

Introduction

The present concern of my study is to look into the subjectivity of America¹ itself. I will examine how the subjectivity² of America is established, and how the condition involved is made possible. Meanwhile, by probing into the subjectivity of America, I will point out its relation to the issue of the identity of being Americans.

The discussion will be carried out through three films, each of which concerns some specific American subject-matter. The films are *The Exorcist*, *The Hulk*, and *Men In Black I*.³ The three films probe into America in three different facets--religion, national defense, and the race. Though the angles vary, the focus is always on how and why the subjectivity of America is a split one and the identity of the American is never fully attained.



This idea of the subject as split is derived from Jacques Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis, especially from his Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, in which the concept of "the gaze" is elucidated.⁴ The concept is the backbone of the theoretical base that paves the way for my discussion of the three films on America I analyze. The Lacanian gaze is an intriguing concept that defines the subject as split – the subject, in order to fend off the object *a* (which in the scopic dimension is the gaze), escapes into the first awakening⁵ in which the subject is safe from annihilation caused by the gaze. However, to keep himself or herself safe from

the gaze makes the subject impossible to achieve his or her full identity.⁶ This dialectical twist plays a crucial role in establishing America's subjectivity. It is by analyzing the three films that this scenario of America's subject as split can be explained.

This way of discussing the establishment of a nation's subjectivity can also be found in Meghan Morris' essay "White Panic, Or *Mad Max* and The Sublime," in which she discusses an unnamable terror in the film *Mad Max* which overwhelms the audience "by a feeling of being watched from all sides" (249). She describes the experience of terror when watching a scene in *Mad Max*. In this scene Jess is hunted on the idyllic beach by the crazy white bikers. The maneuver of the camera is operated from Jess' angle seeing nothing on the beach and feeling nothing in the bush where the bikers launch their attack. Morris writes that the scene "made me flee the cinema" (248). That terror, however, is always an inseparable part of its subjectivity because it is a "powerful cultural memory" (248). The terror in the bush reminds the white Australian of the guilt behind their national identity inseparable from their history of immigration but sidestepped in the construction of the Australian national narrative:

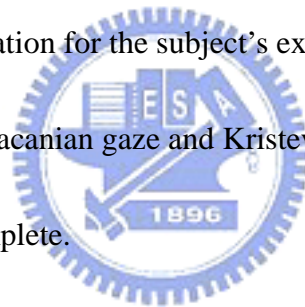
As well as restoring a still often suppressed dimension of sexual violence in Australia, we retrieve a scene a racial terror crucial to national history but

almost never dramatized in mainstream “national” cinema. At various times, most intensely between the 1920’s and the 1960’s, all Australian states forcibly took children away from aboriginal families, placing them in state “homes” or in white foster care, with the aim of assimilating them to white society (Edwards and Read, 1989). (248)

In *Mad Max*, Jess is knocked down by nothing as we see from camera shooting from her perspective. This nothing is the sublime that is unrepresentable which constitutes the Australian subjectivity (Lim 253). Yet the unrepresentable is what the Australian subject can never face. Jess being knocked down on the beach dramatizes the consequence of the encounter. Though Morris does not use the Lacanian rhetoric to specify the terror as object *a*, her argument can still serve as a parallel to Lacan’s idea of subjectivity as split. “White Panic, Or *Mad Max* and The Sublime” serves as a good example that the film can be very Lacanian without using the Lacanian terms or the psychoanalytic conceptual structure. At the same time, “White Panic, Or *Mad Max* and The Sublime” provides the precedent for the film discussion on the construction of the subjectivity of the nation by pointing out how the subjectivity collapses. The way I discuss the subjectivity of America is to follow this essay, except that I adopt the theoretical framework to make the exploration of the film more justified.

Also, besides the exploration of the formation of the American subjectivity via

the Lacanian split subject, a no less important idea which also plays an important part is the concept of abjection formulated by Julia Kristeva. Lacan's concept of the subjectivity is to look at the rupture which gashes between the certainty of the subjectivity and the perennial return of the real, but around the dialectics of the act of fending off and the besieging act, there is a war zone for the subject to claim its establishment by throwing off the unclean, the polluted, the abject as is brought up by Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*. Contrary to the Lacanian dialectics of subjectivity as split, Kristeva's dialectics between the subject and the abject provides some confirmation for the subject's existence. To look into America via the three films using the Lacanian gaze and Kristeva's abject would make my interpretation much more complete.



