BODIES IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION: COMPETING DISCOURSES OF REALITY AND REPRESENTATION IN BIOY CASARES'S *THE INVENTION OF MOREL*

Wendy Ryden

"One hears warnings like the following: If everything is discourse, what happens to the body?" (28)

Judith Butler

"One might nevertheless wonder whether open acceptance of the camera and its operations does not recreate a lost attitude towards a culture which has been replaced by the mechanical arts" (vii).

Pierre Bourdieu

"DeBroglie states: 'A phenomenon is modified by the mere fact of being observed.'"[1]

"No one is ever anything but the copy of a copy, real or mental...." (102).

Roland Barthes

"Don't you see that there is a parallelism between the destinies of men and images?" (63). This is the question asked by the character Morel, the inventor who, in a quest to achieve immortality, substitutes holographic images for people in Bioy Casares's *The Invention of Morel*. Morel's question about the "destinies of men and images" is one that reveals a fascination with, and an anxiety about, the power of filmic representation as a textual device that constructs consciousness and reality. This fascination and anxiety are played out in Bioy's story, in which an unnamed narrator who seeks refuge on an island happens upon the images created by Morel. Through Morel's invention these images and their surroundings are projected

[1] Quoted in Bourdieu 130.

in interrupted but repeating loops of the actions filmed during the one week that Morel and his friends inhabited the island. Unaware of their status as images, the narrator voyeuristically falls in love with one of the projections. Upon discovering the secret, however, the narrator eventually finds that his love is unaffected by his knowing the "truth" about his beloved, Faustine: that she is merely an image and a kind of automaton condemned to repeat the same sequences eternally. The "truth" now is that he loves her anyway, and so his love blurs, or rather erases, the boundary between reality and representation he has hitherto held. Furthermore, the idea of repetition as constitutive of reality becomes less repugnant to him. He tells us that

> A rotating eternity may seem atrocious to an observer, but it is quite acceptable to those who dwell there. Free from bad news and disease, they live forever as if each thing were happening for the first time; they have no memory of anything that happened before. And the interruptions caused by the rhythm of the tides keep the repetition from becoming implacable. ... Now that I have grown accustomed to seeing a life that is repeated, I find my own irreparably haphazard. (75)

Only a few years prior to the 1940 publication of The *Invention of Morel*, Walter Benjamin took up similar questions regarding "the destinies of men and images." Culminating his ideas in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin, in the polemic of his essay, plumbs the same fascination and anxiety that Bioy explores fictionally in *Morel*. At the heart of the inquiry for Benjamin and, I think also for Bioy, is the erosion, through the technology of film, of the concept of authenticity from the domain of aesthetics, an erosion that Benjamin sees as contributing to the loss of what he called the art work's "aura," a loss that derives in part from the threat that reproduction poses to authenticity and thus to the authority that the concept of "original" contains.[2] Both texts can be located in the discourse of cinema and photography and its ontological concern with authenticity, for while Benjamin's and Bioy's attitude

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[2] Benjamin pondered the effect of reproduction on the concept of uniqueness: "The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (223). His idea of aura is bound up with uniqueness (authenticity), which is in turn bound up with authority: "Confronted with its manual reproduction ..., the original (work of art) preserved all its authority; not so vis à vis technical reproduction.... What is really jeopardized (through mechanical reproduction) ... is the authority of the object" (222-223). Unlike mass produced prints of paintings, forgeries (manual as opposed to mechanical reproduction) of paintings do not diminish the authority of the originals (rather in a sense they enhance it).

toward the loss of authenticity is ambivalent, both writers nonetheless see a profound change not only in art but also human consciousness that is wrought by the loss. That I use the word "loss" is no accident, since it seems to me that Bioy and especially, of course, Benjamin view the erasure of authenticity with a certain nostalgia, as a kind of fall from innocence, and as such their rhetoric can be located in that of literary modernism. But their understanding of the aesthetic move from *production* to *reproduction* verges on the postmodern. As Douglas Crimp says with regard to the disruption of aesthetics of postmodern art,

