FIGHTING INDIFFERENCE: LOOKING AT WORLD RESPONSE TO THE HOLOCAUST WITH ELIE WIESEL

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"The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference."

—Elie Wiesel

There exists a common misconception that the terms "World War II" and "The Holocaust" refer to the same period in history. Though historical analysis might reveal that the Second World War had its roots in what were the early stages of the Holocaust, that which made the war worthy of its worldly status did not truly begin until a number of years later. By the time the United States and its allies finally launched a full scale attack against the Fascist powers in 1944, most of the genocide that the Nazis ultimately committed had already taken place, and many of the death camps had long since closed down because there was simply no more killing to be done. What exactly was it, then, that took the world so long to respond? And if the international community was truly unaware of what was taking place (a theory which has long since been abandoned), why did the Europeans who were aware of but not subject to Nazi persecution sit back and watch?

In his speech "The Perils of Indifference," Elie Wiesel addresses the question that underlies any discussion of the world's response to the atrocities of the Holocaust: "What is indifference?" (2). Essentially, his question raises two separate but equally important issues: What motivates indifference, and what are its consequences? Martha C. Nussbaum and Bruce Robbins, in their respective essays "Compassion and Terror" and "The Sweatshop Sublime," present the typical contemporary answers to these questions. It seems worthwhile, however, to take heed of the words of wisdom that Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, might have to offer given his experience. Analyzing the prevailing approaches to these questions, from the perspective of two significantly different generations, ought to give deeper insight into the concept of indifference, how it might explain the global response to the Holocaust, and, perhaps more importantly, how it relates to the world today.

Nussbaum expresses, in part, the more modern view on the causes of indifference in her essay "Compassion and Terror." Though she directly discusses the concept of compassion in the context of the events surrounding *September 11th*, her particular thoughts on the causes of this emotion are of equal relevance with regard to indifference. Commenting on why Americans did not respond emotionally to the plight of Rwandans with the same intensity as they did following *September 11th*, she writes, "suffering Rwandans could not be seen as part of the larger 'us' for whose fate we trembled" (17). Nussbaum is of the belief that, among other causal factors, a sense

of connectivity and commonality is required between the victim and the onlooker for compassion to be aroused within the onlooker. If this sense is lacking, the result will be a relative lack of compassion, which is one important element of indifference.

Bruce Robbins, author of the essay "The Sweatshop Sublime," would argue against Nussbaum's point that a degree of closeness is required for any feeling of compassion to develop. Compassion, Robbins claims, can be aroused regardless of differences between the victim and the onlooker; it is simply the ability of compassion to affect action that is affected by the degree of closeness. One might experience a "moment of consciousness," as Robbins describes it, in which one grasps the complexity of the division of labor and the inequality it engenders, but "this moment of consciousness will not be converted into action" (84). While compassion or pity can be felt for people no matter their nationality and social status, the crux of the issue is a different "tyranny of the close over the distant" (86). The problem, ultimately, as Robbins explains, is "that global commitments can emerge more or less organically and continuously only from local, personal, familial commitments" (91). Though we may sympathize with the plight of others, our willingness to assist them will only be an outgrowth of more personal, tangible issues that we have committed ourselves to resolving. Thus, in Robbins's terms it would seem indifference is not a lack of compassion, but rather a lack of action.

Though these are two very distinct aspects of the definition of indifference, it is important to note that either of these elements could produce the same effect. A lack of compassion will never lead to action, and compassion without action is of no help to the sufferer. Despite their differences, Robbins and Nussbaum can at least agree on what causes indifference: a certain rift between the onlooker and the victim. A sense that the victim is different or distant ultimately leads to a lack of compassion (in Nussbaum's definition) or a lack of action (in Robbins' definition), both of which leave the victim helpless.

Wiesel, representing the approach to indifference of generations past that have learned from history and experience, could respond to this idea with several pieces of contradictory evidence. Most notably, how would the citizens of Poland and Germany who claimed to bear no hatred for the victims of Nazi persecution fit into this definition? Were these not their fellow citizens? Yet so many of them did not speak up or act and went on living their lives showing no signs of sympathy for the suffering of others in their midst. In the city of Lublin, Poland, people literally lived with a death camp in their backyard; if indifference can exist under such circumstances, then how can we define it as a product of distance? Of course Nussbaum might retort that perhaps these people did feel compassion, though they did not show it, and Robbins would say that the lack of action in this situation stemmed from a fear for their own lives. If this is true, then Wiesel would want to know what there is to say for the response of the United States, which presumably was not afraid of the Nazis. While the argument of distance and difference might apply, does it still hold in the case of

the *St. Louis*, for instance? As Wiesel explains, the *St. Louis* was a ship that requested refuge in the U.S., among other countries, and "its human cargo—maybe 1,000 Jews—was turned back to Nazi Germany" (4). Given a blatant opportunity to prevent the suffering of one thousand people that were figuratively knocking at the country's door, the U.S. government sent them back with full knowledge of where it was sending them. Distance was most definitely not an issue, and one might argue that difference is not a factor when one is in direct contact with the victim. Then, according to Robbins and Nussbaum, why was the U.S. government so obviously indifferent?

One might be inclined to say that this question is irrelevant to Robbins's and Nussbaum's definitions of indifference altogether. It seems they are explaining the causes of indifference on the individual level, while Wiesel seeks to understand its causes on the national level. Yet even Robbins and Nussbaum equate these two realms. Though they are both clearly analyzing personal responses to certain issues, they frame their analyses in the context of discussions that can only be understood on a national level. Nussbaum wants to know what factors caused the response, or lack thereof, of Americans to the genocide in Rwanda. This question, while relevant on the individual level, only bears significance in the context of the national; no one could realistically expect the individual to affect the situation in Rwanda, whereas the collection of every individual response into what becomes the national one may have an impact. The same holds true with regards to Robbins's discussion of sweatshop labor. While it may be necessary to examine the causes of indifference on the individual level in order to fully understand the logic behind it, such an analysis is only important in that it leads to an understanding of the concept on a larger scale. Thus, the question that Wiesel poses about the U.S. government's response to the pleas of the *St. Louis* passengers is unequivocally relevant to Robbins's and Nussbaum's understandings of indifference on the individual level as well.

Wiesel, in attempting to decipher the causes of indifference, asks, "Is it necessary at times to practice it simply to keep one's sanity, live normally, enjoy a fine meal and a glass of wine, as the world around us experiences harrowing upheavals?" (2). Robbins, explaining the aftermath of the moment of consciousness of the division of labor, answers this question as directly as possible: "You have a cup of tea or coffee. You get dressed. Just as suddenly, just as shockingly, you are returned to yourself in all your everyday smallness" (85). The reason, according to Robbins, that compassion will not necessarily lead to action is because to worry about the division of labor that produced your shirt or cup of coffee means you will not be able to fully enjoy those things. Nussbaum agrees with this idea as well, commenting on our relative lack of compassion for things that do not affect us: "There are so many things closer to home to distract us, and these things are likely to be so much more thoroughly woven into our scheme of goals" (16). Essentially, Nussbaum is of the opinion that the capacities for concern we have for our own happiness and the happiness of others are mutually exclusive, and ultimately we have to choose one over the other. The fact that our

personal goals are a more immediate distraction and a more integral aspect of our daily lives prevents us from feeling concern for the suffering of others to the degree that we can or should. The consensus here seems to be that, if nothing else, indifference is the result of a very natural desire to maintain one's own happiness. This approach might help explain the response of the U.S. to the request of the *St. Louis* passengers: granting one group refuge might have inspired others to make a similar journey, thereby sparking an influx in immigration that would be easier for the government not to have to worry about or deal with. Indifference is a product of values that prioritize personal happiness over the greater good.

Having established the root cause of indifference, it seems appropriate to analyze its effects. Implicit within both Nussbaum's and Robbins's essays, in that they only discuss the causes of compassion and action, or lack thereof, is the widespread idea that lack of compassion and lack of action effectively leave the situation static and unchanged. According to Nussbaum, if we are not concerned for the fate of suffering Rwandans, then they will simply continue to suffer; according to Robbins, if we do not respond to the plight of sweatshop laborers, then their plight will remain. Wiesel, however, emphatically disputes this notion that indifference is merely neutral. He argues, "Indifference is always the friend of the enemy, for it benefits the aggressor-never his victim, whose pain is magnified when he or she feels forgotten" (3). The effect of indifference, in Wiesel's view, is twofold: it aids the oppressor by giving him the necessary means and the confidence to continue what he is doing, and it worsens the victim's suffering by diminishing his hope. The former effect is highlighted by the *St. Louis* incident in that the U.S. literally sent the Nazis one thousand more people to persecute and murder as a direct result of their indifference. This sheds light upon a very relevant distinction between the notion of lack of compassion and the notion of indifference: lack of compassion seems to imply neutrality as Robbins and Nussbaum would like to have it; something is missing, therefore no effect will be produced. Indifference, however, is an emotion in its own right; it is an inactively active response with real consequences that are rarely positive.

This important distinction captures within it a true understanding of the problem of indifference. It is not, as Nussbaum and Robbins seem to imply, a simple lack of compassion or action to complement compassion, both of which lead to the same result; rather, it is a helping hand to the oppressor. It is a truly active response. This being the case, it seems all the more necessary to directly deal with the issue by stopping it at the source. The driving force behind indifference is the one idea that Wiesel, Nussbaum, and Robbins all seem to be able to agree on: the need to ignore the plight of others in order to maintain one's own happiness. But given the already proven results of indifference, is it feasible to say that the gain in happiness one receives from being indifferent outweighs the consequences? Is our ability to enjoy trivial pleasures to a slightly greater degree more important than the suffering and lives

of so many? History has taught its lesson and offered its testimony; the only question that remains is whether we will take heed.

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MAGICAL MURALS

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> "The insistent sentimentalization of experience . . . is not new in New York. A preference for broad strokes, for the distortion and flattening of character and the reduction of events to narrative, has been for well over a hundred years the way the city presents itself."
>
> —Joan Didion

With its bright colors, rays of sun showering upon faces of influential leaders of different races, and inspiring slogans coined to stir the public to bridge the gap between races and socioeconomic divisions, a mural in the Soundview neighborhood of the South Bronx on 174th St. entitled *We Are Here to Awaken from the Illusion of Our Separateness* (Figs. 1-4) exemplifies a trend to create captivating and educational murals throughout New York City that deal with major socioeconomic and racial issues. The mural in the South Bronx gives the impression, even by virtue of its title alone, of a community with relatively surmountable social barriers between races and classes, in which "our separateness" is insignificant and the solution is to simply "awaken," by realizing that our differences are "an illusion"—one that, in reality, doesn't exist.