My first chapter discusses the religious aspect of America's subjectivity via the film *The Exorcist*. It is well known that the national foundation of America is based on religion, as verified by the fact that the first immigrants from Europe to America were made up of the Puritans, who shaped the American faith today. The emphasis on the religious importance at the core of the nation can also be found in the fact that on all the coins of the American currency is minted the statement "In God We Trust." And in the usual procedure in court, one must testify under oath, no matter what ethnic group this person belongs, by putting one's hand on the Christian Bible. In his

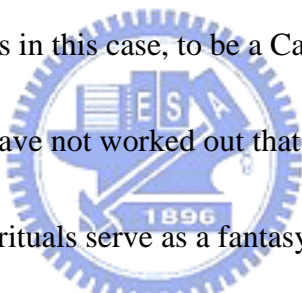
well-known book *Democracy in America*, the famous observer of America Alexis de Tocqueville writes on this religious aspect of America that he sees:

Most of English America was peopled by men who, having shaken off the pope's authority, acknowledged no other religious supremacy; they therefore brought to the New World a Christianity which I can only describe as democratic and republican; this fact singularly favored the establishment of a temporal republic and democracy. From the start politics and religion agreed, and they have not since ceased to do so. (288)

In this description, we find a highly religious nation, in which the democracy of the republic is supported, whether implicitly and explicitly, by the Christianity brought to the New World. In *The Exorcist*, though the main issue is one that deals with Catholicism, it is no coincidence that the setting is America, more specifically in Georgetown and New York, on the Eastern coast, where the “founding fathers” of this nation started their enterprise. In short, the religious problematic revealed in the narrative of this film resonates with the essential crux of one of the motifs that establishes America, the common ground being that of religion.

The title of this chapter then, is “The Final Success of Catholicism in *The Exorcist*.” To begin with, the relationship between belief and ideology is explained through Slavoy Žižek's finding in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, where belief as

materialized ritual is explained (36). That the materialized ritual shapes the belief can be found in the film, which explains why Catholicism containing so many rituals has been chosen. The priests in the Catholic order in the film believe in rituals, or more precisely, deems it as a conviction that rituals alone contain the religious truth. That is the condition of a Cartesian subject, who never doubts his own certainty. And yet in Catholicism, the rituals that structure the belief exist because of the fact that there is a traumatic kernel which Catholicism can never face – that is, Jesus sacrificing his life. Being a Catholic is to follow Jesus, to follow in particular what he has done, instead of simply stating this fact. Thus in this case, to be a Catholic is to sacrifice one's life, as Jesus once did. But things have not worked out that way, hence a rupture.



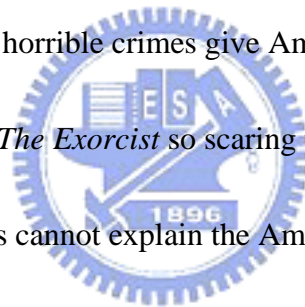
Catholicism exists because its rituals serve as a fantasy that seals up this rupture that the Catholics cannot face. Therefore, by only performing the rituals, the priests think that they are the true followers of Christ. However, there is one priest who doubts, Father Karras in the film, who suffers from the guilt out of the bereavement of his mother and gradually loses his faith in Catholicism. Father Karras' guilt is derived from the fact that he cannot take good care of his mother because of his choice of career as a priest that has caused him unable to pay for her treatment. He begins to suspect the Catholic rituals as a true faith that can deliver humankind from suffering. As a consequence, it is no coincidence that it is when he loses his faith that the demon

possesses Regan, the little girl in the film. So what is the demon? The demon can be seen as the abject of Catholicism. The whole process of exorcism is that of purification of Catholicism itself. This is the logic of dialectics of abjection. The abject challenges the superego because Catholicism needs the abjected excrement to establish itself. At the same time, through the process of exorcism, the trauma of Catholicism can be revealed.

In the final battle with the demon, Father Merrin deals with the demon with only words, which make Catholicism what it is. But words only function as a fantasy to mask the traumatic kernel. Now Merrin stands right in front of this demon, the filth which must be cast out so that the order can be in place. Apparently, he is not able to chase away the demon for if he does, there would be no filth as the negative force to set a contrast to Catholicism as the positive force. On the contrary, Karras embraces the role of a true Catholic. He sacrifices himself for Regan and saves her by achieving the full identity of a Catholic, at the same time destroying his own subjectivity.

In this sense, America can only exist as long as it is not a completely secular nation as it claims to be. In other words, America, which always labels itself implicitly as a Christian nation, can do so only because it is not Christian at all. Otherwise, America as a nation would not exist for the reason that if it is a truly devout nation, it would sacrifice itself by self-mutilating itself to achieve its full

identity. I cite Nick Cull's essay "The Exorcist" to associate the filmic text of *The Exorcist* with the politics of America to specify this paradox of the establishment of America's subjectivity. Nick Cull argues that *The Exorcist* not only echoes with the time when it was produced but it even "sought to shape that time" (47). Cull returns to William Blatty's novel *The Exorcist*, on which the play is based, to remind that the novel explicitly alludes to some contemporary evils at work, including the American panic suspicion of the Communist enemy within, the atrocities done by the American troops in Vietnam, and "the 'original sin' of the era: the murder of President John F. Kennedy in 1963"(47). Those horrible crimes give Americans great sense of guilt. And it is this guilt that makes *The Exorcist* so scaring to the American audience because those traumatic events cannot explain the America national narrative as the religion-founding nation. Cull's essay provides the solid evidence for my argument to explain that *The Exorcist* dramatizes the subjectivity of America as split and its identity thus unfulfilled.



