obviously favored speculative untidiness to rigid methodology, outlandish conclusions to the habit of justifying everything with a solid bed-rock of footnotes. They went with the flow, as is so often advised. But the flow--and this is what they forget to tell you--swirled into violent eddies, undulated strangely for long stretches, and took jolting changes of direction. These notes rode the turbulence and the crooked route.

It was necessary to invent fictional types and to fictionalize real ones in order to say things that seemed right but didn't quite fit the main thrust of the argument or evaded empirical verification. It was also necessary to open the void-space of parentheses in which verisimilitude can be bent; to ignore certain lacunae and demands for rigid analytical strategy; to write about the genetic machinery of bears and the redemptive qualities of invasive African weeds; to think ourselves out of what we thought we knew about souvenirs. Cold scrutiny every so often dissolved in the heat of weird thoughts; or it abdicated its central role to moments of trance and spikes in tempo in which words and ideas seem to outrun sense in complicity with vague suggestions emanating from the material at hand. Things stated had to be turned over with the harrow of their negation.

We, of course, blame all this on the type of object we were chasing. Souvenirs turned out to be eccentric and extravagant things. We marvel at how others seem to have a grasp on their nature, as they continuously gave us the slip and remain a problem, refusing us the tedious but well-regarded authority of being axiomatic, of putting down a sentence or a paragraph without almost instantly feeling that a qualification or addendum was in order, that something vehemently refused to be bound by what was being said. These notes move forward only to curl back on themselves or to bifurcate and follow the slightest hint of a detour, the mildest scent of a new concept.

It all began well: with a proper thesis and a general plan. But then, we came face to face with the souvenir and it turned out to be slippery and perplexing, endowed with strange powers to disorganize linear and systematic thinking. Living at the neglected edge of popular culture, if not altogether beyond it in the slums of lowly commerce, a lumpen marginalized from the bright light of sustained analysis, the souvenir has much to say about the sorts of objects and modes of production that are taking over our world and molding our experience. Souvenirs forced us to write like tourists not visiting this sunny place or that historical one, but surprised by the Generic World that is taking shape around us. We realized, perhaps too late, that the souvenir stimulated us to "advance specifically to get lost," as Robert Smithson wrote somewhere, to follow any clue in hope of substantial pay-off, to sound exaggerations looking for an echo of truth.

To end, a word on the Generic. Often used to describe oppressive or boring or meaningless things without qualities, without identity and the flash (and price tag) of design or brand, we use the term, instead, to designate a networked world in which the axes of production are alien to those of human development. What seems to be a supreme demand in this world is a certain metric and morphological uniformity--at times, at the level of the object, but at others at that of the part or the packaging or the set or the template or even the architectural structure--that generates as little resistance as possible in the channels of commerce and resource-transportation. The Generic is a re-imagination of the globe as a series of lubricated conduits and vectors. A wet dream of infrastructural perfection. The nondescript objects that people frown at because they are so cold and boring and plain are not where this Generic World begins; they are just some of the matter it secretes.

Flamingos

1. If we could collect in a filmic sequence all the flamingos stamped on Miami souvenirs, the reel would be almost endless. Quantity and repetition would acquire a sense of animation. Dead numbers--battalions of immobilized birds-- accumulated to such a degree would make it seem as if something living was pushing their production. And if it isn't the animals that are alive, frozen stiff in place as they are, then it must surely be the source they are emanating from. Automated production beams out such quantity of forms--and those forms, due to their numbers and distribution, become such active agents in the production of urban identity and even morphology, at least in certain geographical locations--that one wants to pin an organic metaphor to the entire circuit. The endless hatching of flamingos and the seemingly infinite circulation they are put into make one seem stingy, if not altogether inaccurate, if all one does is speak of this as only the movement of dead product, the ubiquity of serialized logic, and the labor of mechanical and automated factory-wombs.

2. Projected, the hypothetical cinematic sequence of innumerable flamingoes--the film canisters stacked into a forest of Brancusian endless columns in the theater lobby--can be equally appreciated from both sides of the screen. Each perspective corresponds to a different narrative or torrent of information, and each in its own way provides us with a different vantage point on the souvenir. One side points to the representational dimension of this object, to the cultural environment and moment it crystallizes. It places us in front of the keepsake, in the space of the identity narratives it aims to project and the emotional transactions it feeds on. We're spectators before thousands of shot glasses that stretch to the horizon or at least to the furthest wall of the souvenir shop. Let's call this *the surface narrative*.

The other side, the narrative cast on the backside of the screen--let's call this *the backstage narrative*--, would point to the production and commercialization of the object. It would place us not before the object, inside its semiotic transactions and emotional economy, but in its "prehistory," in the murky background from which it emerges, and which in some sense draws truer qualities of its nature by pointing to the economic impetus that determines its existence as merchandise. Instead of facing the flamingo, the endless multitude of them shelved in hundreds of stores, we would be projected into the gelatinous egg-like space and embryonic dynamic of shapeless raw material assuming form, of objects being cast or assembled or printed in unfathomable quantities.