But taking a step back and viewing the community in which this mural is located leads one to a much less optimistic outlook on the future of social and racial equality than the mural would have one believe. According to a recent *New York Times* article, as of July 2006, Soundview, "long one of the city's poorest communities," doesn't have one bank in hundreds of blocks filled with housing projects; in contrast to the "illusion of our separateness" described on the mural, one resident is said to travel three miles twice a week to the closest bank in the neighboring town of White Plains (*NY Times*). The reality of Soundview is that it's "the city's top shopping area—for car thieves" (Venezia); it's an area "infested with crime and drugs" (Tran), and a neighborhood in which racial tensions found their breeding ground in 1999 when Amadou Diallo, an unarmed twenty-two-year-old black man, was shot dead by four white cops. While the mural in Soundview considers this apparent state of affairs a type of "illusion," the history of the neighborhood seems to render the mural the real illusion.

The proliferation of such murals, which tend to blur racial and socioeconomic riffs while celebrating that which New Yorkers share in common is what Joan Didion refers to, in her essay entitled "Sentimental Journeys," as a "sentimental narrative," a conception that "a reliance on certain magical gestures," often substituted for effective political action, can alter the destiny of a city (225, 279).

Didion traces the development of this narrative throughout New York City's history, as authored by the media and public officials. She claims that these officials tended to "obscure not only the city's actual tensions of race and class but also, more significantly, the civic and commercial arrangements that rendered those tensions irreconcilable" (280). Didion examines several social projects in the city, which received two kinds of publicity. Positive narratives focused on how the projects fostered racial and social blending. Negative narratives depicted the projects as flashpoints for crime. Both representations ignored the underlying issues of economic disparity and racial tension, which can lay the ground for violence and crime.

Didion points to the creation of Central Park as a part of this ongoing, obscuring sentimental narrative. While Frederick Olmstead, the park's creator, described it as a place which would "force into contact the good and the bad, the gentleman and the rowdy," he ignored the fact that these groups may not share the same interests, and "the extent to which the condition of being rich was predicated upon the continued neediness of a working class" (Didion 282, 283). In ignoring such crucial facts while at the same time emphasizing less realistic visions of the park, Olmstead was participating in the sentimental narrative of New York.

Didion analyzes specific instances of crime as the root of social problems; the touchstone example for Didion's essay is the well-known "Central Park Jogger" case of 1990, in which a young woman was gang-raped. According to Didion, the media presentation ignored the racial and social tensions that were the real root causes of the rape. It did so by presenting a "conflation of victim and city," in which "the crime's 'story' would be found, its lesson, its encouraging promise of narrative resolution" (260). Didion describes how the victim in this case, known by the public as "The Jogger," went unnamed in the press, and was instead used as a symbol for what John Gutfreund, the chairman of the company where the victim worked, described as "what makes this city so vibrant and so great" (quoted in Didion 260). On the other hand, her attackers were constantly named in order to show that "what was wrong with the city had been identified, and its names were Raymond Santana, Yusef Salaam" (270). According to William R. Taylor of SUNY, whom Didion cites, in publicizing crimes this way the media "localized suffering in particular moments . . . confined it to particular occasions [and] smoothed over differences," thereby ignoring the more basic underlying tensions that allowed for such occasions (284).

Public murals in New York City comprise a new chapter of this ongoing narrative. The Groundswell Community Mural Project, the group responsible for the mural in Soundview, advertises itself online as "a New York City based nonprofit that brings together professional artists, grassroots organizations and communities in partnership to create high quality murals in under-represented neighborhoods" (groundswellmural.org). The murals displayed online, like the mural in Soundview, depict fundamental racial and socioeconomic equality in New York City and stress the need to improve its condition. Murals like these figure most prominently in relatively

poor neighborhoods like the South Bronx and Harlem, where they most vividly emphasize the need for social change. In Washington Heights, another relatively poor neighborhood in NYC, a mural spanning the length of an entire building was painted to simultaneously help solve the problems of lead paint in that neighborhood and add an aesthetic quality to the neighborhood as well (groundswellmural.org). The mural, which portrays people with a bounty of fruits and vegetables, visiting doctors and taking care of their overall health, is one example of a mural that touches the sentiments and evokes positive feelings about life and health in a neighborhood in order to help amend more sweeping, general communal problems; in this case, the idea was that by using the mural to teach people about the positive effects of a healthy diet and medical treatment in helping to heal lead poisoning, the problem of lead poisoning would be diminished (groundswellmural.org). In Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, a group of kids painted a colorful mural entitled One Community, Many Voices (Fig. 5), featuring a plethora of flags flying in the air, rainbows, and people of many races, in order to promote diversity. A mural in Harlem entitled Voices (Figs. 6-7) was, according to one of the teens involved in the painting, meant as a way "to get a better reality what is really needed in the urban communities [sic]. Whether it is more education or police for safe streets you know what the issues are by interviewing community members and the teens" (groundswellmural.org). "Painting a mural," this person says, "is a great example to the young people of how hard work can pay off and how a task that was set can be completed." According to Groundswell, "our work inspires youth, communities and artists to take active ownership of their future and equips them with the tools necessary for social change" (groundswellmural.org). It's in this conflation of the mural with more basic "social change" that the sentimental narrative is located.

Jane Jacobs advocates a similar program for social change, according to which it's precisely those sentiment-stirring, less drastic agendas that should be implemented. In her essay, she focuses on the need for "sidewalk contacts," public settings which "bring together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion, and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion" (73, 72). These casual public contacts include "stopping by at the bar for a beer, getting advice from the grocer and giving advice to the newsstand man, comparing opinions with other customers at the bakery, etc.," all of which serve to create "an almost unconscious assumption of general street support when the chips are down" (Jacobs 73). Jacobs admits that these contacts can't "automatically overcome segregation and discrimination [because] too many other kinds of efforts are also required to right these injustices" (94). However, she writes, "to build and to rebuild big cities whose sidewalk[s] are unsafe . . . can make it much harder for American cities to overcome discrimination no matter how much effort is expended" (94). While taking issue with her own suggestion, Jacobs concludes that seemingly trivial advancements actually lay the foundation for building a more integrated society.

Jacobs, who repeatedly stresses the benefits of positive sidewalk environments as opposed to more formal city social projects, objects to the use of projects similar to privately funded murals as a means of engendering that "feeling for the public identity of the people" (72), a feeling of sympathy for the general public which can't be attained without informal public contact. However, her more basic assumption that, while the individual small steps taken towards social improvement may seem "utterly trivial . . . the sum is not trivial at all" certainly lends credence to mural projects (73). Indeed, two positive outcomes, each consistent with hopes of unity and a shared public experience expressed by Jacobs, emerge from the creation of murals that depict unity and social harmony. First, the content of the murals—such as the mural in Soundview, which discounts the class divisions in our society—invokes and engenders a sense of social unity, thereby creating an almost subconscious collective feeling of brotherhood and equality. The images of leaders from different races, who played crucial roles in eliminating racial tensions, inspire us to develop a world in which these leaders' values are expressed. Also inspiring are the messages contained in the murals calling for social action and community service. For example, the Soundview mural features the words, "I charge you to do something" (groundswellmural.org). Aside from the finished products, though, the process of creating the murals is itself an experience of racial amalgamation. On Groundswell's website, photographs of mural painting often show diverse groups of young adults enjoying the experience. Indeed, Groundswell's mission statement contains phrases such as "bring together" and "partnership"; the organization's fundamental premise is that mural painting will "bridge cultural, ethnic, class and generational divides" (groundswellmural.org).

However, the idea that minor aesthetic improvements to so-called "underrepresented" neighborhoods can make a significant social impact is more sentimental than realistic—as if the lack of political representation is more characteristic of these neighborhoods' problems than, for example, poverty. While the murals certainly do help to beautify rundown neighborhoods and may encourage some of the public contact desired by Jacobs as well as foster a feeling of community, they actually amount to no more than what Didion, quoting William R. Taylor of SUNY Stony Brook, calls, "empathy without political compassion" (284). While presenting a large and noticeable façade of concern for communal socioeconomic misfortunes, these murals, like many of the components of the sentimental narrative that Didion mentions, divert our attention from finding effective, concrete solutions to enormous problems. While the concern that the murals portray may be genuine, it tends to be perceived as a substitution for or at least a crucial step towards social improvement. A 2004 *Daily News* article about the dedication ceremony of one of Groundswell's mural projects in Brooklyn commemorating young victims of street violence cites several Brooklyn residents who describe the mural in grandiose terms. Jasmine, a fifteen-year-old girl who contributed to the mural said, "[I]t's not just a picture . . . it's a loss in our community . . . there's too much violence, and it needs to stop." One resident, Kevin

Diaz, exclaimed, "I think that people will get a good moral out of this, that they should talk it out instead of using violence" (Hays). The idea that the mural isn't "just a picture" and that people will learn valuable lessons from it affords these murals too much significance and doesn't take into account the more basic issues of class and racial segregation.

The logical flaws that threaten to undermine Jacobs's endorsement of "sidewalk contacts" as remedies to our social problems challenge the notion that murals make a difference in similar ways. For example, Jacobs's assertion that "sidewalk public contact and sidewalk public safety . . . bear directly on . . . segregation and racial discrimination" and help to ameliorate problems of segregation seems implausible when considering the fact that the segregated races to which she refers don't even share the same sidewalks to begin with (94). Similarly, creating murals in poor neighborhoods, while helping to beautify them, doesn't help to bridge the racial and economic gaps that give birth to these neighborhoods in the first place.

Some of the language employed in the murals and their titles also points to certain basic misconceptions on the part of the murals' artists about their effectiveness. *We Are Here to Awaken from the Illusion of Our Separateness* is a striking example of the way in which murals use language to blur social divisions. Such misconceptions threaten to distract our society from facing socioeconomic problems head-on through the creation of better jobs for the poor and better public school education. By appealing to our senses, these murals also appeal to our sentimental notions of New York City as a melting pot, in which we all become "one community" whose differences are an illusion.