My second chapter is entitled "The Implosion of National Defense in *The Hulk*," which is devoted to the critique of America as a military state. America as a nation, especially after the second world war, is a militant superpower that constantly sets war around the world to wield its power and military might, whether to invade others or, in euphemism, "to protect" them. The examples are various--from the Korean War

to the Vietnam War, from the Gulf War to the recent Iraq Invasion. It is hard to speak of America without bringing its military identity into focus.

But why is the national defense an implosion? Is not national defense to protect the nation from what is from outside an offense? But if we look at *The Hulk*, the answer would be clear. In this film, there is an enemy, the Hulk. But how exactly has it come into being? It is produced under the prohibition of the military itself. How is it so? In the beginning of the film, it is the military that provides the laboratory for scientists, including Bruce's father, to do research, though the only purpose is to serve the benefit of the military. Though the military prohibits them from doing experiment on life organism, it does provide the means and resources to such experiments. In this case, it is only possible that in the military laboratory where resources and equipments for every kind of research are so readily available, Bruce's father can carry out this secret research. As the subject casts out the abject to claim the ground of the subject's existence, the Hulk is the abject caused by the military symbolic order to challenge the military itself. The function of the Hulk is to guarantee that the army can serve its own military purpose. .

Thus, it is clear that the Hulk is the product of the military prohibition. Despite the fact that it is prohibited by the military, the military, as a matter of fact, needs it. This can be explained in two aspects, both complementary to each other. The military

must preserve the Hulk for two reasons – first, the Hulk is profitable. But the reason for him to be profitable is that he is dangerous, and that he can serve as a sophisticated weapon for the military to make money. My argument here can be deduced as follows: the military produces for itself a dangerous thing; the necessity for the thing to be dangerous lies in the fact that only when it is dangerous can it be profitable; thus, the military seeks to create a danger for itself.

The second reason is that besides being profitable, the Hulk's danger serves another function: its power to challenge the military. It follows that when it does so, the military must retaliate. If there is not the Hulk, the military has no target to wield its power to. The eradication of the Hulk becomes a must for the military to make sure of its own function. In this case, it is important for the Hulk to be invincible. That is to say, it must not be eradicated and must be kept as the target for eradication. The film, it would be no coincidence, is a splendid show of the grandeur of American military might. The weapon used in the film by the army against the Hulk is constantly upgraded-- from the FBI agents using hand guns to the army using machine guns, from the tanks' canons to the helicopters' hell fire that burns into naught a rocky hill; and from the jets that fly high into the upper atmosphere, to the devastating Gamma bomb. None of these weapons can completely annihilate the Hulk, the brilliant product of the military invention. Yet it is the uselessness of the military that is its

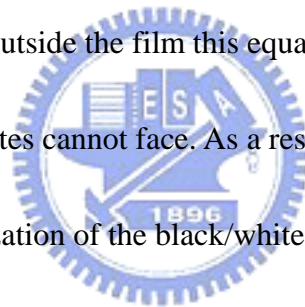
own usefulness. In other words, if the army is useful in destroying the Hulk, it would cease to exist so far as the objective of its existence is abolished.

As a result, the dialectics of the abject is dramatized again, except that this time it is depicted in the military terms. Gina Marchetti, in her essay “Hollywood/Taiwan: Connections, Countercurrents, and Ang Lee’s *The Hulk*,” comes up with the interesting comparison of the position of the Hulk with that of the Asians in America. This argument leads to the idea that what the military really abjects is Asians’ asianness. And what has caused the military to abject the Hulk, which is the metaphor of Asians’ asianness? The answer is the military itself. As I have mentioned, the military makes the condition possible for the production of the Hulk. Instead of finding a solution to help Bruce, the military seeks only to destroy him. The guilt of the military arises first from producing the Hulk out of Bruce, later out of the constant attempt to annihilate him. This guilt is unbearable to the military. The military subjectivity is seen in the film split between the certainty of the military that the Hulk is not their fault, and the guilt that they have indeed caused the trauma which they cannot heal. And this guilt is most apparently seen in the grimace of Bruce when his transformation into the hulk takes place. This grimace when seen would mutilate the military, for this distorted facial expression throws a question to the military, “Don’t you see I am transforming”? This is the accusation the military cannot answer.

The third chapter concerns another dimension of the constituent of the American society-- the race. My critique is launched via my analysis of the film, *Men In Black I*. The chapter title, as it goes, is “The Invisible Race That Never Exists.” Racial difference founds the American society and has a history as long as the country itself. And this film deals with the racial problems of America--not of the humans, but of the aliens.