3. A screening of the *surface narrative* will first of all reveal the extensive formal diversity of the flamingo. From realistic to cartoony, from humanoid to pre-Cambrian, from nerd-jolly to über-cool in sunglasses. The archetypal flamingo, the zoological flamingo--it dissolves into a set of characteristics that can be put together in seemingly infinite ways. As long as the stick-legs remain and the tip of the beak has been dipped in black ink, all else is variable. The species undergoes genetic mutations, often in the form of grotesque anthropomorphisms, that neither the individual member can assume during its lifecycle nor that the species can ever approximate in light of environmental factors that constrain its plasticity. The field of variations is so wide in souvenir-world that at times it threatens to exceed the morphological limits of the animal--and of animality altogether--while of course never quite overstepping the boundaries of recognizability and risking low sales. And it's not only the genetics of the creature that dissolve into an absolutely negotiable element, but also the range of representational options. New School Tattoo is just as good as *trompe l'oeil*. Anatomy, when viewed from a certain angle, seems to respond to stylistic concerns. And this range of stylistic manifestations marks the way in which the souvenir and its market constantly respond to developments in other fields (graphics, visual art, etc.).

4. As these frozen flamingoes "dance" in a cold erotic encounter with their equally frozen partners, or "grow" lost in the flock, or "entangle" themselves with palm trees and Florida topographies, the pink of their plumage mutates. We are offered the enlarged spectrum of the imprecise pink-orange-red-magenta flamingo that will never exist. It's like a missing link from the future, a specimen that inhabits not the liminal zone between past evolutionary stages, but a post-apocalyptic one in which everything is sourced from generic stocks and formatted or synthesized under the guidance of whim, lifestyle sign, or market demand.

5. In its effort to produce commodifiable identity narratives, the flamingo is rarely cast over a void. It inhabits geographical micro-sets that allude to local climate, culture and tourist economy infrastructure. For example: a small mound of sand, a palm tree, a stretch of sky, a cloud, suggestions of sunshine, a diminutive hotel in the distance. This is often accompanied by typographies and logos that come off as "native" or "tropical", while casually perpetuating the illusion that they are not even trying. The flamingo, the extensive registry of its variations, is a tenant in a series of compositional conventions and well-worn narrative fragments.

But these conventions are bound to geography. Coherence between context and representation is essential. Florida typographies and palm trees dissolve as one approximates the Georgia border; the flamingos hide behind rotund golden peaches; the number of manatees diminishes to the point where we are reminded of their place on endangered animal lists. So, in the end, down at their core, souvenirs have something like a green screen on which different "landscapes", each bound to the traits and/or clichés of a geographical location, are projected. Landscape as effect or lamination. Like a CGI product. Or like a customized 3M film. Or better yet: like an image captured by a reflective mechanism, a kind of mirror that allows degrees of distortion in order to accommodate stylistic variance and satisfy multiple regimes of taste. The potential to capture any landscape is the real quality of the object.

6. The distortion that this reflective mechanism accommodates produces images at all levels of resolution and fidelity to source. Sometimes we get mere suggestions that rely on familiarity. At other times, there is distilled specificity. Souvenirs of ligers seem a good emblem for a commitment to the particular.

7. How fluid would the changes in flora and fauna be if we continually move our point of observation along the eastern coast of the US? Traveling north on I-95 a gradual shift into ever more intense greens unfolds. If we take long leaps--from Miami to St. Augustine to Charleston to D.C. to New York to Maine--we find a gradation of greens that, in its careful shifts of tone and hue, emulates the patient color studies elaborated by secret societies dedicated to the teachings of Joseph Albers. Changes in temperature and other climatic conditions, not to mention geological and soil difference, find correspondence in chromatic and floral alteration and adaptation. And these alterations find reflection, a schematized or cartoony homology, in the universe of the souvenir. This seemingly unshakeable link between object and local landscape is what allows so many variations to be taken on.

The south-north axis can be substituted by a diagonal one that connects Miami Beach to Alaska, flamingo to bear, Royal Palm to majestic pine forest. The gradation of greens would be the simplest diagrams that could be produced. A botanist or a zoologist could appreciate the fantastic variation in plant and animal morphologies provoked by processes of adaptation. Black Bears would show up in all their genetic diversity. Individual palm trees would make way for groves which make way for forests which make way for tundras. Heights rise and fall, bodies swell and thin, groupings mesh and disaggregate. And,

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like an unstoppable lava spill of furiously rolling fruits, rearranging landscape, altering water salinity and pH levels, reconfiguring entire tourist industries. Lava, like tsunamis, rises. As if from nowhere. From the secret, animated core of the planet, the alchemists used to think. It's a good metaphors for generic production, which rises from the very demands generated by networks. Which is to say that it seems to rise from nowhere, from some obscure, seemingly animated productive line that is alien to us. Endless objects rising and rolling in. Like souvenirs, too, which seem to trade in infinite quantities and come up from nowhere. Crops of shot glasses and crops of beach towels. Crops of printed oranges that in some distant way mimic the crops of fresh fruits that invariable arrive every year.