> through reproductive technology postmodernist art dispenses with the aura. The fiction of the creating subject gives way to the frank confiscation, quotation, excerptation, accumulation and repetition of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity and presence ... are undermined. (53)

Benjamin's contention is well-known: mass reproducibility is consistent with a "mass consciousness" that in turn is consonant with the "aesthetics" of fascism. But he seems also to glimpse, or at least point to, another potential when he speaks of "the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage" (223) that accompanies the loss of the aura in the medium of film.[3] It is the attitude towards this "liquidation" that seems to be at issue in *The Invention of Morel*.

For Bioy's invention of Morel's invention is a hyperbolic, hypothetical extension of the problem posed to art and the creation of art by the existence of film. To Benjamin film suggested a perplexing hybridity in "its tendency to promote the mutual penetration of art and science." He goes on to say that "of a screened behavioral item ... it is difficult to say which is more fascinating, its artistic value or its value for science. To demonstrate the identity of the artistic and scientific uses of photography which heretofore usually were separated will be one of the revolutionary functions of film" (238). In Bioy's story technology and art compete as they do for us in filmic representation. Morel, it seems, is a scientist, but one who is involved in aesthetic arranging, for he has made an aesthetic (as well

[3] Similarly in his essay "The Storyteller ...," Benjamin glimpses a positive potential in the "end of storytelling." He states: "the act of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out. This, however, is a process that has been going on for a long time. And nothing would be more fatuous than to want to see in it merely a 'symptom of decay,' let alone a "modern" symptom. It is, rather, only a concomitant symptom of the secular productive forces of history, a concomitant that has quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech and at the same time is making it possible to see a new beauty in what is vanishing" (87).

as moral) choice in deciding how and when to film his subjects without their knowledge of his actions. The narrator, who recounts Morel's after-the-fact revelation to his group about his invention and project, divides the speech into two parts and passes judgment on Morel's oratory skills in the following way:

> Up to this point it was a repugnant and badly organized speech. Morel is a scientist, and he becomes more precise when he overlooks his personal feelings and concentrates on his own special field; then his style is still unpleasant, filled with technical words and vain attempts to achieve a certain oratorical force, but at least it is clearer. (60)

At a later point he interrupts his retelling to interject this commentary: "Morel's style is unpleasant, with a liberal sprinkling of technical terms, and ... it attempts, vainly, to achieve a certain grandiloquence. Its banality is obvious" (63). The narrator's criticism of Morel's ability to discuss his invention is in keeping with what Bourdieu notes about so-called "virtuoso" photographers when they speak about their work. They, he says, "most often juxtapose a vague aesthetic discourse with precise technical language." But unlike the narrator who dismisses Morel as affecting grandiloquence, Bourdieu interprets the competing discourses that appear in the language of the virtuosos as occurring "less in order to conform to the distinction of the noble and the trivial than because they are unable to provide a precise description of their activity" (132).

The conflict between science and art and literature runs through the narrative of *Morel*, with the narrator, as an advocate of Malthus and his doctrines, showing a predilection for the scientific while constantly "regressing" to the "art" of narrative (his diary) and visual depiction (his flower portrait).[4] But in the discourse of film, the question of art and science is linked to the question of (re)production and the creative act. As Bourdieu further notes, there is a perceived "ambiguity of the photographic act, situated half-way between being a creative act and a manufacturing operation" (139). Where on this continuum do Morel and his machine belong? As he himself states "To make living reproductions, I need living transmitters. I do not create life" [my emphasis] (63), suggesting that he is a technician, or recorder of reality. As Lisa Block de Behar observes, Morel's invention

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[4] Suzanne Jill Levine discusses the dichotomy between science and literature in *Morel*, asserting that the intrusion of the library upon the scientific adventure "reveals the text's progressive awareness (from Wells to Bioy) of its own textuality" (20). She further states that books and the library "'interfere' with the scientific content" (18), and that the narrator essentially disapproves of all literary works (22).