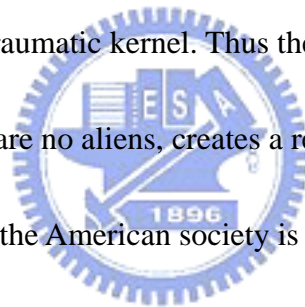
When it comes to the representation of race in American films, Sharon Willis proposes in her *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film* the idea of “difference” which emphasizes the visual contrast of black/white pair of characterization in the American cinema. Willis argues that in the American culture the dominant ideological structure is the white, and the black becomes the bearer of racial meaning. Let me cite three of her concepts that can be related in a way to the Lacanian idea of the gaze: the dominant culture, the display, and the gaze explained in Willis’ book. The display functions as the fantasy that makes valid the Cartesian certainty of the subject. And owing to the white dominant culture, whiteness cannot look at blackness in the way blackness looks at whiteness. To avoid the exchange of the gaze, whiteness must posit the represented gaze in advance, so that the gaze of the blackness would not emerge to meet its own. The gaze of the blackness tells the truth about the white that the black in fact shares no social equality that the white claim to

have. The gaze of the blackness tells the white that their identity is a failure, as in the burning child dream the child's gaze tells the father that he is not a real father by not being able to save the child. The internalized gaze of the black or the minorities in the film is in fact the fantasy to mask the racial trauma. The Lacanian logic of the gaze thus finds the filmic expression in *MIB* scenario. Therefore in the filmic representation, the contrast of black/white pair is displayed to internalize the other's gaze. In *MIB* then, the two main characters starring by Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones are the display to crystallize the social reality that the blacks and the whites share the social equality. Yet outside the film this equality does not really exist. This real inequality is what the whites cannot face. As a result, American subjectivity is seen split between the fantasization of the black/white equality and the real social situation of racial inequality.



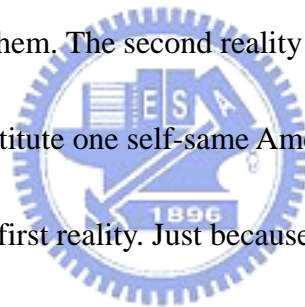
The film, then, functions as a fantasy that masks the failure that the American public fears to face. The film has a happy ending, unlike the two previous films (in *The Exorcist* the priests die in the end, while in *The Hulk* lovers separate). *MIB*, on the contrary, ends in the triumph of the MIB themselves, which represents the victory of the American society. After the bug crisis has been taken care of, the system of the alien immigration goes back to where it was, safe and sound as in the knowledge of the public. The system is well contained in the society by the success of the MIB's

mission. In other words, the society is in a peaceful and harmonious state with the total integration of the alien race. In the film, the immigration policy runs its usual course that sustains the normalcy of this society. In Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, he develops his idea of social narratives as "political allegory" by citing Levi-Strauss' notion that "all cultural artifacts are to be read as symbolic resolutions of real political and social contradictions"(80). Therefore the conflicts in real life are symbolically solved by the filmic narrative. Yet it is this symbolic act of solution that reveals the failure of reality itself. To put it another way, the fantasy must function to fill up the gap caused by the traumatic kernel. Thus the film, like the first reality narrated in the film that there are no aliens, creates a reality in itself that in real life there are no conflicts and that the American society is an ideal society that has no problem whatsoever in accepting different races. Both the ending and the manner the film deals with those alien races serve the suturing function. The film is a comedy in which the incidents having to do with aliens are always hilarious. The social contradictions are made funny to be laughed at. Over the unsolvable contradiction only laughter is the resolution. This fact has also been observed by the two trenchant American critics – De Tocqueville and Baudrillard. Scot Robert Olson summarizes in the chapter "The Culture Factory" of *Hollywood Planet* the two critics' observation of American media. He concludes that De Tocqueville's idea of American media as "first



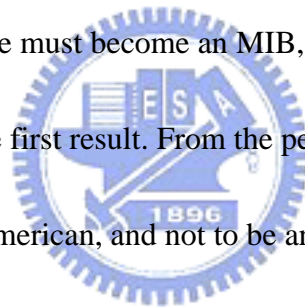
and foremost about giving audiences what they want”(67), while Baudrillard’s criticism of America’s utopianism goes that “ethnic and national diversity ... is a significant aspect of American home demand for media text”(80). Thus by creating utopia images, a real solution to diversity is found.

The alien race in the film can thus be looked at on two levels. The first is the reiteration of the motif of the American subject as split and of the American identity as unfulfilled. In the film, it is clearly observed that the American society is split between two realities. The first reality is that the American people do not know that there are aliens living beside them. The second reality is that America is full of aliens everywhere. Both facts constitute one self-same American society. Yet the serenity of this society is based on the first reality. Just because everyone does not have the knowledge of the existence of the aliens, the society can function normally. The alien races are immigrating into America, but this is only possible that this race is an invisible one. America welcomes the aliens as long as they do not exist. America will be America on the condition that the public fantasy that America is the same old America is sustained. On the contrary, if the aliens should show up, the American subjectivity confronting the Thing⁷ would collapse. To keep that fantasy intact is MIB’s major task. When the Thing should slip into the first reality accidentally and disrupts the fantasy that backs up the social order, MIB serves to suture these two



realities together. By using the memory eraser, MIB allows the fantasy to sustain itself again and the American subjectivity is at peace with the Thing that would demolish it.