Third Parenthesis: Souvenirs for Neo-Golemists

What would happen if all the souvenir shops and stands in tourist and leisure sites would begin to be invaded by an abstract souvenir that everyone, children included, could recognize as a malefic mass? Imagine hundreds of thousands of malefic and amorphous masses cast in plastic, in polychromed clay, in treated and pressed metal, all taking over the shelves and pushing past the doors of the establishments where they are housed and sold, leaving mucus trails, climbing over the Mexican sombreros and sliming the rows of postcards, altering the temperature registered by the map-thermometers and rendering inconclusive the "deadness" of the alligator paw-bottle openers. What condition in the city, in its geography, in the behavior of its inhabitants, in the future that inevitably awaits it, is supplanting these terrifying souvenirs? What dark underbelly of identity registered in the collective unconscious demands such an object? Imagine now these malefic masses, chromatically muddy and screen-printed with matte inks on rows of towels, absorb all the light, even the sunlight that pours in through the windows, in the storefronts where they are sold. The souvenir shop as a zone of swelling opacity, of encroaching dark forces. Are these souvenirs evoking a dark past or are they pointing to something that is slowly materializing on the horizon? Are they inventing a dreaded condition, prefiguring or courting future disaster, and forcing the city to assume it?

From China, hundreds of thousand of generic shot glasses and refrigerator magnets begin to arrive. All of them stamp with an image of the malefic mass. Leaving the port, trucks carrying container after container with screen-printed t-shirts drag this malefic mass across the city and into all the shops and bars by the beach. Lincoln Road becomes the largest deposit of layers of malefic masses, a kind of sedimentary diagram of this unstoppable abstraction. The invasion may happen slowly, as slowly as the invasion of Mexican sombreros and Sevillian castanets and Sphinxes. The malefic mass is like those souvenirs that manage to cross a certain threshold and unfetter themselves from a local culture and landscape. They go global, like certain celebrities. Eventually, the Swedes and the Japanese and the Egyptians will take the malefic mass back home with them, across the ocean, through customs checkpoints in which bored agents will confuse it for a benign blob. Perhaps, the true depth of its terrifying quality will only be obvious to us, who blew life into it, who can perceive it in all its totality, who understand the invasive drive that animates its ability to generate reality. It's a supermass that overtakes everything. It alters the weather. It absorbs massive amounts of sunlight and heat. And it becomes increasingly less visible, less image, and, in time, it is only a terrifying entity, a blank space without identity.

And what if the multitude of flamingos is a temporary stage in the emergence of a malefic pink mass that will eventually overtake the city, waiting at the moment for someone to blow life into its melted-together body? Isn't this already happening? PortMiami just announced that the four Super Panamax cranes that it's having built in Shanghai--they arrive next summer--will be painted flamingo pink so that they can be a permanent flock tattooed against the horizon. A souvenir inscribed in the urban texture itself. The souvenir is no longer a reflection of

the city, it is the city. Which is to say it is the end of the city. When the souvenir seeps into the chromosome sequences of contemporary architecture we've left behind the fable of the Generic City and the detrimental effects of speed building. We've entered much stranger territory. We've butted up against the possibility of living inside souvenir-world the same way we once thought we could live inside the Ville Spatiale--but of course with this difference: La Ville Souvenir arrived by stealth not through theoretical proposal or stowed away in styles friendly to it, like postmodern architecture or Memphis design. La Ville Souvenir jumped right into the realm of reality. It never got stuck in the swamp of the manifesto.

19. Souvenirs are kitschy objects; and kitsch--even the word feels dusty--seems to belong to a time without iPad-minis, intelligent micro-fibers, and drone warfare. This is true but only from a certain angle. A slight parallax shift allows us to think of souvenirs with some of the vocabulary of current technologies. (What is dusty is thinking the souvenir as *only* kitsch.) Why not think of the souvenir as a content managing system, for instance? Isn't every souvenir just a kind of blank surface, formatted into a shape, on which information is collected? And isn't the content of the information completely unrelated, structurally, to the object that manages and disseminates it? A spoon is a spoon and a keychain a keychain whether the slightly obscene map of Florida is stamped on it or not. In the same way that the contents of a blog are completely contingent, even negligible, from the point of view of the standard template, so the imagery that sits on the souvenir must function in a fundamental disconnect with its support. In fact, the opposite may be the case: the limited range of forms that characterize the souvenir as a category, like the finitude of formats for the management of digital information, determine the very nature of the information they administer. The substrate-object--template, generic form, etc.--imposes limits.