Several blocks away from the mural about unity in Soundview there's another mural, which in turn is several blocks away from where Amadou Diallo was shot. Jovino Borrero, the owner of a small shop in Soundview, commissioned an artist from Harlem to paint this mural in commemoration of Amadou Diallo in 2001 (Tran). However, this mural isn't so sentimental or inspiring. It depicts 4 white policemen in white hoods and, next to a portrait of Amadou Diallo, the Statue of Liberty holding a gun. The effect of the mural is to suggest that the cause of Diallo's murder was racial discrimination, and that this is what lies behind the country's façade of liberty. This mural may be a more accurate portrayal than the more sentimental murals of the way in which Soundview residents view racial segregation and class divisions. While beautifying neighborhoods and fostering senses of unity and public identity are necessary projects, mural painting should not cloud our perception of the unfortunate reality in which we live, nor should it defer our search for realistic solutions that will help change that reality.

Appendix: Groundswell Murals

Fig. 1 (details below in Figs. 2-4)

We Are Here to Awaken From the Illusion of Our Separateness (acrylic; Summer, 1998) (85 x 16 ft.). A Collaboration with Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice. Director: Amy Sananman; Assistant Directors: Joe Matunis & Jenny Laden, & Mural Volunteers. Location: E 174th Street & Stratford Ave, Bronx, NY. Ghandi detail.

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

One Community Many Voices (2006), (8 x 45 ft.). Lead Artist: Conor McGrady; Assistant Artists: Menshahat Ebron and Michelle Strasberg; TEMA Apprentice Muralists: Sophia Dawson, Ebony Thurman, Annie Wu, Jan Min Wu, Steven Medina, Jorge Beltran, Nequevah Williams, Nylejah Lawson, Glenna Washington, Jesus Ticas, Arthur Spruill, Jonathan Hidalgo, Joshua Hidalgo, Krystal Yardon, Will Hyman, Chauncey Esada, Desiree Wannan; Volunteers & Interns: Clare Herron , Katherine Gressel , Ed Bopp, Dana Wilson , Sehu Amennun. Location: 501 Carleton at Atlantic Ave., Clinton Hill, Brooklyn.

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Voices (July & August 2005) (acrylic; 60 x 17 ft.). A Collaboration between Groundswell Community Mural Project & The Brotherhood Sister Sol. Lead Artist: Duane Smith; Assistant Artist: Clifford Mondestin; Teen Muralists: James Dixon, Gerallyn Aquino, Du'Vaughn Wilson, Denaiah Johnson, and Issakiah Bradley. Location: 143rd St between Broadway & Amsterdam, Harlem, New York.

Fig. 8

Figure 9

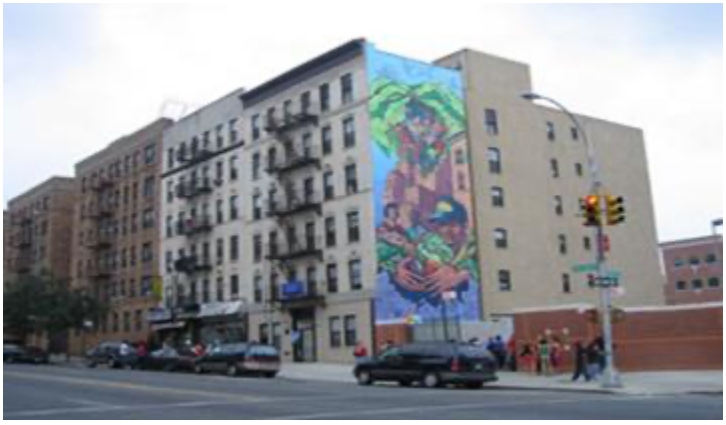

Fig. 10

Live in the Environmental Area of Your Destiny (summer, 2004) (30 x 60 ft.). A Groundswell collaboration with the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation's Lead Safe House. Lead Muralists: Christopher Cardinale and Youme Landowne; Youth Muralists: Samantha Akwei, Jessica Binion, Chris Matos, Zakkyya Miller, Ali Jorge, Amy Ramirez, Geraldo Negron, Misael Soto, Randy Wilson, Anthony Reyes; Assisted by: Walfrido Hau. Location: 168th Street & Amsterdam, Washington Heights, New York.

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JUSTICE'S ILLUSION

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During their recent confirmation hearings, Supreme Court Justices John Roberts and Samuel Alito both spoke about the importance of precedent in judicial decision making. In this age of bitter partisan politics, the High Court is often viewed as the one branch of government that interprets the law and leaves politics aside. In theory, Justices serve life terms so that they are not subject to the whims of the public. Nonetheless, despite the aura of non-partisanship the Court displays, it can be said that the Justices manipulate precedent to effectively rule based on their personal policy preferences.

In 1996, two political scientists, Jeffrey A. Segal and Harold J. Spaeth, did a statistical study of dissenting Justices in landmark decisions to determine whether or not Justices are influenced by precedent. They look at dissenting Justices because their revealed choices are clearly different from the Court's decision, which makes it possible to see whether or not they change their opinions to comply with precedent in the future. Thus, "For each dissenting Justice, we will determine whether that Justice accepts the relevant decision in subsequent cases dealing with the same issue" (Segal and Spaeth 476). Certainly precedent does affect some decisions, but "the question is whether such behavior exists at systematic and substantively meaningful levels" (477).

Of the 346 votes Siegel and Spaeth analyzed, "90.8% of the votes conform to the Justices revealed preferences. That is, only 9.2% of the time did a Justice switch to the position established in the landmark precedent" (477). All Justices but Justice Stewart and Justice Powell voted more than 80% of the time according to their own policy preferences. Half of Justice Stewart's six precedential votes were from one case, and all five of Justice Powell's were from one case. The empirical results show that following *stare decisis*, otherwise known as precedent, is the exception.

Yet while the evidence may indicate that following *stare decisis* is rare, Justices often preach about its importance. During their confirmation hearings, both Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Alito said they felt deep respect for precedent. Furthermore, Justice O'Connor preached for the preservation of precedent in her decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. That case revisited *Roe v. Wade*, which gave women the right to an abortion and was perhaps the most famous and controversial court case in our nation's history. At the time, both Planned Parenthood and President Bush's solicitor general, Kenneth Star, asked the Supreme Court to end the uncertainty and either reverse or affirm *Roe v. Wade*. In the end, Justice Kennedy and Justice Souter signed onto Justice O'Connor's compromise opinion, which became the official opinion of the Court.

Justice O'Connor's decision focuses on the need to abide by *stare decisis* for the sake of the Court's legitimacy. She says, "Thus, the Court's legitimacy depends on making legally principled decisions under circumstances in which their principled character is

sufficiently plausible to be accepted by the nation" (III). O'Connor argues that if Justices made decisions on non-legal principles, the nation would begin to lose respect for the Court. Therefore, she claims, "Within the bounds of normal *stare decisis* analysis, then, and subject to the considerations on which it customarily turns, the stronger argument is for affirming *Roe's* central holding, with whatever degree of personal reluctance any of us may have, not for overruling it" (I). *Stare decisis* must be upheld even when Justices disagree with it.

Justice Scalia, however, rejects the Court's reliance upon *stare decisis* as contrived: "It insists upon the necessity of adhering not to all of *Roe*, but only to what it calls the 'central holding'" (Scalia). It appears that this picking and choosing of what part of the precedent the Court will follow is simply a way for the Justices to keep the parts of *Roe v. Wade* with which they agree, while leaving out those that they view as poor policy. To show how the court has done this, Justice Scalia focuses on the trimester framework, a part of *Roe v. Wade* that the Court rejects in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*:

> I must confess, however, that I have always thought, and I think a lot of other people have always thought, that the arbitrary trimester framework, which the Court today discards, was quite as central to *Roe* as the arbitrary viability test, which the Court today retains. It seems particularly ungrateful to carve the trimester framework out of the core of *Roe*, since its very rigidity (in sharp contrast to the utter indeterminability of the "undue burden" test) is probably the only reason the Court is able to say, in urging *stare decisis*, that *Roe* "has in no sense proven 'unworkable,'" ante, at 13. I suppose the Court is entitled to call a "central holding" whatever it wants to call a "central holding"—which is, come to think of it, perhaps one of the difficulties with this modified version of *stare decisis*.

Justice Scalia then describes a number of different ways in which the majority decision ignores large portions of *Roe*. He essentially argues that the majority opinion, while claiming to uphold *Roe* based on precedent, essentially destroys the whole institution of *stare decisis* with its inconsistent holdings.

Justice O'Connor does believe that a certain amount of "correction of error" is permissible. Yet "only the most convincing justification under accepted standards of precedent could suffice to demonstrate that a later decision overruling the first was anything but surrender to political pressure, and an unjustified repudiation of the principle which the Court staked its authority in the first place" (Scalia). While O'Connor upholds *Roe*, she does change certain aspects of it, such as the trimester framework, which essentially rules out any restrictions on abortion through the first two trimesters. She says, "We reject the trimester framework, which we do not consider to be part of the essential essence of *Roe*" (IV). In its place, O'Connor introduces the "undue burden" standard for determining whether an abortion-related law is constitutional.

So, if Justices do not follow *stare decisis*, why then do they preach of its importance? What, then, is the relationship between precedent and decision making? In effect, Justices use the appearance of *stare decisis* to cover their own policy beliefs and gain legitimacy. For example, in his dissent in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, Justice Scalia rips into Justice O'Connor's "outrageous arguments . . . which it is beyond human nature to leave unanswered." Responding to O'Connor's opening statement, "Liberty finds no refuge in a jurisprudence of doubt" (O'Connor I), Scalia claims that "The shortcomings of *Roe* did not include lack of clarity" (Scalia). Instead, Scalia claims, the new undue burden test's "efforts at clarification make clear only that the standard is manipulatable and will prove hopelessly unworkable in practice. . . . Consciously or not, the joint opinion's verbal game will conceal raw judicial policy choice concerning what is 'appropriate' abortion legislation."