doesn't invent; rather it conserves (75), but she later asserts that Bioy seems to show that films *create* history as much as they reproduce it (90). Critics have noted that Morel's week-long recording session echoes the seven-day creation schema of Genesis,[5] and Morel, through his filming, assumes a God-like position of control in relation to his creation that is consistent with the presumed agency of authorship and the creation of art. Indeed, the narrator invests Morel with a kind of *übermensch* mentality when he says that he

> must have a very overbearing and audacious conscience, which could be confused with a lack of conscience; but such a monstrosity seems to be in keeping with the man who, following his own idea, organizes a collective death and determines, of his own accord, the common destiny of all his friends. (82)

But if Morel is playing God, he is a post-modern deity who can only re-present what already is. When it becomes clear to the narrator that the subject must die in order to enter the eternity of the projected images, he sees Morel's act as one of love for Faustine and declares his approval: "Faustine's beauty deserves that madness, that tribute, that crime. ... And now I see Morel's act as something sublime" (87). This suggests an aestheticization of Faustine; that Faustine is being (re)created as a work of art through Morel's lens. What happens to Faustine's aura, then, is complicated. Does Morel's machine destroy the aura of its natural object by reproducing it, or does it preserve, enhance, even create the aura that surrounds the art work known as Faustine? Faustine is repeatedly reproduced through the continual "rebroadcasting" of her film loop. Is Faustine or Faustine's image degraded through the reproduction? Once again the questions are bound up in issues of authenticity and authority as they relate to the medium of film. Certainly for the narrator there is no "real" Faustine, or rather there is no "Copy," because each Faustine is as "authentic" as the one that preceded her. For the narrator there are only copies, each one as "real" as the last. This, in effect, is the conclusion he eventually comes to when he gives up on positing an "originating" Faustine to supply meaning to the "image."

Benjamin speculated on "whether the very invention of photography ha(s) not transformed the entire notion of art" (229) with regard to the question of authenticity. Bourdieu, in discussing the concern about originality that the medium of photography provokes, states that:

[5] See Dowling; and Snook's "Boundaries of the Self."

> If photographic aesthetes in particular are keen to challenge this idea (of originality), it is not primarily because the existence of multiple prints strips photography of the 'aura' attached to unique work. While forgeries and copies do not deprive the original painting of its uniqueness, and even serve to underline it, the proliferation of identical photographs constitutes a uniform sense in which all works are of equal worth; the proliferation of works of comparable style destroys the originality of the style which they are imitating because nothing —or apparently nothing—prevents the copy from equaling the model. (137)

Here Bourdieu calls into question the whole concept of originality as does Morel when he makes the following statement regarding his "creations": "If we grant consciousness, and all that distinguishes us from objects, to the persons who surround us, we shall have no valid reason to deny it to the persons created by my machinery" (62). Morel is telling us what Bourdieu observes: that there is "apparently nothing that prevents the copy from equaling the model."

Benjamin saw a connection between the loss of aura and uniqueness for the art object and the loss of the individual. In place of the work of art, its reproduction; in place of the individual, the image. Instead of insuring continuance, reproduction, ironically, threatens it (Behar 87), despite the perception of the masses that filmic images produced through lenses are associated with "uniqueness and permanence" while images "seen by the unarmed eye" are connected with "transitoriness and reproducibility" (Benjamin 225). Benjamin's ironic fear about diminishment through multiplication is shared by the narrator in *Morel*, who demonstrates a paranoia about reproduction, especially in his fear of uncontrolled population growth (Dowling 60),[6] but also, before he reaches his accommodation with them, to images. Immediately preceding Morel's revelation, the narrator has an uncanny remembrance that the hall of mirrors (one of which he is standing in) was historically a famous place of torture (57). Multiple images are torturous in the challenge they pose to the uniqueness of the originating subject, a torture especially acute for one who has declared his independent subjectivity by seeking hermitage on a remote island.