20. But thinking of the constraints activated through form and format one has to take things further. While the shapes of the souvenir--as viable merchandise and not as the "differentiated" object that begins to appear through 3-d printing and other gestures that remove it from an economy of large numbers and repetition--limit the information that it will carry, the range of forms of the souvenir is itself determined by external factors. The manufacturing and shipping networks through which it moves exercise a kind of silent coercion. It's not that they directly demand particular characteristics for these objects, but, rather, that they impose volumetric regimes and attractors that translate into profit. If one adheres to the what these networks understand and promote as optimal, one's costs and profit margins will show it. This means both computing the proper size for the objects and their packaging and understanding the sites that these networks favor for their production. The race for the "China price" is not the unfortunate result of a networked world, it's its very program. An industry has to increasingly allow global flows to determine its morphologies. It integrates into larger systems or faces banishment to the sad and tangential netherworlds of niche and artisanal markets. When Wal-Mart is moving more than 30,000 tons of merchandise a day, the details matter more than ever--but not those that differentiate a product, those that standardize it in relation to the metrics of the modules employed in all this moving and the production that accompanies it. Feeder lines, complex and "de-materialize" as they may seem in information-dependent economies, still have a shape, structured by millions of terabytes, and what works best in them is what adjusts their contours and creates as little obstruction as possible. The Generic is less the name of a set of forms than of the conditions in which objects have to function in a networked world.

21. To think of these conditions is to obliquely allude to the realm of labor. After all, someone, somewhere, and we can all imagine the

conditions in which this happens, is making these souvenirs. But the souvenir hides the very condition of its production. It is an object always associated with leisure and the idyllic. It reminds us of good times, of faraway places, of what we do when we run away from work. The relationship it establishes with its owner pivots on complete obscuring where it may come from and how it came to be. It's as if the transaction established between the individual and this object that safeguards her experiences doubles as gesture of erasure. The moment of acquisition activates a delete function on economic reality. The souvenir rarely allows the idea of work to find any foothold in its vicinity. A circumference is drawn in which only the keepsake and the experience or location it memorializes are allowed to exist. All that falls outside it, recedes into a fog. So, it's not just that the activity of production is dissociated from the bodies that undertake it, but the very possibility that a site exists where such an activity may take place recedes into a nebulous space that renders it indiscernible, close to unthinkable. The magic of the souvenir is not that it objectivizes labor, but that it refuses to allow the question of its existence to even emerge. Souvenirs, they seem to suggest about themselves, take shape *ex nihilo*. This is surely one of their charms, what makes them such good objects on which to inscribe our personal narratives and turn them into proxies for our experiences.

Alligator

22. Alligators may be a different story. While they, too, are stamped on shot glasses and embroidered on sweaters, the heads and paws of actual animals are desiccated and shellac'd and sold as souvenirs. Although this returns us to a more localized, craft-based economy, lathering the object with artisanal "authenticity", it may also produce a rather weird thing: the souvenir as an incursion into the realm of the living. It's like hair in some sense, which has often shocked us with the way that, generating the illusion that it continues to grow after the death of the body, points at the murky realm of life after death. But there is this difference when we consider the alligator: where hair (seemingly) continues the process it undertook in a living body, allowing room for the illusion that there is still life in the corpse, and inviting zombie narratives that blur any sharp lines we want to draw around the concept of "life", the dismembered and shellac'd alligator body part shows the living synthesized at the moment of expiration. The cross-over is not into a spiritual realm, or the space of the animated dead, or back into natural cycles of regeneration; it's an incursion into the space of life-as-product, of bio-shopping. Life as the maturation period for the commodity. The dead zone of the posthumous as the animating center of merchandise. If taxidermy is a perverse celebration of achievement, this is the very inverse of that: life, divested of qualities, rendered insignificant, is raised to the higher achievement of being a synthetic product, a keepsake for the tourist too adventurous for the run-of-the-mill trinket.

23. As interesting about the desiccated alligator-souvenir is the metaphor it allows us to develop for the souvenir in general as a two-sided structure, which on one side deals in semiotic and informational transactions and affect, and on the other invites thinking on contemporary conditions of object production. It's, in this sense, a kind of *reptilian* object, immersed in two different worlds. It's like the hypothetical double-sided film sequence we began with.

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un filme de Julio Garcia Espinosa



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of course, the souvenir, endowed with its mechanism of reflection, isn't impervious to this: it accommodates the single specimen as well as the flock or the grove, the rapids as well as the dry bed and the canyon, the pine forest as easily as the lonesome cactus.