In essence, Scalia argues that Justice O'Connor's majority opinion, which is, by extension, the majority opinion of the Court, conforms far more to the Justices' own personal preferences than it does to Roe v. Wade. As Justice Scalia points out, even though Justice O'Connor claims to uphold the "essential holding" of *Roe v. Wade*, she conforms more to her own personal preferences in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* far more than she does to the prior case. For example, O'Connor's dissent in *Akron I*, while she was sitting on a lower court, first introduced the idea of an "undue burden," which she sets forth as the new test for admissibility in place of the trimester framework of *Roe*. In effect, she has masked her own policy preference on abortion with the image of *stare decisis*. While she claims to accept the central holding of *Roe*, she rejects large parts of it in order to replace the trimester framework with her own favored standard. This manipulation of *Roe* allowed Justice O'Connor to come up with the split decision on *Casey*, upholding the informed consent, twenty-four-hour waiting period, and parental consent portions of the law in question while striking down the spousal notification and reporting sections of that law. As Justice Scalia notes, "Under *Roe*, requiring a 24-hour waiting period between the time the woman gives her informed consent and the time of the abortion is unconstitutional, Akron I. Under the 'undue burden' regime (as applied today, at least) it is not" (Scalia). Through his scathing dissent, Justice Scalia has shown us perhaps the greatest illusion in American politics. Justices do not follow precedent; they manipulate it to gain legitimacy for their policy preferences. Segal and Spaeth have proven Justice Scalia right: "The Imperial Judiciary lives" (Scalia).

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A CONFLICT OF CULTURE OR CONSCIENCE: RE-READING THE 2006 ELECTION

ALLON BRANN

In 1924, as the United States Congress debated the Johnson-Reed immigration act, Senator Ellison Smith of South Carolina took to the Senate floor to assert what he believed to be the country's need to "shut the door." "Without offense," Smith ironically declared, "but with regard to the salvation of our own, let us shut the door and assimilate what we have, and let us breed pure American citizens and develop our own American resources." While Smith believed this "purity" could best be achieved through immigration restriction harsher than that created by the already restrictive bill on the table, he was willing to vote for the bill's quotas, as were most of his colleagues. Although Smith's racist arguments were not indicative of the entire chamber's calculus for vetting the bill, it was nonetheless approved with overwhelming support and signed into law the same year ("Shut the Door").

Over eighty years later, a similar scene unfolded in the halls of Congress. During a speech to the House of Representatives in September of 2006 regarding a bill which would strengthen the investigatory powers of law enforcement, Colorado Rep. Tom Tancredo invoked the supposed criminal activity of illegal immigrants in his state to garner support for what he called "our true and one single responsibility" (United States Congress). In effect, the responsibility was to deal with the increasing illegal alien population of the country, a cause with which Tancredo, the Chairman of the House Immigration Reform Caucus and author of *In Mortal Danger: The Battle for America's Border and Security*, had long been associated ("Biography").

The juxtaposition of these two moments in legislative history offers a glimpse into America's seemingly never-ending conflict with immigration, particularly illegal immigration. The racism of Smith's time evolved into the more refined nativist streak in politicians like Tancredo, one which arguably placed him to the right of his colleagues on the issue (like Smith himself). However, such an acknowledgment must be treated cautiously; perhaps the more proper angle from which to consider Tancredo's position is in relation to the view of the American public. With equal caution, we can submit the Congressional elections of 2006 as the measuring stick with which to gauge the electorate's perception of illegal immigration and the nativist response it may have drawn in various political circles. More complex but perhaps more relevant would be to view the election as a moment of internal struggle, the latest development of the existential conflict in which the "nation of immigrants" attempts to define itself.

Less than two weeks before the midterm elections, President Bush signed a law authorizing the construction of a seven-hundred-mile fence on the border with Mexico. While many critics decried the ludicrous inefficacy and difficulty of the fence's

construction, to the shrewd political observer the intent was not pragmatism but rather political opportunism; Republicans seemed to believe that a platform highlighting immigration control would aid them in the coming election. As Michael Fletcher and Jonathan Weisman of the *Washington Post* astutely noted, the bill had backed President Bush into a corner, with "international allies and his own immigration principles on one side, and the electoral needs of his party on the other" (A04). Bush's signing of the law effectively heralded his resignation to the political reality, an acceptance of the fence as willed by the people.

Taking the passage of the fence construction bill as the definitive emergence of immigration as a Republican issue for voters in 2006, we can consider the party's tactics in passing the law a mixed success. According to the CNN National Exit Poll for the U.S. House, of the sixty-two percent of voters who considered illegal immigration either "very" or "extremely" important in 2006, the majority voted for Republican candidates ("U.S. House of Representatives/National/Exit Poll"). On the one hand, this figure seems to indicate voters' recognition of Republican efforts on the immigration issue. However, the significant national net losses by the Republican Party might point to the relegation of the immigration issue among the priorities of the electorate. While it seems likely that the favorable response to the Republican immigration agenda was that party's reward for pragmatic legislative effort (the mere passage of the fence bill), it is also reasonable to conclude that the average American voter did not undergo a radical ideological shift, such as an adoption of nativism as a guiding philosophy on the issue.

Whether or not the election returns and the polling data on immigration specifically were a referendum on American *personal* sentiment towards immigrants, the results lend credibility to the notion that American identity is not marked by a prejudicial nativism. Moreover, if the voters approved of Republican immigration policy because of its emphasis on external (at the border) rather than internal control, the results would be in line with larger international trends. According to a study by Angel Solano Garcia which asks, "Does illegal immigration empower rightist parties?" in most developed nations where the issue is framed (and parties distinguished) by level of commitment to border enforcement, voters tend to heavily favor right-wing parties when they connect illegal immigration to a sense of insecurity (652). This projection validates the statistics provided by the CNN exit poll that asked voters what should be done with "most" illegal immigrants currently living in the U.S. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said that illegal residents should be "offered legal status," while thirty-eight percent favored deportation ("U.S. House of Representatives/National/Exit Poll"). The willingness of the majority to grant amnesty (a term as fervently avoided by many politicians as a scarlet letter of treason) in some form to illegal immigrants would seem to preclude any evidence of nativist bias among most voters. Of course, the thirty-eight percent minority in support of deportation is significant, and we can speculate that those voters responded to the "border security is national security"

trope. Even if the distinction between the two responding constituencies is conditioned by the influence of nativism on the part of the minority, it would adhere to Garcia's model, given the fact that fifty-six percent of that minority voted for Republican candidates ("U.S. House of Representatives/National/Exit Poll").

The national data is useful to the extent that it can help us form a picture of the average voter's attitude towards the parties' portrayal of the illegal immigration issue, as well as their respective success in reconciling pragmatic security concerns with heavier moral ones. By isolating certain races of note in 2006, we can build on that portrait in order to better understand how such considerations were weighed on a more local level. The southwest region is the most likely candidate for closer observation in any immigration study, owing to its higher concentration of illegal immigrants and the tendency for that presence to pervade the realm of state and local politics. In Arizona's fifth congressional district, the defeat of Rep. J.D. Hayworth was hailed by many supporters of the "path to citizenship" plan for alien residents as a symbolic victory for their cause, part of an overall American repudiation of conservative restrictive policies (Archibold).

At first glance, it seems reasonable to conclude that voters rejected Hayworth's relatively "hardline" position on illegal immigration. Hayworth, like Congressman Tancredo, authored a book on the subject entitled *Whatever it Takes*, which sparked controversy both in his district and nationally for, among other things, its employment of a quotation from Henry Ford (Giblin). In addition, the *Arizona Republic*, an influential community publication, called Hayworth a "bully," and asserted that the district needed "a bridge-builder, not a bomb-thrower" (Myers). If we were to assume that these characterizations represent a prevalent view of Hayworth within his district, we would concurrently assume that the voters of the fifth district favored tempered rhetoric and moderation of policy (in the hope that it would lead to pragmatic legislative achievement) over more fiery, divisive postures.

Unfortunately, the presence on the statewide ballot of Proposition 103 complicates such an assessment. Proposition 103, which called for the adoption of English as the official language of Arizona as well as the limitation of multilingual government programs, was passed with 74.2% of the vote ("Voters Make English"). Traditionally, measures such as this one have been perceived as the hallmark of the modern nativist effort. Why then did an overwhelming expression of statewide disapproval for the intrusion of immigrant language into American communities not translate into a victory for Hayworth and his restrictive platform? After all, the characterization of the passage by one leader of the English-first campaign, Mauro Mujica, as Arizona's call for "assimilation, not separation," was strikingly reminiscent of what was rejected by many as nativism in Hayworth's *Whatever it Takes* ("Voters Make English"). "Instead of Americanization," Hayworth wrote, current policy offers "bilingual education, racial and ethnic quotas, and education that focuses not on American heroes and culture, but on a potpourri of ethnic heroes and cultures" (qtd. in Giblin).

Unless popular opinion in the fifth district differs extraordinarily from that of Arizona as a whole, it seems clear that Hayworth's support for "Americanism" rather than so-called "multiculturalism" was not the voters' chief grievance with their congressman. Overall, Arizonans may have felt that in fact, the defense of English (and perhaps transitively in their minds, the defense of strictly "American" culture) was as essential a tool on the illegal immigration front as physical border security itself. But the fact that Proposition 103 was passed irrespective of party or ideological affiliation—exit polls indicate the measure was approved by fifty-four percent and fifty-three percent of Democrats and Liberals, respectively—shows that while Hayworth may have been on the right side of the issue for some voters, like many Republicans nationwide he may simply have been a member of the wrong party for this election ("Ballot Measures/Arizona Proposition 103/Exit Poll").

However, even support for Proposition 103 does not lend itself to the embrace of nativism as a guiding philosophy without reservation. Exit polling estimates that fifty-five percent of all Arizona voters supported the granting of legal status to current illegal residents ("Ballot Measures/Arizona Proposition 103/Exit Poll"). It is this statistic more than any other that exposes the suggested "existential conflict" over immigration. The stated motives of proponents of Proposition 103 are designed to distance, or even reject, an explicit nativism. Consider the rationale offered by Arizona State Rep. Russell Pearce to voters considering the Proposition that "Official English promotes unity" and "empowers immigrants" ("Ballot argument FOR Proposition 103"). If sincere, these assertions could hardly be considered anti-immigrant. Rather, they, along with Pearce's contention that the measure will eliminate government waste, appeal to an *inclusive* persuasion. Therefore, the "existential conflict" is essentially the struggle to reconcile Americans' tendency towards the so-called "Americanism" and "Americanization" with the previously embraced "melting pot" theory of societal development. The difficulty lies in validating the belief that these new systems allow for an equally smooth and efficient integration of an immigrant population into American communities.

