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AVELINO SALA


"Do Like Us, Be Different". PSJM

"The things you own end up owning you". Fight Club

The treatment of consumer society, mass media and marketing techniques in today's capitalist society, is a main focus in the projects by the artists called PSJM—like a real brand name—who work as a group. In recent years they have stood out among other artists of their generation by addressing the same social topics, using insertion techniques into the real, approached through simulation, rather than parody.

Regarding the idea of parody, Fernando Castro Flórez states in his text *Everything is copied* (copyright) that "...within contemporary artistic practices it is difficult to find forms of resistance or semiotics: they are either poses of clear revolutionary decadence or gestures of cynicism..."¹. This is not the case with PSJM, who, immersed in a consumer society, look out from their watchtower to see how the human being behaves and how to make an insider critique on a system which absorbs everything, like it or not.

Already in their project *Solo para las masas* (*Only for the Masses*, an exhibition curated by PSJM) artists with similar concerns and discourses about this topic were included. In the introductory text, PSJM reasoned: "...bringing culture to the public, to the largest audience possible. Perhaps many people forget that without an audience, there is no art; the reader, the viewer, the public is actively involved in




the construction of the work of art, and without the act of reception/consumption, the cultural product is incomplete...². This project is a clear example of the notion that the work is incomplete without an audience: it is a shop that sells one brand of objects and products, and the cycle is only closed when these are consumed, that is, when they are bought. And in order for these objects to be bought, they must be visible—the objects through the message. They are shown and, furthermore, as Baudrillard says, “we are loved by the object”³.

OBJECTS LOVE US

Publicity: The advertising message, which is pure connotation, is the quintessential component of consumer society. It surrounds, complements, and broadens the meaning of the object. It is not only its discourse: through omnipresence, it has become a consumer object. For Baudrillard, advertising is not information, or even a subliminal conditioning for purchasing products, although this does not mean that it is ineffective. Advertising looks for us at every moment and in every place: the product is sold, but the publicity is given for free, regardless of class.

The discourse of advertising, whether accepted or rejected, gives us membership to this or that social group and also responds to the neurotic question of desire. Although Lipovetsky qualifies that the social group is no longer important, it is rather the identity, an image of personal promotion, which matters.

In the film *Fight Club*, directed by David Fincher, Jack, the main character played by Edward Norton, ponders multinational corporations and identity in a moment of extreme insomnia: “When deep space exploration ramps up, it’ll be the corporations that name everything, the IBM Stellar Sphere, the Microsoft Galaxy, Planet Starbucks...” But, later, he will question his own personality: “...Like so many others, I had become a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct. If I saw something clever, I had to buy it... I



flipped through catalogues and asked myself, what kind of dining set defines me as a person?" In the past, we looked at porn magazines, now we look at interior design collections.

In this sense, PSJM does not just set up a "shop" in the strict sense of the word, but considers the "advertising" of the products produced as a fundamental part of the work itself. Therefore, they design an entire advertising campaign.

