

Three poems on markets and consumption

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This account reflects an effort to address the crisis of representation emerging from some of my recent fieldwork on pilgrimage in the postmodern era. Bracketed by the relatively dispassionate field note and the reasonably narcissistic journal entry, each of these particular poems is a liminal playground for the contest between introspection and exteroception. In these poems, I exploit the coincidence of the ethnographic and lyric moment to examine an anthropologist's engagement with his craft. They address the experience of researcher ambivalence – in this case, the uncomfortable unwillingness to suspend the voice of judgment – occasioned by prolonged immersion in spectacular venues. Neither autoethnographic nor reflexive in any formal sense, these poems invite the reader to participate in the mixed emotions of a persona locked in the embrace of consumer culture, where to resist is to accommodate, and to accommodate, resist. The sites represented in the poems are, respectively, the flagship brand store American Girl Place, the Caribbean port of call Costa Maya, and the temporary autonomous zone of the Burning Man festival.

Keywords: pilgrimage; spectacle; reflexivity; ethnography

Regina Cantata

A horde of plastic people
Swaddled, shopping bagged,
Volvate, vermillion,
Stream toward the aunt pharm
As well as just away,
Returning to the source –
No cradle board or stroller
For these regal children.

Memento Mori: American Girl

Post-Columbian
Exposition, Midway
Plaisance in miniature,
Wunderkind in
Wunderkammer play space,
Exploded home, hearth,
And holdings on display –
Curated, catalogued,
Boxed for your pleasure.

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Slice of life in a booth,
 Phoned in by experts
 Staking Barbie, staving
 Off Homies and Bratz,
 Culture counters history
 And herstory wins –
 Asynchronous sorties
 Cleave generations.

Bluehair down through towhead
 Groom and dress the past
 With talk, and talk of talk,
 Repairing culture
 In the warp of words and
 Weft of woman's ways –
 Father couched and curbed
 Outside, always outside.

Memento Vivere: American Girl Today

Valley of the dolls,
 Quickened terra cotta
 Preppies of Xian,
 Dampened once like *moai*
 On Rapa Nui,
 Now pleasant under glass –
 No need to break in
 Case insurgency.

Twilight of the idols,
 Doppelganger soul mates,
 Exotic secret selves,
 Curios, fetishes,
 Snow clones melting in
 The waning warmth of want –
 Before choral risers,
 Daughters search and dicker.

Flesh of the used gods,
 And eyes and hair and clothes,
 Memetic parcels
 Meted out on tickets,
 Collected, surrendered,
 Pulsing this playground –
 The soft sororal
 Systole of shopping.

Like starter dough shared out
 Across the households,

Engendered kinship
Energizes girls, as
Mothers and grandmothers
Labor to release –
Brandchild from buyosphere
With still more merchandise.

Puerto de las Cruceros

At skyline, on sea rim,
They favor pyramids,
Resolve to mountain
Villages, cresting,
Troughing, drawing close
To manifest as boats,
Bearing Quetzalcoatl's
Cousins, once removed.

They choke the port in numbers,
Each funnel a proud
Palimpsest, each logo
Barely masking a bold
Horn of plenty,
Racked like panpipes on each top deck,
Flying false flags before
The jolly rajas rise.

Disgorged down gangplanks,
Turistas hit the beach,
Dodging beggars, jousting
With indolent vendors
Whose cookie-cutter come-ons
Delay the sack of stalls,
Rude T-shirts, fakelore
Curios, sacral schlock.

How often I have watched
Boat people scrub their hands
With vigor, with disgust,
And pray Purell will
Purify the palm defiled
By accident, by
Local touch, or fingers
Fouled by grazing craftwork.

"Seen one village, seen 'em all,"
Slurred like a mantra
By the sunburned and the slow,
In straw hats and sweatsuits

They throng home to Mother,
 Their boat, for succor, to embrace
 All seven deadlies. Again.

“¡Vaya con Dios!”
 Ancient malediction,
 Spiel spat with smile and nod,
 Hurlled after “Meester
 Weeskers,” after “Harley,”
 After “Chica” and the rest,
 Wasted in tender wake
 And the cries of gulls.

Marooned back in Vandalia.
 Tagalog gofer hangtime,
 Hand towel origami
 And dinner jacket bingo
 Relax their grip once more.
 New worlds to number
 Shimmer on the sea.

Sanctuary (Black Rock City)

Outwaiting a white out
 In Medusa’s womb
 With dismembered dolls,
 Gilded and garlanded,
 Heads on greenglass bottles,
 Arms and legs preserved
 In a Culligan keg.
 Dust drifts on the altar,
 On offertory gifts
 Of M&Ms and glow sticks,
 Chianti and acanthus
 On a base blue circle.
 Vulval streamers
 Celebrating days,
 Whip ‘round me while I write.
 The storm abates, then boils
 As fast, abates and boils
 Again before it dies,
 The evanescent aura
 Of art outside this art,
 Beyond this holy yurt
 And then inside it, too
 Leaves me, only, to
 Imagine and recall
Eroica on the wind.