Photography induces a sense of the schizoid in the observer of the photograph; a sense of estrangement from the self; an uncanny

[6] "The masses" are an important thematic concern in Benjamin's work and many other modernist texts (see Tratner). In Morel the narrator exhibits a disdain for the masses appropriate for someone who seeks isolation on a deserted island. But his solipsism, or lack of audience, is, predictably, untenable. One way to read his relation to the images is as a compromise in his problematic relationship to the masses.

sense of the fictive status of the autonomous subject and its agency.[7] Benjamin's remarks about film actors allude to this felt sense of the deconstructed subject. In his discussion about the difference between stage actors and film actors he writes that "the audience's identification with the (film) actor is really an identification with the camera" (230). He quotes Pirandello as saying:

> The (silent) film actor feels as if in exile—exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice, and the noises caused by moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence. ... The projector will play with his shadow before the public, and he himself must be content to play before the camera. (231)

Benjamin comments on the above: "For the first time—and this is the effect of film—man has to operate with his whole living person, yet forgoing its aura. For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it" (231). And later he continues: "The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, as Pirandello describes it, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror. But now the reflected image has become separable..." (232-231).

This dilemma seems to be played out literally in *Morel*, as the existences of the images, or the "ghosts" as the narrator calls them, come and go with the caprice of the tides. The bodies that Morel uses as "transmitters" literally, to refer to Pirandello's words, "evaporate" and "lose their corporeality." In fact the whole island is dying, presumably as a result of being photographed by Morel's machine, which suggests that the island is a kind of "whited sepulchre," functioning in the kitsch image that Morel has imposed over a rotten underside exhibited only when tidal changes stop the machines from projecting.[8] The narrator makes note of the folk belief that cameras

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[7] Barthes illustrates this sense of estrangement and lost control when he discusses his reaction to seeing a photograph of himself that he cannot remember having been taken: "This distortion between certainty and oblivion gave me a kind of vertigo.... I went to the photographer's show (the one who had taken the unremembered photo) as to a police investigation, to learn at last what I no longer knew about myself" (85).

[8] In "The Storyteller" Benjamin makes an analogy between a proverb and a ruin in order to make a distinction between a proverb and a story. His distinction seems to have explanatory power for the status of Morel's images: think of the proverb "as an ideogram of a story. A proverb, one might say, is a ruin which stands on the site of an old story and in which a moral twines about a happening like ivy around a wall" (108).

capture souls (82), but interestingly Morel's photographed subjects manifest the opposite of the feared result. The *body is* what is lost as a result of being photographed—it is killed into art and becomes, in a sense, Barthes's "flat death."[9] Despite Morel's assertions and the narrator's suspicions, it is never clear what happens to the "soul," or whether or what kind of consciousness the images possess. It may be that, like a text, the images have no meaning unless someone is there to "read" them, something which the narrator does over and over again. What is clear is that the kind of aestheticized immortality offered through Morel's machine involves sacrificing the body. It is interesting, in light of the narrator's chronic voyeurism and Morel's megalomania, to think of Benjamin's observation about the aestheticized politics of fascism: "Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, *now is one for itself.* Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order" [my emphasis] (244).

Morel depicts a scenario where destruction is a prerequisite to immortality, although this destruction is not apocalyptic—neither in the sense of finality or revelation. As quoted above, the narrator describes the existence of the images as one where actions are repeated without any awareness by the subject of the repetition. But as I stated before, it is unclear what sort of consciousness the images have. This unanswered question serves to reconfigure the narrator's, and perhaps the reader's, conceptions of consciousness and agency. This reconfiguration takes place in relation to two other important themes in the story: the question of death and the question of audience and textuality.