Further, Rep. Hayworth's framing of the issue sheds light on the rhetorical ambiguity surrounding this conflict. It is doubtful that most supporters of English-first legislation, such as Mujica, would assert that assimilation through language (and perhaps other responsibilities of American citizenship) mandates the purging of ethnic identity. Rather, their philosophy accepts the ethnic "potpourri," which Hayworth decried, as a viable part of American life. Indeed, most would maintain that a confluence of ethnic traditions created and continues to create American culture, rather than threaten it. It is clear then that their call for "assimilation" is far more benign than Hayworth's "Americanization," which seems to equate the adoption of English with that of an exceedingly narrow view of American identity. And inevitably, this view of identity is based in potentially harmful racial distinctions, rather than inclusive patriotic sentiment.

Of course, Arizona cannot legitimately be considered a microcosm for the entire United States. As the national polling data indicated, American voters may have been less concerned with immigrant integration than Arizonans were when they voted in 2006. Therefore a consideration of a case outside of the southwest, a region we might even consider "tainted" for study given the way in which the economic and cultural effects of immigration may prejudice votes, can be used to return to a more general study of national opinion. The election in the sixth district of Illinois, another one of the key swing races in 2006, may illuminate how illegal immigration was used or misused as an issue among the rest of the electorate.

The race in the sixth district pitted Democrat Tammy Duckworth, an Iraq war veteran, against Peter Roskam, a Republican state legislator ("The 2006 Campaign"). Not surprisingly given Duckworth's combat experience, Democratic strategists hoped to use this race to emphasize their party's commitment to national security and defense issues, which were traditionally in the Republican corner. Also not surprising given the national dissatisfaction with Iraq was Roskam's refusal to make that war a major focus of his campaign. However, he did not shy away from the issue of illegal immigration, a decision which ultimately may have greatly helped him secure victory. Roskam opposed the "path to citizenship" legislation and supported fence construction on the border ("Border Security/Illegal Immigration").

By conventional standards, Roskam's decision to incorporate immigration into the debate is rather puzzling. Considering the overall national distaste for the Republican record, sticking to the prevailing wisdom of treating local issues primarily in a House race would have been the logical strategy. If a Republican candidate were to widen the discourse to the national scale, they would open themselves up to attacks based more on party affiliation than on personal record. However, Roskam did just that, allowing illegal immigration to come into play as the primary issue in the national security field.

It was certainly not the issue Democrats had hoped would emerge. But the question remains: why would voters respond favorably to Roskam's posturing on illegal immigration when the issue affected their district only tangentially? While we cannot assume that Roskam won solely on this point of contention, it undoubtedly played a role in his victory. One reasonable inference is that the voters of the Illinois sixth considered immigration an economic threat first and foremost. Perhaps the same protectionist sentiment ridden by some Democratic candidates, such as Rep. Sherrod Brown in the Ohio Senate race, to victory in 2006 aided Roskam in this case in the sense that voters were attentive to the potential economic consequences of expanded immigration and amnesty. If voters supported Roskam's campaign platform, which stated, "We are a nation of immigrants, but we are also a nation of laws," we can identify a new voice in the existential debate, one that hearkens to the call of immigration control not out of bias or even the integration of "Americanism" ("Border Security/Illegal Immigration"). Rather, this constituency responds to a sense of "crowding"—the imposition of immigrant economic needs (not cultural ones) on

the country. As the sixth district shows us, the crowding can be just as potent hundreds of miles from the source.

While the 2006 election failed to produce a clear consensus on immigration, it cemented the status of the issue as far more complex and relevant than previous agents of electoral polarization. Indeed, we now see that immigration is not a polemic of the same fabric as the much-hyped "moral values" debate of 2004; the issue is impaired by hyperbole yet rejects the tendency to divide along traditional regional and social contours. The identity crisis observed among the American electorate is one which will continue to compound the national immigration debate, fostering a confused politics in which voters are unable to define themselves according to philosophies traditionally recognized by politicians. Still, perhaps only by recognizing the impossibility of settling this internal discord—of reaching a cultural consensus—will we reject the disquieting politics of anxiety that currently reigns in public discourse.

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DAVID CRONENBERG: THE VOYEUR OF UTTER DESTRUCTION

DANIEL N. GOLDBERG

David Cronenberg began his career by making B horror films but later transcended the genre, creating gruesome, highly physical melodramas. One of the ways he has made this transition so smoothly is through the motif of sadomasochism, in which violence is directed at an objectified female. In watching Cronenberg films like *Videodrome*, *Crash*, *Dead Ringers*, and *A History of Violence*, it is easy to interpret one's horror as an indication of the director's offensive ideology. But one must also consider the possibility of a director distancing himself from his dramatic material through the use of horror techniques, and encouraging the viewer to do the same: a possibility that becomes clear through an investigation of the work of Laura Mulvey, one of film theory's most prominent feminists.

In her essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey discusses the cinematic convention of the objectified female and the man as the bearer of the look. She proposes that since the male protagonist directs the gaze of the spectator through subjective narration, mainstream Hollywood encourages the audience to identify with his voyeurism. She also claims that implicit in the voyeur-exhibitionist relationship between the male protagonist and the female lead is a sadomasochistic fantasy that is never explicitly realized: "The power to subject another person to the will sadistically or to the gaze voyeuristically is turned on to the woman as the object of both" (845). Because the Hollywood female lead is placed in a submissive role, film has not only reflected the sexism in society but also perpetuated it, affirming women's submissive role in society. She identifies this problem through the use of Hitchcock films as an emblem of mainstream Hollywood misogyny, and she defines sadomasochism as the use of pain to enhance sexual pleasure in both the inflictor and the recipient.

Mulvey calls for a new subversive film language to destroy these misogynist pleasures of spectatorship by provoking the viewer to analyze the look of the camera. She writes, "The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions (already undertaken by radical filmmakers) is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space" (847). In other words, subversive filmmakers would need to eliminate the technique commonly referred to in film editing as the "eyeline match," in which a character's gaze is intercut with the subject of the gaze. This would free the look of the camera from the subjective look of the protagonist, and thereby heighten the audience's awareness of the camera's presence within the diegesis. Awareness enables analysis, which is the key to the destruction of pleasure. As Mulvey herself puts it: "analyzing pleasure, or beauty destroys it" (839), and "destruction of pleasure is a radical weapon" (838). Voyeurism, defined as the

pleasurable illusion of looking in on a private world, would thus be destroyed through analysis.

David Cronenberg achieves this same feat of destruction through slightly different means. He does not eliminate the eyeline match, nor does he avoid subjective narration. Whereas Mulvey talks about freeing "the look of the camera into its materiality," Cronenberg frees the look of the male protagonist into its physical manifestations through the depiction of sadomasochism between the male protagonist and the female lead. Since Mulvey herself admits that the look of the spectator and the look of the male protagonist are intricately intertwined in the conventional narrative system to which Cronenberg adheres, Cronenberg's subversion of Hollywood misogyny is in fact quite similar to Mulvey's. Cronenberg's films do provoke analysis of the nature of voyeuristic pleasure, as Mulvey urges, and this analysis has already had a destructive impact on that pleasure. There is then a possibility that Mulvey fails to acknowledge in her essay, namely that filmmakers can subvert the very techniques they use—that they can express ambivalence toward their own artistic tradition.

Both Mulvey and Cronenberg seem to feel that materiality or physicality makes film-going a more candid act. Cronenberg's film *Crash*, from 1996, depicts a scenario in which a growing cult seeks sexual gratification through vehicular accidents. The male protagonist, a TV director, stumbles upon this subculture while trying to rejuvenate his sex life with his wife. In his article regarding that film, entitled, "A Vision of Masochism in the Affective Pain of *Crash*," Anthony McCosker writes, "*Crash* explores new ways of corporealizing sexuality, bringing sexuality back to bodily experience" (43). Feminist film theorist Mary Ann Doane would not find this surprising: "It is precisely because the [female] body has been a major site of oppression that perhaps it must be the site of the battle to be waged" (384). If this is true, we can confidently say that Cronenberg heads straight for the battleground. But has he stumbled upon this battleground by chance? Or does his work have some purpose, some sociopolitical impact beyond entertainment?

In the film *Videodrome*, a new type of pornographic broadcast is discovered emanating from Pittsburgh in which people are beaten, tortured, and electrocuted in a bare room with clay walls. The broadcast is known as videodrome, and it catches the attention of protagonist Max Ren, who seeks to introduce it onto his channel, and his love interest Nikki, who wants to star on the show. Professor Brian Oblivion, a character in the film, claims, "The battle for the mind of North America will be fought in the video arena: the videodrome." Since that is the title of the film itself, we can infer that Cronenberg realizes he is engaged in a battle "for the mind," despite his perverse focus on the body. He clearly intends to fight, so which side is he fighting for: the pleasures of patriarchal society, or the destruction of those pleasures?

Before we can say for sure, it is necessary to compare Cronenberg's films to Mulvey's analyses of films by Alfred Hitchcock. Mulvey examines Hitchcock's films *Vertigo*, *Rear Window*, and *Marnie* through the lens of Freudian theory in order to

demonstrate mainstream Hollywood misogyny as expressed through voyeuristic sadomasochism. By making this sadomasochism obvious to the viewer unschooled in Freud, Cronenberg enables more viewers to reach the same conclusions as Mulvey.

For example, in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, a crippled photojournalist spies on his neighbors from his apartment window and becomes convinced that the man across the courtyard has murdered his wife. The male protagonist's voyeuristic tendencies are established by the fact that he is a photographer. The female lead's exhibitionism is established by her obsessive interest in dress and style. The male protagonist comments on her expensive dress, but only to mock its excess. In *Videodrome*, the male protagonist practically psychoanalyzes the female lead's dress, saying, "That dress. It's very stimulating. It's red. I mean, you know what Freud would have said about that dress." The female lead replies, "And he would have been right." Whereas the voyeur/exhibitionist relationship in Hitchcock relies on Mulvey's psychoanalysis to be discerned by the typical viewer, Cronenberg does the psychoanalysis for us.