8. And it isn't just a question of types and quantities. Seasonal representation is rendered much more complex when we move from the climatological uniformity of Miami Beach to territories with visible landscape alterations. The souvenir, as seasonal atmospheres and colors and decorative traditions change, fires up what we can call a calendar-based mimesis and exhibits its own capacity, like that of the trees, to adapt to the different times of the year.

9. The genetic diversity of the Black Bear--which finds manifestation even in the white fur of the subspecies Kemrode--can both find expression in and metaphorically represent the very diversity that the souvenir is capable of. The genetic machinery of the bear finds a parallel dynamic in the genetic machinery captained by individuals who live from the production and sale of souvenirs. One wonders if the "genetic" richness of the souvenir'd flamingo or the Black Bear's varied physiognomic spectrum aren't potential metaphors for the *adaptive impulse* in human groups to economic models that emerge out of territories with tourist potential. Like the objects they pedal, they seem to be able to adjust to whatever results from the negotiation between the signs that local geographies and cultures offer and the dregs that remain after the dilution of many regimes of taste.

10. The metaphor of adaptation can also be used to describe other pressures, beyond a tendency toward geo-cultural fidelity, that affect the souvenir's morphology and content. One can think of customs services, for instance, which have become increasingly regulated with the War on Terror and of international accords to protect national patrimonies and agricultures and the environment more generally. The caution and regulations that these systems exercise are also sets of restrictions which impact souvenirs. For instance, the frogs, ducks and crocodiles dressed as debutantes from the colonial period or as 19th Century gentlemen ceased to be highly sought or available objects in the National Park Ciénaga de Zapata at the beginning of the 90s as Cuba became gradually integrated into various international organizations dedicated to the protection of local faunas. A similar thing happened in Native American reservations in the US where bear teeth and alligator legs were once found in piles of hundreds in shops.

But the other side of this: One can think of souvenirs made from Marabou plants. A native African weed, it has become a feared invasive species in the Caribbean. Needing only sunlight (not water) and with its seeds migrating in cow manure, it's become a kind of beaded necklace that is cruelly constricting around local agricultural economies. It's as terrifying as the pythons that are taking over the Florida Everglades and eating its alligators the way these used to eat distracted golfers. (How long before these pythons are integrated into Florida souvenirs?) In Cuba, the Marabou has overtaken 5 million acres of arable land. As *Juventud Rebelde*, one of the newspapers on the island, began one of its articles in April of 2008: "The marabou plant was brought to Cuba with the intention of using it for property demarcation. Currently, it is the worst plague affecting land and crops across the entire country." In time, souvenirs made from this invasive plant began to invade the shops and tourist centers of the island. Cups and other vessels carved out Marabou began to fill the shelves. If customs restrictions and environmental protections pressure the forms of the souvenirs from one side, clandestine practices and other unregulated phenomena open escape routes for it on another side. At some point the virtual necklace of seeds migrating through bovine digestive systems becomes the real souvenir seeds-and-beads necklaces that Canadian and Italian tourists take back home with their satisfied libidos.

First Parenthesis: Souvenirs for Neo-materialists

A souvenir: the head of a Marabou stork carved out of a branch from the equally-named Marabou plant. Two glass eyes and some feathers are glued to it and a cigar is dangled from its beak in order to render it more attractive and "alive". What is this type of souvenir memorializing--the bird and its connotations of fertility and renewal or the conditions and forces that explain the invasion of the plant? Does it allude to the presence of these animals nearby or to an understanding of the world as little else than emergent topographies that result from the clashing and meshing of a multitude of different forces--biologic and economic and geologic and cultural and...and...and...? Are we really still engaged in a simple correlation between animal and representation? The bird's inanimate head may just be an analogy for an expired way of employing and thinking the souvenir.

Stretching things a little further: Is the generic mass of clay, a fired and glazed mountain that is equivalent in volume to all the material employed in all the ceramic souvenirs spread throughout the terrestrial surface, accompanied by a ledger (or USB) filled with manufacturing quotes and shipping documents more interesting than the differentiated clay pots and cups with their stamped designs? Will we have one day a souvenir shop in which there is nothing but this massive mound of glistening matter, seemingly animated and spreading at its edges like an advancing bacterial colony, swallowing all the shelving and sliming the windows and climbing the walls, like a swamp-thing squeezing through all the openings in the mangrove root systems and wrapping itself around all the trunks and the driftwood? Will one day all the dinosaurs stamped on stretched pennies at La Brea Tar Pits memorialize the penny and the abstraction of money, rendered antiquated by the Singularity and financial instruments of a sophistication we can't even imagine, as much or even more than saber-toothed tigers, ground sloths and mammoths? What happens when the representation and the medium are identical?