In this sense, the identity of being an American is the identification with the fantasy constructed to mask the real situation. Being an American is to acknowledge that there are no aliens, while being a “real” American is to face the real fact that aliens are everywhere. However, to be a “real” American in this case is to face the two following results--first, the subject must mutilate itself and be dissolved into nothing, like the sheriff in the beginning of the film nearly killed by both the attack and his own astonishment; second, one must become an MIB, who disappears from the public forever, which is quite like the first result. From the perspective of these results, being an American is not to be an American, and not to be an American is the way to become a normal American. The paradox plays itself out through the film.



I have also employed the idea of surrogacy from Carroll Smith Rosenberg’s essay “Surrogate Americans: Masculinity, Masquerade, and the Formation of National Identity.” Rosenberg explains the idea by citing the founding moment of the America when the white wear the Indian costume to surrogate the Indians in order to welcome the natives American who they have kept on waging bloody war upon. This surrogacy also emphasizes on the difference that Americans are different from the European because they incorporate the natives to form their Americanness. Yet the difference is

a surrogate one to mask their real innate guilt towards those native Americans as Rosenberg argues “in this way, surrogacy works to suture the wounds change gashes open”(1329). As a result, *MIB* is a costume party in which the contrast of black/ white pair is also to surrogate the racial difference in order to shun from the real sameness. . Americans embrace the difference as the identity but this difference is only the fantasization that works to suture the social wounds which inspires the guilt in the white. Therefore the identity cannot be truly attained because after unraveling the shell of the fantasy of the difference, the traumatic kernel of racial inequality is revealed.



The three films, if deeply looked into, reveal the secret of the American subjectivity as split between the return of its undoable traumatic kernel and the certainty that guarantees the ideology of the American subject, the fantasization that fills the gap the trauma rips apart. And it is on the fantasization of the subject that American identity resides. Therefore this identity is incomplete and never can be fulfilled. .

Chapter 1

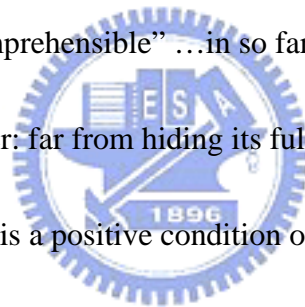
The Final Success of Catholicism in *The Exorcist*

The film, *The Exorcist*, puts on a provocative presentation of exorcism over a possessed little girl. Through various ordeals, she is saved by the young priest Father Karras. As the film ends, however, Father Karras ends his life in a way that, at the first sight, is a failure of Catholicism. Yet the fact is that if the details are looked into more carefully, the victory and the success remain on the side of Catholicism, though on some level, the defeat is still attributable to modern-day Catholicism. Thus in *The Exorcist*, the whole meaning of being a Catholic, its core of doctrine, its essence of teaching, should be reconsidered in terms of what goes between this paradox of Karras's victory and its failure conceived in the death of Karras's counterpart, Father Merrin. On the other hand, the demon appearing in the film is an interesting part that could be brought forth by the Lacanian concept of the gaze in order to explain its function, in relation to the interaction between Catholic subjectivity and identity of what a Catholic should be. Meanwhile, in this complex interplay between subjectivity and identity, the concept of "abjection" and the "abject" developed by Kristeva also plays an important role.

To begin with, the way of how belief functions has already been pointed out by Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, "... belief, far from being an "intimate",

purely mental state, is always materialized in our affective social activity: belief supports the fantasy which regulates social reality” (36). This crucial point of belief as materialized is essential to what we see in Catholicism and in *The Exorcist*. The rituals that priests daily perform in the church materialize their belief and structure the fantasy of their identity as true Catholics. In this way, rituals are necessary in terms of their continuance of belief, as Žižek again puts it:

“External” obedience to the Law is thus not submission to external pressure, to so called non-ideological “brute force,” but obedience to the Command in so far as it is “incomprehensible” ...in so far as it retains a “traumatic,” “irrational” character: far from hiding its full authority, this traumatic, non-integrated Law is a positive condition of it. (37)



The Catholics in *The Exorcist* only live under their own fantasy supported by rituals of every kind. This idea can be and has already been conveyed in Lacan’s *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, in which Lacan takes Freud in this way “...Freud, when he doubts...is assured that a thought is there, which is unconscious, which means that it reveals itself as absent” (36). In other words, it is when he doubts that he is sure that he is in his “I am.” On the contrary, a Cartesian subject is an annihilating one that when he thinks, he is. As Lacan explains:

. . . Descartes then has to reassure himself --of what, if not of an Other that

is not deceptive, and which shall, into the bargain, guarantee by its very existence the bases of truth, guarantee him that there are in his own objective reason the necessary foundations for the very real, about whose existence he has just reassured himself, to find the dimension of truth. (36)

In being comfortably submerged in the self-confidence of his “I think; therefore I am,” a Catholic, in this film, ignores everything except his certainty of being what he is, namely, a Catholic. There are many examples in various episodes in the film to affirm this. That which is revealed as evidence is mostly the lack of the priests’ devotion to virtuous behavior. During the distressful moment when Father Karras is bereaved of his beloved mother, his friend Father Dyer actually steals a bottle of liquor for him to drown his sorrow. Also, in the party, Father Dyer drinks, smokes, acting like a businessman, instead of acting as a devout priest dedicated his life to God. Nevertheless, he still is a Catholic, or he still thinks that he is. There are rituals waiting for him in the church to perform, from which the fantasy of him being a Catholic wields its power.