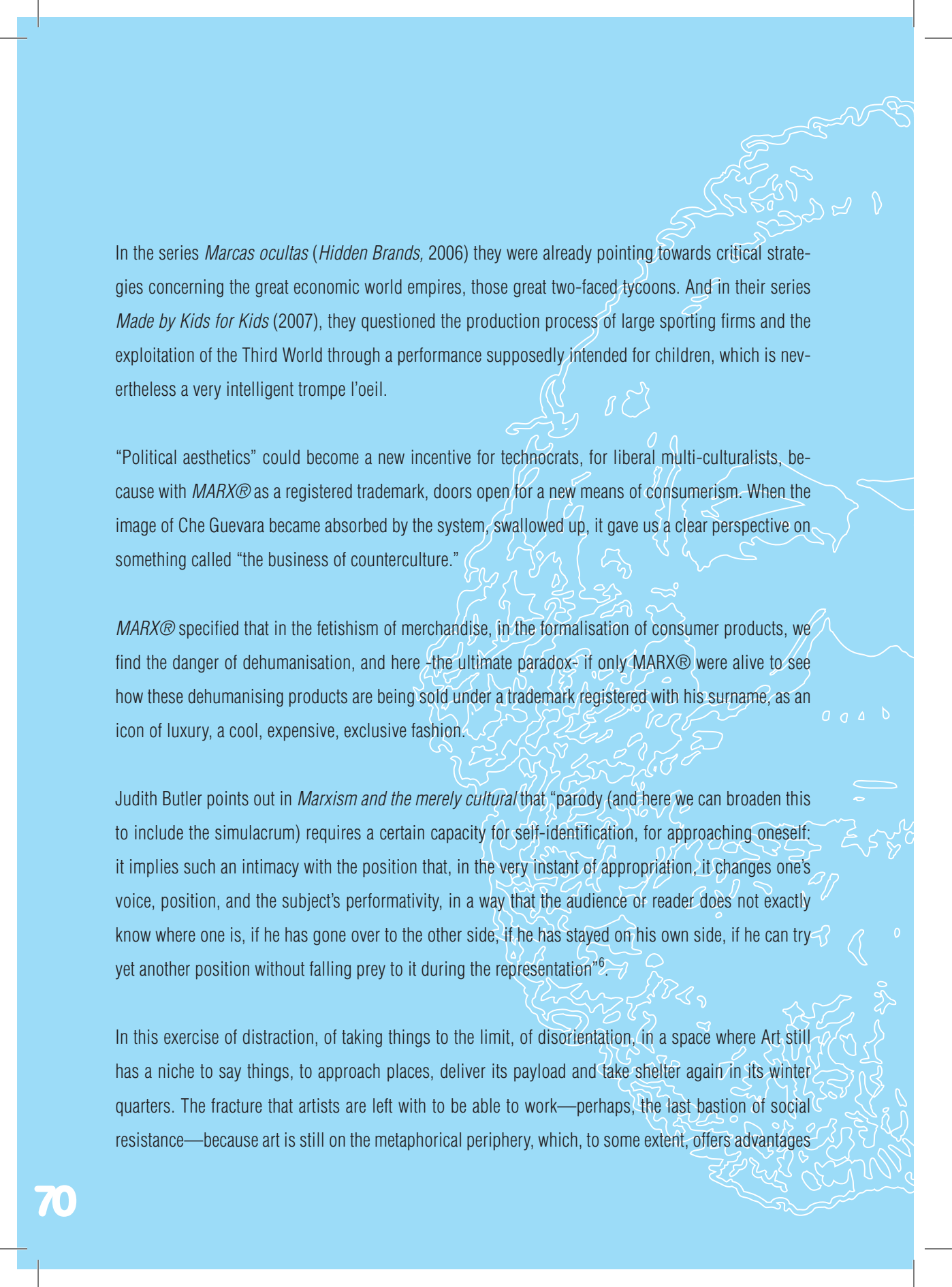
An advert for television, a poster campaign to be displayed in the city, a catalogue of products... Marketing techniques at work for art. An art along the lines of what Nicolas Bourriaud has described as being immersed in a aesthetic leaning towards the relational; a line of work which expands in a rhizomatic way, in the museum, in the street, on the web.

OTHER FORMS OF REPRESENTATION

In such fast-paced times -for Lipovetsky⁴ the period we're living in is a time of urgency, immediacy, of zero time, of the instantaneous- such an itemised analysis made by visual artists of our social and contextual reality, leads us to believe that they are meddling in the sociological arena and, consequently, in the areas of philosophy and politics as well.

Slavoj Zizek specifies about an idea of "political philosophy", which is, in all its versions, a kind of defensive formation, and that today we are witnessing a new kind of political denial: the post-modern post-political, that does not only "repress the political, but excludes it, with greater efficiency"⁵.

Perhaps PSJM, having given thought to these concepts and formulated a kind of "political aesthetics" that, in different versions, denies the political, trivialises it, or leads it towards a communist iconographic space: the registered trademark.