Let us say that where some may have perceived a mechanism of reflection in the souvenir, a kind of screen-capturing process that grabs and reproduces a local landscape or culture or climate, what we find is really a mechanism of replacement. It is not about symmetrical copies of the referent. The power or force in the invasive Marabou is less mimicked than continued by the Marabou-souvenir as it invades the souvenir shops and leisure sites of the place which, through a kind of agricultural terrorism, the invasive weed is taking over. The souvenir is the propaganda arm of the Marabou; one of the methods through which it is naturalized, "nativized," rendered an obvious part of the local landscape. The Marabou souvenir does its work by establishing a molecular continuity between the colonizing plant and the souvenir that represents the place. In this way the Marabou can be carved into a cup, a stork, a flamingo, a mermaid, a bear or any other enticing thing. But these outwardly-facing figures are only cover-ups for its true purpose, for its operations at the level of cellular substrates.

But don't we also have to speak here of another continuum, a new virtual coating over the globe. Draw two lines. Call one "life"; the other "souvenir-plane". Think of the first in a very mundane way: it represents the tissue of events and relations that make up the world, that fill our days. Think of the second as a slightly more complex figure: a virtual plane, a constant potential, "there-and-not-there" at the same time, that is inseparable from contemporary reality. This "souvenir-plane" is the constant potential to generate an object with particular qualities (those that unmistakably characterize a souvenir). This generative potential is actualized when a perturbation flows "down" from the line of life. The perturbation is caused by a particular pressure released by an event or an economy. That is, when "punctual" (when a souvenir appears and vanishes in the blink of an eye), it is produced by a momentous event that it is generally perceived to merit commemoration--e.g., the Obama Campaign. When "constant", it is produced by the economic potentials found in certain geographies and/or leisure-based economies--e.g., Miami Beach.

More needs to be said, however, because this pressure is only effective, only translates into a perturbation, if it is properly canalized by merchants. It's the intervention of an economic imperative that turns a "social" pressure into a perturbation that impacts the souvenir-plane and impels it to generate an object. But this plane, disturbed or not, is always there, under our feet, so to speak; always ready with its boundless capacity to respond to any demand for a potentially profitable morphology, "sensibly open" to contextual exigencies.

There are moments, however, in which "faulty" or "misguided" pressures are applied and the souvenir that emerges is out-of-step with the reality it faces: Mexican sombreros in Barcelona. Coherence between context and representation is absent. And yet, these "errors" need not always end in catastrophe. With the right conditions (satisfying or endearing shape, understood cultural reference, astute merchants), these "erroneous" or "incoherent" souvenirs invent their own markets or slip into existing ones. Mexican sombreros become "native" to Barcelona, un-alien. If these "erroneous" souvenirs can repeat their success in enough places, they assume a kind of "transcultural" quality. Sombreros in Malaysia and Myanmar and Macedonia and Mongolia.

Incorporating this untethering of the object from local culture and landscape may signal that a potential sharp transition in the general character of the souvenir may be afoot. An eradication of any obligation to context at the semiotic level may be one of the emerging qualities of a novel souvenir. And this object may come to function in a way that is the near reverse of what was described above: a perturbation doesn't come down from life and impel an object to arise from the souvenir-plane. The souvenir-plane itself produces "erroneous" or "incoherent" souvenirs and delivers them to life. We are not proposing that these objects are self-generated in any strict sense, as if a virtual, "there-and-not-there" plane had suddenly acquired agency, but, rather and simply, that it no longer responds to the usual external pressures. The production of a new souvenir may just be the realization of a stupid merchant's idea--or a brilliant one's intuition. Or it may simply have surfaced due to sheer economic inertia and the routinized quest to always have a new and different product. Merchant or economic inertia are the instruments of the emerging souvenir. In time, one imagines these objects living in stable coexistence with souvenirs that continue to strive to be coherent with their surroundings, neither seeming more appropriate than the other.

One imagines, also, that part of the future success of these "incoherent" souvenirs lies in that the tourist is the first to dilute deep cultural meaning. He likes the sombrero and knows that for some reason it is said to be Mexican, but what else really matters. He just wants it to be a reminder of the castles and the drinking in Prague. Isn't the tourist the first social type to naturalize a generic culture, to feel at home in it more than anyone else? Doubtlessly, he is one of the front-line witness of the "generification" of the planet.

11. As in evolutionary theory, we can also speak of external constraints which don't directly impinge on the souvenir but on technologies or behaviors on which it depends. These constraints have a "second-degree effect" on the object. The near extinction of the "View-Master reel" as a souvenir (multi-scenic postcard-disc) is inextricably bound, on the one hand, to the diminished production of the View-Master and similar stereoscopes and the emergence of portable DVD players and the like, and to the advent of digital image production which displaced Kodachrome and other film processes. On the other hand, it is bound to the shift from treating the View-Master as a souvenir or even as an educational tool to understanding it exclusively as a toy. This shift opens a flexibility for the View-Master reel that the souvenir and the pedagogical curio can never afford it. A diffuse "children's market" replaces the limitations of site or natural curiosity. Dora the explorer goes everywhere--as a character and as a product.

p. 4 p. 5 Palm Tree

12. Is the souvenir the cabaret show of objects? After all, it adheres to the two inviolable rules that Julio Garcia Espinosa assigns the cabaret show in *Son o No Son* (1978):

a) it should be understood by any tourist regardless of whatever language he may speak.

b) it should respond to middle class taste, which to say a taste that is neither popular, nor high, nor taste.