For Morel is very much a story about texts and how texts are activated through audiences. As a fugitive, the narrator shows disdain for "invasions by the hordes of increased populations" (70) and seeks isolation. Thus his first reaction to discovering others on what he had thought to be a deserted island is fear as well as annoyance. He makes a statement appropriate to the age of paranoia: "For my

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[9] Despite Barthes' distinction between film and photograph and his emphasis on stasis in the latter, his ideas about filmic representation seem important here. He tells this story: "In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe which has already occurred.* Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe" (96) [my emphasis]. This description characterizes the narrator's relationship to Faustine. She may in fact even be dead, but this is irrelevant. The sequence of events can only exist for him as "the emanation of a past reality" (Barthes 88).

own safety, I must renounce—once and for all—any help from my fellow men" (19). Because he is a fugitive, he takes care not to be caught in the gaze of others, particularly Faustine's. Yet he is never completely comfortable in the exclusive position of voyeur. He is given a paradoxical warning by the rug merchant before he goes to Morel's island: "There is only one possible place for a fugitive like you—it is an uninhabited island, but a human being cannot live there" (10). While the rug merchant is referring to the mysterious disease that afflicts visitors to the island, metaphorically his statement is reminiscent of Freud's condemnation of voluntary isolation as a means of avoiding the pain of human relationships: it is not a sustainable strategy,[10] as the narrator finds out. His reactions are complicated. After all, the gazer, in a sense, controls. As much as he fears the gaze of others, he desires it because it is in the gaze that one lives. And still the gaze of others cheats him of the annihilation he wants; the annihilation of which he is terrified; that must occur if he is to be recreated as a work of art whose existence can only be made meaningful through a gaze.

Almost immediately upon his arrival the narrator is tempted by Faustine to renounce his renunciation and seek companionship. He tells us that "if she looked at me for a moment, spoke to me only once, I would derive from those simple acts the sort of stimulus a man obtains from friends, from relatives, and, most of all, from the woman he loves" (19). And later he contemplates the possibility of "her glance, enlarging my little world" (24), indicating that his contemplation of her alone is insufficient. He too needs to be seen, although ironically he hopes that "surely she will not judge me by my appearance alone" (19). Moreover he feels compelled to construct and describe his actions as though he has benefit of an audience; as though his actions can only have meaning if he imagines that someone is watching them: "As if I were involved in an argument with someone who insisted that the skylight was not real ..., I went outside to see whether it was really there" (16). When Faustine does not take note of his flower portrait, he remarks, "since I cannot escape, I continue with this monologue, which now is unjustifiable" (30), suggesting that speaking for himself alone is an incomprehensible act.

[10] In *Civilization and It Discontents*, Freud writes, "Against the suffering which may come upon one from human relationships the readiest safeguard is voluntary isolation, keeping oneself aloof from other people....Against the dreaded external world one can only defend oneself by some kind of turning away from it, if one intends to solve the task by oneself. There is, indeed, another and better path: that of becoming a member of the human community" (24).

When he speaks of his embarrassment at not being able to understand Morel's machinery he explains his emotions thus: "It was as if someone were looking, as if I were trying to cover up my embarrassment or shame" (77). His attempt to superimpose his image onto Morel's film is again conceived in terms of another spectator: "I performed well: a casual observer would not suspect that I am not part of the original scene" (88). But, conversely, he admires and yet is baffled by the actions of Morel's group because they seem to be acting for no one but themselves: "without any audience ... they are enduring discomfort, even risking their lives, in an attempt to be *original*" [my emphasis] (22).

That performance can't exist without audience suggests that the autonomy of the subject is illusory; that the narrator's position as recluse is ontologically invalid. Margaret Snook describes *Morel* as being about "the subject's struggle and failed quest for independent selfhood" (Boundaries 109). Even such a subject-centered statement as "I am a writer who has always wanted to live on a lonely island" (54) is only conceivable for the narrator as an imagined conversation with Faustine. That his statement concerns writing is significant, since it is the narrator's wish to be able to exert control and define existence through writing. According to Snook, the narrator shows an "awareness of the function of grammatical or linguistic logic in establishing the parameters of the self" (Boundaries 113). A diary is, after all, in many ways an attempt to write a life and often an attempt to write "the truth," which is in turn an attempt at control. As the narrator says, "writing helps me to control myself" (80). But his ability to write the truth is undermined repeatedly by his own reversals and, unbeknown to him it would seem, the editor's intrusions into his text. In fact the movement of the story leads from writing to *being written* in the narrator's relinquishing of authorship (the position of recluse author) to join the existence of the images. There is even the suggestion that writing interferes with action: "Now I shall stop writing in order to concentrate, serenely, on finding the way to stop these motors" (79) as though the consciousness of acting prevents acting. And he also hints that writing and the contemplation that accompanies it is enervating as he tells us (hopefully), "perhaps writing down my idea will make it lose its force" (81).