Similarly, while Mulvey interprets the motivation behind the male protagonist's sadomasochistic desires as the female's embodiment of the male's "castration threat," Cronenberg depicts that threat literally (Mulvey 837). In fact, the female lead in *Videodrome*, indirectly through her alliance with videodrome, causes the male protagonist to literally and physically grow a vagina that also functions somewhat like a VCR. There's no need for Freud—the castration threat has been made real (see Fig.1):

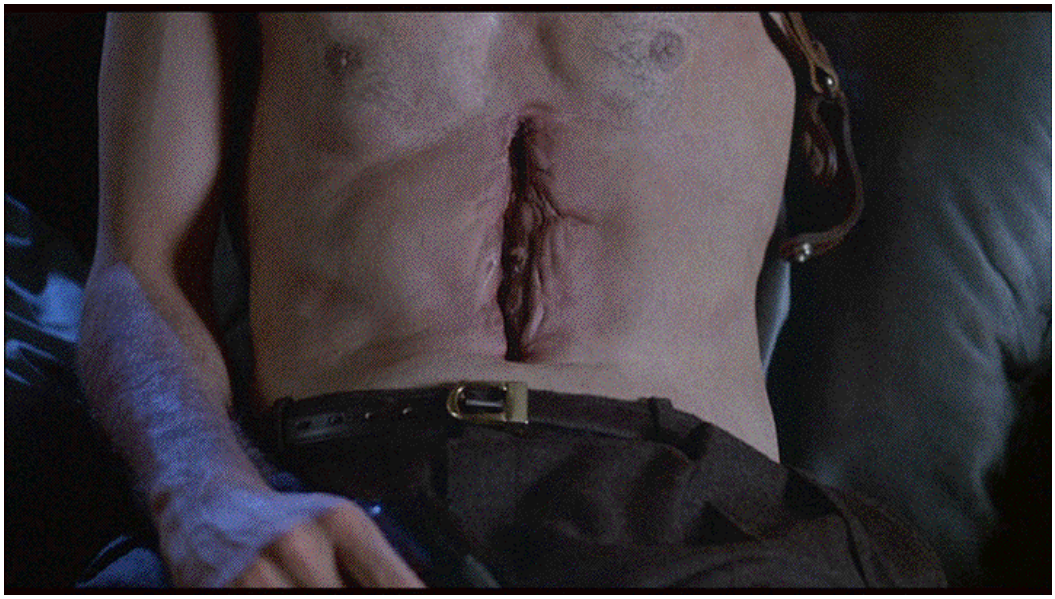

Fig. 1

The implicit sadomasochism that Mulvey discerns in this type of relationship is also made plain to the viewer. Mulvey writes of the female lead of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, "Her exhibitionism, her masochism, make her an ideal passive counterpart to Scottie's [the

male protagonist] active sadistic voyeurism" (846). Yet spectators who have not read Freud might not be able to discern the misogynist message of this sadomasochism because it is not enacted literally and materially. In *Videodrome*, the male protagonist watches the female lead on a television screen, making the voyeuristic nature of the relationship material. He then proceeds to whip the television screen with her image on it, making the sadomasochistic nature of the relationship material. The scene suggests that, like the male protagonist who directs our gaze, we are in some way violating the female lead by watching her voyeuristically on a screen. In the image below, taken from *Videodrome*, the male protagonist kisses a voyeuristically objectified image of the female lead (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2

Tania Modleski writes in her essay, "The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory":

> In Hitchcock's films, women's purses (and their jewelry) take on a vulgar Freudian significance relating to female sexuality and to men's attempts to investigate it. One might think, for example, of the purse in the opening closeup shot of *Marnie* that contains Marnie's 'identity' cards and the booty of her theft from patriarchy. (854)

The average spectator, however, would probably see merely a purse—not, as Modleski supposes, a guilty vagina. Hitchcock's films generally served as mainstream genre

pictures, and most viewers probably wanted to be entertained more than they wanted to crack the Freudian code. Cronenberg, on the other hand, makes the Freudian significance of the male protagonist's voyeuristic investigation exceedingly obvious; there's no need to decode.

In his 1988 film *Dead Ringers*, two identical twins sharing the same office, apartment, and women. The male protagonists are gynecologists, and the female lead is not only an actress (an obvious occupation for an exhibitionist), but more importantly his patient. When we first meet the female lead, she is subjected to the male protagonist's incriminating gaze in the most physical of ways. She lies in his office with her legs open and the male protagonist peering into her vagina. He tells her she has a defect, and later they engage in sadomasochistic sex in which she is tied to a bed with medical tubes. The female lead cries, "You're gonna spank me, doc. I've been bad, and I need to be punished." It is as though her physical defect is deserving of punishment in the same way as Marnie's psychological defect (her kleptomania), which is physically manifested only through the metaphor of the purse. The sadomasochism in Cronenberg's films therefore reveals the Freudian implications of the relationship between the male protagonist and female lead to the viewer unfamiliar with Freud's ideas.

Moreover, because Cronenberg's films point out the sadomasochistic nature of cinema itself, we are labeled as participants in such events, an idea rarely acknowledged by most moviegoers. Jean-François Lyotard writes of the corporeality of cinema in his essay "The Unconscious as Mise-en-scene": "It is the transcribing on and for bodies, considered as multi-sensory potentialities, which is the work characteristic of the mise-en-scene. . . . The idea of performance . . . seems linked to the idea of inscription on the body" (88). It is as though moviegoers seek to be acted upon physically in some way, to have their bodies altered. Yet it is unlikely that most film spectators have read Lyotard. Such a theory would be unnecessary when applied to a Cronenberg film, which has the psychoanalysis already built into the narrative. For example, in *Videodrome*, watching television induces a brain tumor in Professor Oblivion, and eventually persuades the male protagonist to shoot himself, exclaiming, "long live the new flesh." Lyotard's analysis of cinema as closely linked to the body, if applied to *Videodrome*, might seem trite and even understated.

Cronenberg's films also point out ways in which artists like Hitchcock sadistically exploit women for voyeuristic entertainment. For example, Hitchcock casts beautiful, voluptuous women as the female leads so that they can be gazed at by the audience through the eyes of the male protagonist. Cronenberg points out the perverse sadomasochism implicit in such an artistic choice. In the film *Crash*, for example, one character says, "I want really big tits so the audience can see them get all cut up and crushed on the dashboard." In Hitchcock films, we go to the cinema in order to voyeuristically violate the female lead. In Cronenberg films, the female lead's violation is physical. In *Dead Ringers*, when the male protagonist has gone insane, he invents

torture instruments which he calls "gynecological instruments for mutant women." An artist who owns a gallery displays these misogynist sadomasochistic devices in a way that evokes the way Hitchcock panders to spectators by violating his female leads (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3

But since Cronenberg is doing the same things as Hitchcock, isn't he just part of the same problem identified by Mulvey? As Janet Maslin wrote in her review of *Videodrome* for the *New York Times*, "There are times when it is dangerously unclear, in the midst of Max's lurid, sadomasochistic fantasies, whether *Videodrome* is far removed from the kind of sensationalism it seeks to satirize" (Maslin). Movie critic James Bowman, in his article, "On Sex and Violence," criticizes Cronenberg and other directors such as David Lynch when he says, "Are they, by an amazing stroke of irony, actually ridiculing the sex-and-violence connection they are ostensibly promoting? No, probably not" (64). It is possible, though doubtful, that Cronenberg is not trying to make cinematic sadomasochism so unpalatable that we reject it in all its forms.

Yet even if Cronenberg is not ridiculing the sex-and-violence connection, even if he is promoting it on the screen, he is probably only doing so to prevent it in real life. The main character of *Videodrome*, Max Ren, chooses programming for his pornography channel for a living, presenting hidden urges to the public in a way that parallels David Cronenberg's role as a director. As Max Ren puts it, "Better on TV than in the streets." According to such logic, enacting these fantasies on screen prevents the viewer from enacting them in real life.

So perhaps for those who are attracted to the type of relationship Mulvey finds so disgustingly misogynist, Cronenberg also serves a more socially positive role than Hitchcock. In Hitchock's *Marnie*, a sexually frigid man-hating habitual thief called

Marnie marries the man who catches her in exchange for his silence to the authorities. On one occasion, the male protagonist says to the female lead, "I'm fighting a powerful impulse to beat the hell out of you." The male protagonist manages to beat that impulse; perhaps as a result, the sadomasochist spectator is denied the ability to satisfy his violent urges vicariously through the male protagonist. The viewer is allowed to experience voyeuristic sadomasochism, but that is not fulfilling enough, because it would probably not be physical enough for a self-identified sadomasochist.

Because the Cronenberg protagonist barely fights the impulse to "beat the hell out of" the female lead, we are allowed to experience the same rush that the male protagonist feels. As Professor Oblivion says, "Whatever appears on the video screen emerges as raw experience for those who watch it. The hallucination can therefore act as a substitute for reality." And according to another character in *Videodrome*, "You don't have to actually hurt anybody. You just have to think about it." This kind of dialogue supports the notion that even if Cronenberg is not far removed from the kind of sensationalism he seeks to satirize—even if he is a panderer like Hitchcock—he still aims to perform a socially positive act.

Yet the majority of us don't have sadomasochist urges, or if we do, we derive more horror than pleasure from them. It is this "mainstream" audience member that ought to be the main target in Cronenberg's war against the misogynist cinematic vocabulary of mainstream Hollywood. Because Cronenberg not only acknowledges but explores the grotesque physicality of Hitchcock's sadomasochism, he lays his perversions out on the table, which makes them far more accessible to the viewer unschooled in Freud. Hitchcock was popular for his ability to satisfy his audience's urges. For the sadomasochist, perhaps, Cronenberg plays a similar role.

But Cronenberg makes most "normal" viewers so disgusted and ashamed of these urges that for many it is difficult to "like" a Cronenberg film. As Roger Ebert wrote regarding *Crash*, "I admired it, although I cannot say I 'liked' it" ("Crash"). His feelings toward *Dead Ringers* are similar: "It's the kind of movie where you ask people how they liked it, and they say, 'well, it was well made,' and then they wince" ("Dead Ringers"). McCosker writes, "Often manifesting as outrage and discomfort, the unsettling spectatorial experience of *Crash* is far from empty" (45). He also summarizes the critical response at large: "Reviews in news media around the world reiterated the moral outrage expressed in the British news media" (38). When the film was screened at Cannes, some attendants fled the theater in protest, horror, or a combination of both. The film was even banned for a period of time in Great Britain.