But is the souvenir only this?--that is the question.

Manatees and Mermaids

13. Let's consider the souvenir's phenomenological or affective dimension--it's engagement with a buyer. As Constantin Boym has pointed out the souvenir is endowed, unlike the usual objects we employ, with a "fuzzy functionality"--it is never immediately clear what its use may be. It is, in a sense, good for nothing. Or, rather, what it may be good for is never what it should be good for. The manatee embossed in the paperweight matters more than the weight of the object and the function that it actualizes. Instead of a paperweight, such an object becomes a stand-in for an experience that doesn't quite line up with everyday life--a vacation or an exotic place.

The souvenir also has a "fuzzy latency period" in which it goes from being an object acquired during a vacation or in a particular place to assuming the more important role of memorializing these things. That is, with time, the souvenir develops new possibilities: it becomes a kind of bank for emotional investment. It goes from being an object in waiting, a loose connection to an adventure, to becoming a satisfying substitute for lived experience. Memories, as they loose their hard edges, begin to be increasingly associated with these keepsakes. One procures a souvenir betting on the affective dividends it will pay in the future. And paying out these dividends, the souvenir comes to exit what Boym calls the circle of obsolescence and disposability. It begins to practice a kind of emotional colonialism that keeps us from tossing it out with all the other objects and technologies around the house that meet their expiration date or their upgraded versions.

14. But is this right? The souvenir turns us into captives of its promise to fulfill a future and inevitable lack, to fill the void left by fading memories. But is such a fulfillment really the souvenir's "content"? All the souvenir may "memorialize" in the end is this void, forever reproducing and asserting a lack, pointing as much to the experience or place it is supposed to stand in for as to one's growing distance from it. And it's this very "incompletion," the way that it never quite replaces the thing lost but constantly renews the promise to do so, that allows us to increasingly feel connected to it.

15. The souvenir, in a "common sense" reading of it, morphs from being a kind of object-manatee--a possibly useless and nearly shapeless thing that floats un-intrusively in its owner's field of awareness; something that one may be excited about encountering and purchasing but has no emotional connection to--to being a seductive object-mermaid, something that one is deeply connected to and which one comes to experience in an intimate way that is difficult to convey to others. No one understands the power that the souvenir holds over its owner, prevailing wisdom says. It's economy functions in the special realm of family heirlooms, childhood awards and trophies, and the like. But perhaps the transformation from manatee to mermaid is never complete. The souvenir swells as an indeterminate figure between the two; it gets stuck on the conveyor belt of the metamorphosis. This half-transformation may find indirect representation in the way that souvenirs often seem jammed between functions--

--key chain/bootle opener--or, more pointedly, as hybrids of things that we associate with incompatible parts of reality--real alligator paw bottle opener. And it is this "unfinished" quality, the condition of being "jammed" between two figures, the promise of full transformation that it maintains while only reasserting a lack, that solicits or demands our emotional investments.

Second parenthesis: Souvenirs for Neo-Communists

Boym: "A souvenir is manufactured to serve as a reminder (the word, in French, means 'to remember') of a non-ordinary experience, place or culture. The object works metonymically, as part of a fragment that evokes larger places and events." What happens if the mnemonic dimension of the souvenir is deployed not to memorialize a personal experience, the site of a vacation, an alma mater, or even an entertainment event but, rather, to recall and do more than recall a significant historical moment and the social arrangements that characterize it? And what if it isn't about memorializing an event that is collectively shared either like, say, a momentous political campaign or a visit from the Pope, or some diffuse ancestral identity or ethnic narrative that can be fixed to certain signs, like wooden clogs or bear paw salad tossers? And what if it isn't, in the end, really about memorializing at all? What if a such a souvenir could open up to something that is precisely unshared, rendered inexistent in some way by an ideological apparatus, current organizations of social life, or the vicissitudes of history, and liberate some of the forces that may still be collected there, allow us to re-imagine processes now hidden by the sign systems that came to represent them? What if it retrieves situations or experiences, collective and emancipatory, like efforts to develop a truly popular cultural production as an important and animating factor in political and institutional re-arrangement, that history itself has buried as a way to unleash the power that those situations may still hold in reserve? A souvenir of models; a punctual illustration of a larger field of social practices. It's not about reproducing bears and sickle-and-hammer flags. Those we can still find all over Berlin and Tbilisi. But, rather, it's a souvenir as a mnemonic vector through which the forces and not the signs of forgotten truths and creative experiments can be extracted.