To carry further the discussion, what exactly is the gap, the rupture that makes the condition of the endless automaton of rituals? As we have read in the New Testament, Jesus is the incarnation of God into man, by being crucified, that is, by sacrificing himself to save all humankind. The principle that Jesus sets up is to give

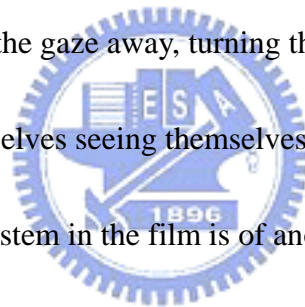
away his own life to fulfill the happiness of others. This “failure” is irreducible to every one that tries to be a Catholic. This is how Žižek defines ideology, “The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality, but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel” (45). This kernel of being a Catholic, of Jesus sacrificing himself, is so traumatic that Catholics nowadays must construct a reality, that is, the symbolizing process of rituals in order that the fantasy, being a Catholic, be obtained and kept afresh.

The certainty of being a Catholic guarantees the Catholic subjectivity. In this way, the Catholic subject is safe from meeting its true doctrine – the giving away of one’s life for the benefit of others. But how does the certainty of a subject whose “belief,” as mentioned above, is materialized as social activity sustaining itself? How does he not doubt? Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* explains, “Hence a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant” (9). Therefore we see that it is the Other that saves the subject from meeting his real. But he does that “by making it repugnant” (9), which is what Kristeva calls abjection. The abject is what is driven out and excluded (which is also part of it) by the subject as improper/unclean in order to sustain itself. As Kristeva explains, “. . . I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish myself” (3). But the abject never

stops challenging the subject, whose ego is oppressed by the superego, “A certain “ego” that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter’s rule of the game. ... To each ego its object, to each superego its abject” (2). As the result, subjectivity is where the abject challenges the superego and the ego escapes from the object.

So now the problem comes to the demon and the exorcist. What is the demon? And who is the exorcist? The demon is, of course, something outside the symbolic order of any representation. Its appearance always takes shape in the way of distortion, disorder, and anamorphosis. But what it is must always be linked to who comes to chase it away. Firstly, in the film, what comes to confront this demon is the medical system. This medical system, like Catholicism, bases its core of method on representation. After attending the clinic, the mother asks the doctor what the matter is to Regan, her daughter, and the doctor bases his observation on the external behavior of Regan and gives an answer making sense only to the medical symbolic order. But the mother inquires further that it is not spasm that Regan has, but the bed that is shaking. The shaking bed is not possibly explained by the medical symbolic order. The doctor, unable to face this impossibility, escapes into the explanation that fits his knowledge and answers, “What’s wrong with your daughter is the nerves, not the bed.” Later on, as the doctor sees personally how Regan shakes her body in an

impossible way, he still attributes the cause to the physical brain lesion. The Cartesian subject of the doctor never doubts his certainty, as Lacan points out, “That in which the consciousness may turn back upon itself – grasp itself ... as seeing oneself seeing oneself – represents mere sleight of hand. An avoidance of the function of the gaze is at work there” (74). The consciousness that sees oneself seeing oneself is assured of its own certainty, and as the quoted passage points out such a function is to avoid the gaze. As all the possible means, all the methods of the medical symbolic order, have been used to detect the illness of Regan, the doctors avoid the gaze that ruptures their certainty, thus simply putting the gaze away, turning their back on their own failure, so that they can still see themselves seeing themselves.



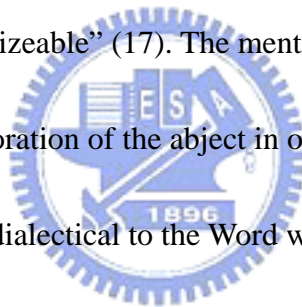
Secondly, the juridical system in the film is of another symbolic dimension. Yet the detective there somehow plays a less clear than ambiguous role in the process of his investigation. Though he also depends his judgment on representation, his certainty, as we know, is undermined by something beyond his ken. The way of Burke’s death, that is, with his head completely being twisted around, leads him to doubt. He senses that there is something beyond the representation of his juridical knowledge. That’s why in his first visit to the mother in that house, he eliminates other rational possibilities piece by piece and reveals to the mother subtly, not directly, that Regan is perhaps the murderer of Burke. But what’s special about the detective is

that he never has to confront the thing face to face, the demon. This way, though he doubts, we never clearly know whether in the end the juridical symbolic order in which he is a part is deeply disturbed.