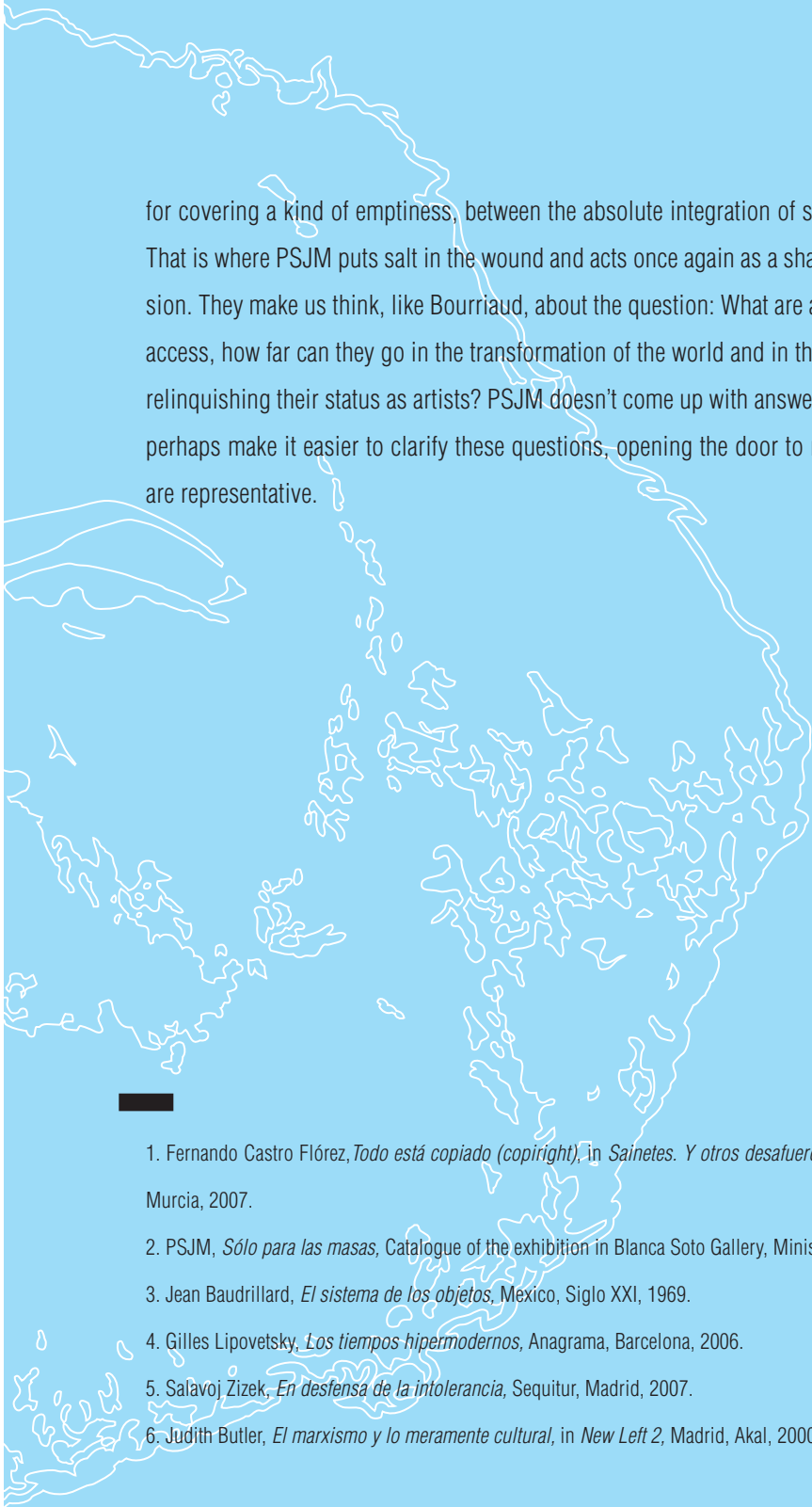
In the series *Marcas ocultas* (*Hidden Brands*, 2006) they were already pointing towards critical strategies concerning the great economic world empires, those great two-faced tycoons. And in their series *Made by Kids for Kids* (2007), they questioned the production process of large sporting firms and the exploitation of the Third World through a performance supposedly intended for children, which is nevertheless a very intelligent *trompe l'oeil*.

“Political aesthetics” could become a new incentive for technocrats, for liberal multi-culturalists, because with *MARX®* as a registered trademark, doors open for a new means of consumerism. When the image of Che Guevara became absorbed by the system, swallowed up, it gave us a clear perspective on something called “the business of counterculture.”

MARX® specified that in the fetishism of merchandise, in the formalisation of consumer products, we find the danger of dehumanisation, and here -the ultimate paradox- if only *MARX®* were alive to see how these dehumanising products are being sold under a trademark registered with his surname, as an icon of luxury, a cool, expensive, exclusive fashion.

Judith Butler points out in *Marxism and the merely cultural* that “parody (and here we can broaden this to include the simulacrum) requires a certain capacity for self-identification, for approaching oneself: it implies such an intimacy with the position that, in the very instant of appropriation, it changes one’s voice, position, and the subject’s performativity, in a way that the audience or reader does not exactly know where one is, if he has gone over to the other side, if he has stayed on his own side, if he can try yet another position without falling prey to it during the representation”⁶.

In this exercise of distraction, of taking things to the limit, of disorientation, in a space where Art still has a niche to say things, to approach places, deliver its payload and take shelter again in its winter quarters. The fracture that artists are left with to be able to work—perhaps, the last bastion of social resistance—because art is still on the metaphorical periphery, which, to some extent, offers advantages



for covering a kind of emptiness, between the absolute integration of society and the space outside it. That is where PSJM puts salt in the wound and acts once again as a sharpshooter, with exquisite precision. They make us think, like Bourriaud, about the question: What are artists capable of, what can they access, how far can they go in the transformation of the world and in the evolution of their role without relinquishing their status as artists? PSJM doesn't come up with answers, but considers strategies that perhaps make it easier to clarify these questions, opening the door to new realities, as critical as they are representative.

1. Fernando Castro Flórez, *Todo está copiado (copyright)*, in *Sainetes. Y otros desafueros del arte contemporáneo*, CENDEAC, Murcia, 2007.

2. PSJM, *Sólo para las masas*, Catalogue of the exhibition in Blanca Soto Gallery, Ministerio de Cultura, Madrid, 2004.

3. Jean Baudrillard, *El sistema de los objetos*, Mexico, Siglo XXI, 1969.

4. Gilles Lipovetsky, *Los tiempos hipermodernos*, Anagrama, Barcelona, 2006.

5. Slavoj Žižek, *En defensa de la intolerancia*, Sequitur, Madrid, 2007.

6. Judith Butler, *El marxismo y lo meramente cultural*, in *New Left 2*, Madrid, Akal, 2000.