"Temporally," writes Susan Stewart, "the souvenir moves history into private time." But what of a souvenir that could invert this calculus? What if instead of drawing an occurrence or location into a private sphere, turning itself into an aid for personal memory and sustaining private emotional resonance, the souvenir could bring the forces of collective exercises, of experimental forms of life, of prefigurations of a different world that are momentarily frozen in time, into the public sphere, whatever there is of it these days? The souvenir as a mnemonic device for a collective body, as a vector that attempts to link current thinking to the power of past efforts that have been "forgotten", Autobiographical economies have no place here. The deed for the narrative that emerges around this kind of souvenir and the subsequent possibilities they engender belong to no one--or, just the same, it belongs to everyone. This souvenir moves private time into history, refusing to bestow excessive value to this so-called private time, which is nothing if not assailed from every side by objects that render any experience in it poor and atrophied. If such an object as is being described remains a souvenir, it's because it continues to pit the present against the past. Not nostalgically, but almost juridically: it thrives in making a case for the practices it points to as recoverable material by attempting to free some of their force. It takes what may have happened and presents it as evidence of what may still be. It spirals the past into the future, in a kind of inverted vortical movement. It marks a "homesickness" for what, having happened already, may still come.

But how does one keep this sort of souvenir from twisting into a full-blown fetish? Let's call the transaction in which money is exchange for a keepsake the economic fact of the souvenir. A few dollars for a trinket. An important question may be: How does this souvenir, if it purports to challenge in even some minimal way the dominant logic of exchange, deter-

mine the nature of its economic fact? In other words, does it meet the challenge of producing an alternative fact by restructuring the way the souvenir is traded? Or, tacking a different tact, does it render visible all that the standard economic fact of the souvenir hides? In more concrete terms, should labor be rendered visible at the site where the souvenir is brought together with its future owner? Should the lines of production rub up against the display structures of the souvenir shop or its surrogates? And should not only the bodies that manufacture trinkets be brought back from their spectral state, even if only through stand-ins and placeholders, in a kind of diagrammatic display more than in a real transposition of the production site, but should the very conditions of the Generic find articulation--or at least be alluded to--somehow? How does the souvenir which on the one hand attempts to liberate historical forces, to house utopian content and a quotient of criticality, become on the other hand a metonym not of a personal experience or a visited location but of a global system of production and distribution?

Oranges

16. For Boym, the souvenir is a paradigmatic example of how design should function in information-based economies: it should generate communicating vessels, complexly layered with information, enfranchising "immaterial" material--sentiment, affect, memories, etc.. It should do this at the expense of its fixation with object performance. What is curious in this engagement with the souvenir is that while the object becomes a site on which to reflect on the shift from manufacturing-based to information-based economies, it can also be the very opposite of this, letting us turn to the other side of the filmic sequence we started with, our *backstage narrative*: a site on which to reflect on the global shift in manufacturing itself, on the transition from manufacturing objects to producing metrically-regulated generic matter. By objects, we mean consolidated aggregates of materials which find their identity in the combination of how they respond to the use they are designed for and a layer of semiotic codes that can be thought of as style, signature, brand, personal aesthetic, corporate look, or some other variant of this. By generic matter, on the other hand, we mean a kind of "object" whose morphology is determined less by its response to use in a human environment and its registration of signature (personal, corporate, or even communal) than by either the specific metrics and demands determined by the networks in which it functions (think of the container in an inter-modular global transportation system) or by the possibility of functioning as a generic substrate that can be laminated with codes or lifestyle signs to which it is not beholden (think of digital content management systems).

17. Is souvenir the name of the generic once it is inserted in a tourist economy?

18. Although in French souvenir means 'to remember', it's etymology is a little more suggestive--*sub-*"up" + *venire* "to come". To rise. To emerge. As in: an object that teases a memory to rise from the depths in which it is usually stored. But of course not only memories come up. Streams emerge. Geysers. Oil. Tar. Sea wrack. Crops. The thousands of citrus trees--rows and rows of the them like the objects on souvenir shop shelves stamped with images of oranges--that pattern the Florida landscape rise from seeds. One can even get away with saying that the oranges themselves, harvested and collected as a gigantic set of units, rise in yearly waves. They suddenly appear. Maybe not the individual fruits--they hang, one would say--but the massive numbers that fill crate after crate and truck after truck may seem, in bright sunlight, as if having come up from nowhere. These crops rise like orange tsunamis. If enough trucks tipped over at once, one could imagine waves of fruits flooding the entire state, running off the shoreline like a counter-tidal wave "flooding" the ocean. It'd be