Importantly this movement towards "being written" parallels his abandoning the hope he places in the idea of the "original" Faustine. He reluctantly admits that "away from this island Faustine is lost with the gestures and the dreams of an alien past," but then he comes to the more hopeful conclusion that if he abandons "his uneasy hopes

of going to find Faustine, (he) can grow accustomed to the idea of spending life ... in seraphic contemplation of her" (87). Fautine's meaning is no longer dependent on the concept of an original Faustine. As Lee Dowling points out, "the fugitive has no more access to (an original) Faustine ... than the reader has to the fugitive, who is, it appears, on the way to realizing his own fictional status" (60). [The narrator ejaculates at one point: "So I was dead! The thought delighted me. (I felt proud, I felt as if I were a character in a novel!)" (47).] Dowling further suggests that the status of the images is comparable to a Derridean sense of writing in that they constitute meaning that is neither fully present or absent; they are "traces" (61). It is the narrator's acceptance of this state that finally allows his story to be told. Immortality—the telling of the story—is based on his death as author and his birth as text.[11] As Benjamin says in his essay "The Storyteller," a life only becomes a "story" at death: "this authority (of death) is at the very source of the story" (94).

A concern with death is linked not only to issues of presence and absence but also to questions of order and chaos, the latter concerns particularly important for the notion of art that is put forth in the story. For one way to view the kind of art that Morel's machine produces is, as I mentioned before, as *kitsch.* Morel's machine projects a clear pool with living fish, even though the "real" (narrator's) pool is fouled and the fish are dead.[12] Morel's machine projects a pleasant and, most importantly, ordered and safe existence. The narrator, after watching the film repeatedly, makes note of how disgracefully haphazard his own life seems in comparison (75). It is no surprise that the narrator, who originally puts up resistance to

[11] Earlier in the story Morel juxtaposes his method of achieving immortality with that of the man Claude who has been excused from the experiment. Claude is working on a novel because "he thinks it will bring him immortality and therefore he does not wish to interrupt his work" (59). Morel makes no judgment about Claude's activity, but the story does seem to set up a comparison between writing and filming. Barthes speaks of the distinction between language and photography in terms of authentication. "In the Photograph" he writes, "the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation (89)... No writing can give me this certainty (of the photograph). It is the misfortune (but also perhaps the voluptuous pleasure) of language not to be able to authenticate itself" (85). And also: "the Photograph... cannot *say* what it lets us see" (100). In some ways, then, it seems that in film, according to Barthes, there is more plenitude than in writing.

[12] It is interesting that here the narrator makes one of the few mentions of a "real' Venezuela prior to the last page. Of the dead fish he say that "it reminds me of the beaches in my country, where huge quantities of fish, dead and alive, emerge from the water to contaminate the air, and receive a hasty burial at the hands of the outraged populace" (16).

Morel's invention, is eventually "seduced" by it, given the disdain he shows for the biological: his contempt for biological reproduction and the "hordes"; and his preference for a theory of immortality that would eliminate the body. The superimposition of his image over Morel's images is one way of reestablishing a performative relationship with others without the messy disorder of biology.

In this way Bioy's story reads as a cautionary tale of Benjamin's fascist aesthetics, and yet the narrative's position is not so clear. The description of Morel's images as controlled, aestheticized reality might be consistent with Benjamin's warnings. The narrator says that "life will be a repository for death. But even then the image will not be alive; objects that are essentially new will not exist for it. It will know only what it has already thought or felt, or the possible transpositions of those thoughts or feelings." But then the narrator reverses himself by adding: "The fact that we cannot understand anything outside of time and space may perhaps suggest that our life is not appreciably different from the survival to be obtained by this machine" (72). Ironically the narrator relinquishes the illusory control of the writer for the predictability of the filmed subject and finds himself "happy to know that I depend on Haynes, Dora, Alec, Stoever, Irene, and the others (even on Morel!)" (88).