Monohla Dargis attempts to explain these types of reactions in her review of the 2005 Cronenberg film, *A History of Violence*. In that film, a humble family man's transformation into a local hero through a brutal act of "heroism" causes a chain of violent repercussions and forces him to defend his family while attempting to restore peace and order into their lives. The film traces the protagonist's effort to grapple and subdue the violent impulses within himself that arise in the wake of his heroic deed.

In one scene, the male protagonist loses control and rapes his wife on a wooden staircase. She writes, "The great kick of the movie—or rather its great kick in the gut—comes from Mr. Cronenberg's refusal to let us indulge in movie violence without paying a price" (Dargis). Botting and Wilson provide a similar explanation for viewers' responses to Cronenberg in their essay "Automatic Lovers": "*Crash* refuses to evoke or simulate the sensational and spectacular effects that one would expect from a film that draws an equivalence between sex and car crashes" (189). That both reviews speak of some sort of "refusal" on Cronenberg's part—the refusal to indulge, the refusal to sensationalize—is significant. Essentially, he is refusing to pander to our expectations for sanitized sadomasochism and sanitized misogyny, expectations which directors like Hitchcock catered to by expressing our urges through voyeurism and purses, metaphors for much deeper and more physical perversions. Cronenberg refuses to let us ignore the sickness in these ostensibly sanitized films, and more importantly, the sickness in ourselves as viewers of those films. Ebert describes the relationship between Cronenberg and the sanitization of mainstream Hollywood quite clearly:

> Take out the crashes and the injuries, and substitute the usual romantic movie story line, and it would be easy to understand this progression. For the first crash, substitute a chance meeting at a party. Have the husband make a fool of himself. Have them meet later by chance. Have them survive a dangerous experience. Let them feel sudden sexual attraction. No one in the audience would bat an eye if there was then a sex scene. ("Crash")

Adverse reactions are key to provoking debate, says McCosker: "The media event of *Crash*, then, affords the chance to rethink the general notion of sadomasochistic sexuality in terms of a more concerted examination of masochism . . . as mass media experience" (31). Similarly, he argues that "this film and the media events that encompass it have provided a site for an encounter with the corporeal specificity of masochistic sexuality" (37). We can therefore gather that Cronenberg's film has allowed us to consider masochism in mass media as a corporeal event.

It seems, then, as though Laura Mulvey's predictions have been proven correct, though in a slightly different way than she intended. She hoped to make the sadistic gaze of the camera more material and more obvious to the viewer by perhaps allowing the figures onscreen to acknowledge the presence of the camera and the spectator. After all, voyeurism depends on a one-way dominant gaze. Mary Ann Doane explains, "If a character looks at and speaks to the spectator, this constitutes an acknowledgment that the character is seen and heard in a radically different space and is therefore generally read as transgressive" (378). Yet in *Videodrome*, the female lead often looks at and speaks to the male protagonist when he watches her on television, the effect of which is indeed quite jarring. These instances are symptomatic of a more general attempt on Cronenberg's part to make us aware of the protagonist's gaze and

to materialize it into physical sadomasochism rather than voyeuristic sadomasochism. As predicted by Mulvey and pointed out by McCosker, the effect of this materialization is an awareness that provides an opportunity for analysis. Furthermore, as Mulvey and various other critics like Ebert suggest, this analysis leads to the destruction of pleasure. This approach, described by Ebert in his review of *Dead Ringers* as "the objectivity of a scientist" ("Dead Ringers"), is far different from the usual romanticization of voyeuristic sadomasochism in mainstream Hollywood. In *Rear Window*, for example, the diegetic soundtrack consists mainly of a love song that the female lead claims "sounds like it's being written just for us." Cronenberg is just as much of a voyeur as Hitchcock, but unlike Hitchcock he manages to subvert the very techniques he employs.

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WHAT'S SO FUNNY: COMEDY IN AMERICA

EMILY MOUSSEAU-DOUGLAS

Based on reviews and articles I had read about the new faux documentary *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, I expected that when I actually saw it, I would be disgusted. I imagined sitting low in my theatre seat, covering my eyes, horrified by the displays on the screen. When I finally got to see the movie, I was disappointed at my lack of disgust and horror. It was not nearly as outrageous or offensive as I felt all those articles had promised it would be. My disappointment made me think about my extensive exposure to vulgar comedy and the nature of comedy in America. Perhaps I have been desensitized to bodily functions and nudity, especially when they are presented in the name of comedy. Perhaps years filled with *American Pie*'s and *Scary Movie*'s, capped by the summer of raunchy sex farces (like *Wedding Crashers* and *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*) have made it hard for me to be shocked and appalled by anything, even the scene of a hairy naked man wrestling a fat naked man, which constitutes the climax of the Borat movie.

For those who have not seen the movie (or read every article written about it) the idea is as follows: a journalist from Kazakhstan named Borat drives an ice cream truck across America, hoping to meet the woman of his dreams, Pamela Anderson. Because Borat is new to America and knows nothing of American decorum or tradition, he unwittingly does and says things to the locals along his path that both infuriate them and end up making them look like horrible people. Take for example the man working at a rodeo who, trusting the seemingly simple foreigner, tells Borat that America is currently working on making it acceptable to "string up" homosexuals. The concept of lulling unsuspecting locals into a false sense of confidence so that they will reveal their innermost prejudices may sound cruel and potentially humiliating for all involved, but the movie has been very well received in America, debuting at number one and managing to keep the top spot for the following week as well. It is difficult to find an unfavorable review of the film, and the "comic elite" in America is calling creator and star Sacha Baron Cohen a "revolutionary" (Stein; Rottenberg). Still, despite the positive reception from critics, Borat has caused worldwide controversy as well, which made me wonder: what is it exactly that separates those who hate the movie from those who love it? Is it just that people who hate it don't "get it"?

Cohen, due to his performance as Borat, has been compared to Andy Kaufman, called a "Johnny Knoxville with a sense of humor," and a Dadaist (Stein; Rottenberg). His performance blurs the line between the "wildly surreal and the all-too-real" as he allows his subjects no "comforting recourse to ironic detachment" (Rottenberg). It is reported that during filming, Cohen was extremely dedicated to the project, refusing to break character between the time he woke up and the time he went to bed. The

mustache is real, the suit remained unwashed to make him smell more "foreign," and all promotional interviews were conducted with Cohen in character (Rottenberg). This kind of ultra-real comedy, in which unwitting targets do not realize they are part of the joke, is, according to those in the know, a trend emerging with the release of Borat. Referred to as "street comedy," it relies on extreme absurdity, well-placed realism (such as the authentically smelly suit), and little-to-no money (Stein). It is a descendent of *Jackass* and Stephen Colbert, but without the "twinkle in [the] eye" (Rottenberg). The look of *Borat*—the grainy, cheaply shot footage—is intentional, as is the fact that *Borat* hails from a real country. As British comedian David Baddiel points out, "if it had been an older comedian, Borat would have been from Stupidlandia" (Stein).

It is in the spirit of this new brand of guerrilla comedy that the faux documentary becomes so successful as a genre. *Borat* simply would not work as either a social commentary or a shock-filled comedy if a viewer felt that everyone on screen was in on the joke. The genuine reactions to Borat deliver most of the laughs, and it is knowing that these people are revealing their true selves, their innermost thoughts and beliefs, that allows the film to comment on American society and culture.

When considering some of the most famously disgusting comedic outlets, such as *South Park*, *Team America: World Police*, and even *Mad* and *Cracked* magazines, it seems obvious that even if the public is sure to be disgusted, comedy just has to go as far as it can go. Comedians revel in the challenge to make audiences cringe. It is with this in mind that one considers how a group of the most respected comedians in America, following an advance viewing of *Borat*, shared a "sense of collective astonishment" (Rottenberg). In a group that included a *Simpsons* writer, Garry Shandling, and one of the creators of *Seinfeld* (the other, Larry Charles, actually directed *Borat*), there seemed to be a consensus that what they saw was "something totally original," and that Cohen had changed comedy in the same way that Marlon Brando changed dramatic acting after *On the Waterfront* (Rottenberg; Stein).

This new style of aggressive comedy is expected to horrify older viewers, namely those over the age of thirty-five. Says journalist Joel Stein, "If you're over 35, you think you have the right to keep your regrettable moments private. If you're under 35, you realize that everything is public now." As one woman in the film tells Borat, when he asks her to clean him after using the toilet, "That is a very private thing." But it isn't anymore; nothing is. And the younger generations are used to that. In the era of reality television and Internet video stars, everyone's idiocy and/or talent is on display for all to see. The notion of privacy as an assured right no longer exists, and everyone, at every moment, is at risk of revealing his or her true nature. The arrival and popularity of Colbert, YouTube, and *Jackass* means the medium will continue to grow. No one is safe. At the Toronto Film Festival in September 2006, *Borat* "earned a rapturous reception," even though the projector malfunctioned midway through the movie and despite the festival's renown for debuting future Oscar contenders, which *Borat* reportedly outshone (Rottenberg). The movie has also created a lot of buzz on college

campuses, as well as within the film industry. So it may be safe to assume that this type of movie, a colorful mix of vulgarity and supposed social commentary, is inevitably going to be more fervently anticipated, and finally received, by those Americans who are presumably more liberal, more open-minded, and more creative. Or is it just that this was the right time for this movie to be seen in America?

Professor Paul Lewis suggests in his critique of the film that the latter may be the case, and the movie's reception internationally suggests it may be an entirely cultural issue. Borat has definitely not been so welcome in Russia, or in his supposed homeland of Kazakhstan. The former has not banned the movie, as was reported, but its Federal Culture and Cinematography Agency, which is responsible for certifying films for distribution, has refused to certify *Borat* (Myers). The agency contends that its decision was based on "potential to offend religious and ethnic feelings," although due to rampant illegal DVD production in Russia the film will likely still be seen (Myers). This implies that there may still be some demand for the movie despite belief by officials that it will offend many within the country, particularly Russia's large Muslim population.