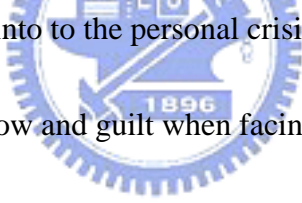
In this perspective, on the contrary, Father Karras, the main character, must come into view. Father Karras, among all other figures in the film, is the only one who really doubts. He is not sure any more that he can maintain the faith he has towards Catholicism, a religion that functions by rituals, by the materialized effect that structures the faith. He tells his mentor, Father Birmingham, in a bar in Georgetown that he has lost his faith. In fact, certain moments in the film have hinted that Catholicism nowadays comprises only of symbolized rituals and is already perceived by Father Karras as flawed. For example, in the subway, while still waiting for the train to arrive, he is disturbed by an old pauper sitting in the filthy corner soliciting him, “Would you help an old alter boy? I am a Catholic.” Father Karras is perturbed because just like the Catholicism of which he has lost faith, the old pauper simply sticks to the symbolized dimension that he claims himself to be a Catholic by words alone.

Thus Father Karras is undergoing a crisis of faith. In order to restore the religious order, the process of the reinforcement or the purification of religious order must be carried out. From this perspective, the demon can be seen as the abject of Catholicism.

Kristeva writes, “Abjection accompanies all religious structurings and reappears, to be worked out in a new guise, at the time of their collapse” (17). Usually the abjection appears as a rite of purifying the polluted--the abject--in order that the sacred can keep itself in order. This forms a dialectics between the sacred and the abject. The sacred needs the abject so that the process of purification strengthens the legitimacy of the sacred. On the other hand, without the sacred, there is no superego for the abject to oppose to. As Kristeva writes, “It finally encounters, with Christian sin, a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian Word as a threatening other – but always nameable, always totalizable” (17). The mentioned Christian sin in relation to the Christian Word is the elaboration of the abject in opposition to the superego in the religious topology. The sin is dialectical to the Word while the Word can always tame the sin but never eradicate it. That is why Kristeva puts it as “always namable, totalizable.” This is the relation of the demon as the abject to Catholicism. And also in 1972, one year before *The Exorcist* was put on onto the screen, Pope Paul VI had emphasized the importance of reviving the study of personal evil. Nick Cull in “The Exorcist” writes, “As Mark Kermode has pointed out, in November 1972, Pope Paul VI urged Catholics to return to the study of the Devil: Evil is not merely a lack of something, but an effective agent, a living spiritual being, perverted and perverting. A terrible reality...” (48). It is no coincidence that at the religious crisis of Karras the

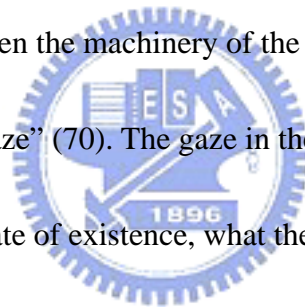


demon appears for the restoration of the religious validity. Through the rite of exorcism, at first sight, the purification is for Regan, to restore her to her original state. To look deeper, we find that it is not all. The exorcism is in fact a purification of Catholicism itself, namely, the process of abjection. Father Merrin dies in the battle against the demon, but he dies as a Catholic subject, with his certainty about Catholicism as what should be defended. Therefore his death does not chase away the demon. On the other hand, Father Karras who has lost his faith, must become the abject, even the demon itself, and throws himself outside the window that the order of Catholicism can be rebuilt. The impure is, at this moment, gone.



Now let us look further into to the personal crisis of Karras. We see in the film that Karras falls into deep sorrow and guilt when facing the death of his mother for not having been able to take care of her adequately. He sees his own mother lying on the bed of a public asylum, tied to a corner surrounded by a crowd of disordered patients, crying and yelling in a terrible way to Karras. And he, worst of all, in the asylum faces the accusation of his mother from such a horrible place that Karras has left her alone. The subjectivity, interestingly, of Father Karras' becomes clearer to us in a way. Though he soon resumes his normal routine, we know that in his daily course of life it is not all, but something else is there. Here we can introduce the concept of *tuché*, deployed by Lacan to explain the mechanism of that which

constitutes subjectivity. As Lacan argues, “the tuché we have translated it as the encounter with the real. The real is beyond the automaton, the return, the coming back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies behind the automaton” (54). This indicates that the subject is always a split one – split between Cartesian consciousness and the real. It is, in an extreme manner, the burning child dream in Freud⁸ that is introduced by Lacan to expatiate on the split condition of the subject, “This split, after awakening, persists-- between the return to the real . . . and the consciousness re-weaving itself . . . the more profound split between the machinery of the dream . . . and the voice of the child, the solicitation of the gaze” (70). The gaze in the burning child dream recognizes the father’s true state of existence, what the father really should be. The mystery of the identity as a real father is here revealed in the gaze.