A nearly comic moment in *Morel* occurs when the narrator commits what he refers to as an "imprudence":

> I put my left hand in front of the receiver; I turned on the projector and my hand appeared, just my hand, making the lazy movements it made when I photographed it. Now it is like any other object in the museum. ... In a story, that hand would be a terrible threat for the protagonist. *In* reality—what harm can it do. [my emphasis] (81)

It is interesting to juxtapose this scene against a passage in Benjamin's "Storyteller" where he writes about the role of hands in relaying a story:

> The role of the hand in production has become more modest, and the place it filled in storytelling lies waste. (After all, storytelling, in its sensory aspect, is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling the hand plays a part which supports what is expressed in a hundred ways with its gestures trained by work.) [108]

In light of Benjamin's comments, the narrator's floating, emasculated hand (he later dreams that it breaks off) takes on an interesting significance. The hand in respect to narration has lost its potency; it is no longer a "threat in reality." That it is another piece for "the museum" suggests that it is art but that it is dead and without power. It is merely an object to be catalogued, and it no longer has an

organic function in the narrator's tale. The floating hand is a signal that the narrator is no longer a traditional storyteller, and that the narrative is no longer a traditional "story."

But how are we to read the "museum" in *Morel*? Douglas Crimp says that the museum has historically been a site where heterogeneity has been denied; a place where there is faith in the possibility of order (49). The very concept of the museum, then, is *kitsch*. But Crimp sees the photograph as posing a problem to this principle of heterogeneity. "So long as a photograph was merely a *vehicle* by which art objects entered the imaginary museum, a certain coherence obtained. But once photography itself enters, an object among others, heterogeneity is reestablished at the heart of the museum; it pretensions of knowledge are doomed" (51) Morel's remarks on his museum are edifying in this regard: "The word museum, which I use to designate this house, is a survival of the time when I was working on plans for my invention, without knowing how it would eventually turn out. At the time I thought I would build large albums or museums, both public and private, filled with these images" (67). Morel does not comment further, but he seems to imply that his images are no longer fit subjects for museums or albums; they are no longer a collection of catalogueable oddities. He does not specify how they differ from what he expected, but in light of Crimp's remarks, we may think that the images are not merely reproductions of objects but photographs in Crimp's disruptive sense. From this standpoint they are not kitsch; not copies, but instead images that disrupt the boundaries between the "authentic" and "copy."

But what do we make of the closing paragraphs, where the "real" Venezuela and a "real" woman are introduced to the reader and the narrator expresses his desire for someone to make "a machine that can assemble disjoined presences" (90)? He says he cannot suppress the patriotic emotions he feels for a Venezuela he knows to be corrupt, and yet he must "combat" those feelings. Why? Perhaps his desire to be joined with Faustine is "an attempt to ... restore primordial boundlessness" (Snook, Boundaries 111), which suggests his desire is a restatement of an old, "original" problem. While he has given up on finding an original Faustine, he is not content to live with what he views as merely a projection. He yearns for the genuine; a restoration of the aura. For the desire for joined presences is certainly a desire for wholeness.

And yet he says he is fighting the feelings of nostalgia that the above interpretation suggests he is entertaining. Perhaps it is also possible to understand his statement in terms of audience. Viewing

alone, as an act of epistemological observation, is not enough; he must also *be* viewed if he is to become part of the narrative that constitutes the reproduced story. He too must be "projected," and play, as he says with discomfort at one point, "a dual role, that of actor and spectator" (80). In this we can see a repudiation of the aura as lost idyll and an assertion of what Benjamin called "modern man's legitimate claim to being reproduced" (234).

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