Borat is the first movie that has been refused certification for distribution in Russia since the collapse of Soviet censorship in the 1980's (Myers). Even Kazakhstan has not explicitly refused distribution of the movie. This leads one to wonder whether Russia's choice to refuse distribution for *Borat* is based on cultural, ethical, and religious reasons, or something else entirely. Daniil B. Dondurei, editor of *The Russian Art of Cinema* magazine, argues that the decision was motivated by politics. He cites "ethnic tensions, but also close relations between Russian and Kazakhstan, and a taboo in Russia against satirical depictions of national leaders or political systems"—a notable cultural difference from America, where leaders and politics are not only satirized publicly but frequently, on two intensely popular shows, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* (Myers).

In Kazakhstan, where they were likely expecting a "major, if probably hysterical, hit to [their] image," the government went on the defensive in the wake of the release of *Borat*, taking out a four-page tourism advertisement in the *New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*, and producing television ads for distribution in America (EP Staff). The print ad, described by journalist Josh Rottenberg as "unintentionally funny," tries to appeal to potential visitors with such tidbits as, "The country is home to the world's largest population of wolves" (Rottenberg). Initially, the government of Kazakhstan threatened legal action against Cohen but has now invited him to visit. Cohen is considering going to Kazakhstan (in character, of course), and sees it as the "ultimate opportunity to conflate his made-up character with reality" (Stein).

So, Russia does not find *Borat* funny; Kazakhstan does not find *Borat* funny (although they are beginning to adopt the adage "If you can't beat 'em . . ."); and Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar, all of which have "barred distribution of

the film" due to predominantly Muslim populations, do not find *Borat* funny (Myers). Then why does America seem to find him so funny?

The answer to this question appears to lie in an interesting cultural conglomeration: *Borat*, both the movie and the man, embodies everything that Americans find humorous. He is a combination of highbrow satire, lowbrow sight gags, extreme and inaccurate caricature—he creates in the average viewer, through his own inadequacies, a quiet feeling of superiority. This recipe has proven successful in so many of America's most popular comedic outlets: *The Simpsons*, most notably; network sitcoms like the 1980s hit *Perfect Strangers*, which capitalized on the inherent humor of a foreigner trying to start a life in America; even *The Daily Show*, which earned its extreme popularity by emphasizing for a delighted audience the constant foibles of politicians and other public figures.

America, it seems, has a history of humor based on "patronization of the other," satire based upon stereotypes beginning with the caricature of Yankee Doodle during the American Revolution (Stein). Yankee Doodle was depicted as a country "bumpkin," the opposite of the perception of the British as fancy and sophisticated, and was originally created as an "ignorant clodhopper [to] appeal to the British soldiery as an apt caricature of the rustic rebels" ("Songs and Oaths"; Tandy). Eventually, the character of Yankee Doodle was proudly adopted by American soldiers to emphasize and proclaim their difference and independence from the British ("Songs and Oaths"). These exaggerated characters generally develop into recognized facsimiles of a given ethnic or economic group, as Yankee Doodle came to symbolize patriotic Americans, and are then embraced in the culture. Such is Borat.

One trick, Rottenberg argues, that makes Borat (and Cohen) so successful is that he is playing on the average American's inherent notion of a "foreigner," and their almost guaranteed lack of geographical knowledge (Rottenberg). Cohen, Rottenberg says, capitalizes on the average American's willingness to believe even "the most absurd things" about how people live and behave in foreign countries. Because Kazakhstan represents one of the "many gaping holes in the average American's shaky knowledge of geography," anything that Borat says about the country will go unchallenged by his subjects (Rottenberg). As Stein says, Cohen preys on the "fear, fascination and, most of all, patronization of the other—the foreigner" (Stein). The irony is that while Cohen plays the "clueless, desperate-to-fit-in, optimistic foreigner" that has become a comedy staple, Borat's "attempts to be American pinpoint exactly how the world sees us: garish, violent, nouveau riche, a land of Donald Trumps and 50 Cents" (Stein).

An interesting contradiction lies in Cohen's performance in the film. He simultaneously plays a "leering, filthy, poor and opinionated foreigner and a confidence man who triumphs over the shills who fall into his lap," creating a caricature of a foreigner, and emphasizing the true feelings of his subjects (Lewis). Borat's success lies in the audience's knowledge that he may be fake, but the targets

are very real. This duality allows the audience to laugh both at him and with him, and seamlessly combines the film's use of both exaggeration (satire) and reality (documentary).

According to journalist Carina Chocano, Borat's encounters with average Americans are "gems of fish-out-of-water buffoonery" and test some "surprisingly ambitious sociological theories." But to what end? Borat's main target appears to be bigotry within the United States, particularly in the South. Lewis claims that audiences, by assuming a position of "imagined superiority" over both Borat and his subjects, "take an angry pleasure in the appalling statements he brings out of others" (Lewis). By revealing these people's darker sides, Borat is giving the viewer a "shot of security and a double infusion of enhanced self-esteem" (Lewis). Viewers are given some sense of pride and the idea that things could be worse: they could be the person on screen, saying bigoted things and making a fool of him/herself.

Also, the indiscretions of the people on the screen become a novelty in our contemporary politically correct society. As Jay Roach, director of *Austin Powers*, says, "Political correctness has led to a more civil society because people with racist attitudes have taken them underground" (Rottenberg). Until now! Borat reveals the true feelings of his subjects, much to the horror of the audience. But there is something compelling about hearing beliefs and ideas that are normally not allowed in a public forum. Particularly because it is socially unacceptable to publicly reveal one's prejudices and hostilities, Borat quickly becomes both a window and a mirror, allowing people who do not share the opinions of those featured in the movie to see what others really think, and to allow those who do share these beliefs to see themselves represented in popular culture for better or worse. This onscreen candor creates something akin to a car crash: even if people hate what they are seeing, they can't turn away. Of course, the fact that Cohen's antics as Borat create humor within the spectacle makes it palatable to a wider audience, horrifying viewers some of the time, and making them laugh the rest of the time.

Satire as a form of humor is pervasive throughout American comedy and is seen as a highbrow alternative to parody or irony, intended to "attack vice, and promote virtue" (Granger). Tony Hendra defines satire as an "intellectual judo, in which the writer or performer takes on the ideas and character of his target and then takes both to absurd lengths to destroy them" (Turner 55). Throughout his travels, Cohen (as Borat) challenges his subjects, creating situations in which they can either receive him well, or not. Take, for example, the men on a New York subway that Borat attempts to greet with kisses. There is nothing overly aggressive or intrusive in the way in which Borat approaches the men; he only tries to kiss them on each cheek, in a way that is common in many European countries. More often than not, he is met with harsh language and the threat of bodily harm. This simple experiment reveals much about these men: homophobia, ignorance regarding other cultures, distrust, disassociation from the people around them, and probably even fear. The movie is full of similar

incidents and similar people, all of which are startling in their hostility. Because the events on the screen are shocking and uncomfortable for the viewer, it becomes both natural and necessary to laugh to alleviate the uneasiness. Also, given the prevalence within American society of the traits exhibited by the men on the subway, the men become instantly recognizable to the audience, who "laugh along because [they] see [them]selves . . . and to face up to this sort of unvarnished, unpleasant reality is a powerfully subversive thing" (Turner 56). Unexpectedly, these men become representative of everything that is wrong with our society, and it becomes not only acceptable but obligatory to find the humor in their ignorance. How could we not? Suddenly we are aware that it is all around us, all the time!

In his book *Planet Simpson: How a Cartoon Masterpiece Defined a Generation*, Chris Turner notes that satire often emphasizes the "blazing hundred-foot-high neon gap between What Is and What Should Be," or the difference between how people know things to be and how they want them to be (57). He explains further, saying that this idea is particularly important in comedy in America because "America's ideals are so central to its society and so celebrated in its history and culture" (58). America prides itself on being welcoming, open-minded, and accepting. But Borat's experience certainly does not confirm this notion. In actuality, the people that he meets are the exact opposite. This is usually so, says Louis D. Rubin Jr., who asserts that American comedy arises out of a gap between a "cultural ideal" and fact, with the ideal usually being revealed as "somewhat hollow and hypocritical, and the fact crude and disgusting" (Turner 58).

In addition to the more subtle comic devices Borat uses to get a laugh, there are present in the movie displays of all levels of comedy, described by Turner: sight gags, catchphrases, referential humor, and sophomoric humor—the previously mentioned bodily functions (Turner 59). Through the use of many levels of comedy, Borat is able to appeal to all types of viewers, and the movie never feels heavy with pretension, or like one would have to be a genius to understand the jokes. A child could watch the film and laugh. The sight gags and slapstick humor combined with the more subtle social satire create comedic stimulation for all the senses. The catchphrases ("High five!") act as both an effective marketing tool and an easy way for people leaving the theatre to feel that they can actively participate in the movie. Just because the show is over does not mean you have to stop talking like Borat!

The referential humor in *Borat*—though limited—creates cultural cohesion, another potential reason that the film has been so successful in the very home of its main cultural reference: *Baywatch*. The references to the culture in Kazakhstan are quite obviously the fruits of Cohen's imagination and are, for the most part, unspoken. Borat's history and habits are never explicitly tied to Kazakhstan specifically, but instead embody most Americans' notion of a foreigner. The choice of Kazakhstan as Borat's home is effective because it "blends into all the other 'stans' we don't understand" (Lewis). But the American people and references are real. As Cohen

himself says, "The joke is not on Kazakhstan. I think the joke is on people who can believe that the Kazakhstan that I describe can exist" (Strauss). It is America that is Borat's punch line, and it was also American audiences who turned test screenings into "tent revivals, with audiences convulsing with laughter" (Rottenberg).

So is it that *Borat* just happened to be the right movie at the right time in America? Can timing, and America's general taste for vulgarity and satire, account for the movie's phenomenal success here? Paul Lewis calls *Borat* the "perfect ethnic joke for post-*9/11* America" (Lewis), capitalizing on America's fear of foreigners as potential terrorists and turning it into laughter and fascination at the foibles of a naive newcomer. It is probably true that, before *9/11* and the country's increased fears of terrorism, Borat would not have received the hostile reaction he did from the people he met throughout his journey. And, without their prejudice caught on tape, the film would not be the shocking glimpse into American intolerance it has become. It is for this fact in particular that *Borat* becomes such a fascinating lesson in American self-awareness. It reveals much about the American character, and it says much about the way that America is viewed by foreigners (of which Cohen is one), but has still been embraced by the very people that it criticizes. Despite the unfortunate truths that may be revealed through the *Borat* movie, America must always be commended for its ability to laugh at itself, loudly and enthusiastically.

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