Therefore when we turn our attention to the film, the comparison is surprising. We see in the dream of Karras’ that his beloved mother appears in a soliciting expression, eluding his grasp, and finally fades away. It is by no accident that in the dream, when Karras is in agony facing his mother, a flash of an image sets in, a flash of the horrifying face of the demon. So the demon, in fact, plays two roles in this film in Father Karras. First, of course, the Thing, as the demon, is the object *a* of Karras. However, this demon recognizes the failure of two identities in Father Karras – one is

that of being a son, the other being that of a catholic. Like what Žižek comments in

Looking Awry on the The Birds:

they (the birds) are, rather, the making present in the real, the objectivization, the incarnation of the fact that, on the symbolizing level, something has not worked out, in short, the objectivization-positivization of a failed symbolization. In the terrifying attacking birds, a certain lack, a certain failure assumes positive existence. (104)

Here comes forth the problem of incarnation in the film. If we deploy Kant's idea of

the "Sublime," the demon would be of a different kind in the film. In his *Sublime*

Object of Ideology, Žižek provides an explanation of what that idea is, "The Sublime

is therefore the paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation,

provides a view, in a negative way of the dimension of what is unrepresentable"

(203). The unrepresentable is of course not within the field of representation. The

Sublime, therefore, lies outside phenomenality. In the film then, the Kantian demon

would be the unseen Thing that we would not get to see through the film since all that

the camera shows is representation. Žižek thus goes on to give his idea of the

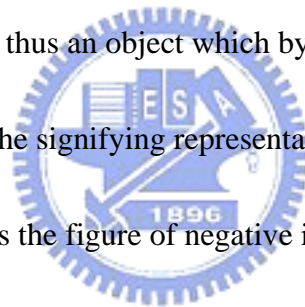
Hegelian concept of the Sublime:

Hegel's position is, in contrast, that there is nothing beyond phenomenality,

beyond the field of representation. The experience of radical negativity, of

the radical inadequacy of all phenomena to the Idea, the experience of the radical fissure between the two – this experience is already Idea itself as pure, radical negativity. (205)

In *The Exorcist*, the demon, the elusive, ungraspable spirit finds its place in the incarnation of the little girl. Through the whole course of the film, the demon, as we know it, is the little girl lying on the bed in her room. The inexpressible image of the spirit of the demon appears in its impossibility of appearance in the body of a girl, in the bone, the skull, in that poor Regan. This is “the spirit is the bone” proposed by Žižek, “The bone, the skull, is thus an object which by means of its presence, fills out the void, the impossibility of the signifying representation of the subject” (208).



After seeing the demon as the figure of negative incarnation, we should now come to the other side of the incarnation, namely, the positive⁹ one. Before that, however, the question previously raised should be considered – who is the exorcist? Owing to the fact that from the very beginning of the film, the scene takes place in northern Iraq, in which Father Merrin, digging an ancient tomb, finds a silver medal of Holy Mother and Son. Afterwards Father Merrin enters another ancient ruins and confronts the sculpture of the demon. This scene paves the way and foresees the event of the later battle. Indeed, it gives the impression that Merrin is the exorcist and will play a pivotal role in driving out the demon. Meanwhile, on the other side of the

world, in Washington D. C. , Father Karras comes into our sight as a troubled priest who doubts his faith and is ridden by guilt. The crucial thing here is that the loss of his faith, as well as his guilt, comes down to a fundamental place – his identity. The loss of faith, of course, challenges directly his identity of being a Catholic, while the guilt that has torn him clashes with his identity as a son. The two feelings intersect with each other and converge on the demon. The intersection of the two can be seen in various places in the film. In the bar where Karras conveys to his mentor that he has lost his faith, he also mentions that he needs reassignment to where he can be near his mother and takes care of her. Also, when Karras and his uncle visit his mother in her illness in the mental asylum, his uncle worsens his guilt by telling him that if he weren't a priest, he would now be a famous psychiatrist and his mother wouldn't end up like that in a shabby public hospital. It is, therefore, obvious that by failing his identity as a son, his splitting state of a subject can still sustain his subjectivity and existence. Before we really cut down to the problem of identity (since we know that the subject is a split one) an interesting point should be mentioned – extimacy, as Žižek in *Looking Awry* points out:

The problem is that, by “circulating around itself,” as its own sun, the autonomous subject encounters in itself something “more than itself,” a strange body in its very center. This is what Lacan’s neologism *extimite*’

aims at, the designation of a stranger in the midst of my intimacy. Precisely by “circulating only around itself,” the subject circulates around something that is “in itself more than itself,” the traumatic kernel of enjoyment ...the subject is perhaps nothing but a name for this circular movement, for this distance toward the Thing which is “too hot” to be approached closely.

(169)

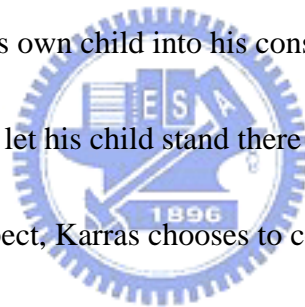
This extimacy describes the condition of the subject that the Thing which looks from outside at him, is at the same time very intimate and close to him. In that burning child dream, the child appears in the dream and questions his father, but this gaze and the voice are within the father’s own subjectivity. As we know that the subject is a split one, in this example the father escapes the dream into daily reality, into the “consciousness re-weaving itself” to avoid meeting the child. Thus the gaze is something within oneself but also excluded or avoided. Now we can see this in the film when Karras first meets and talks to the demon, he suddenly hears the old pauper who asks for money in the name of Catholicism. That same sentence emerges again “Father, would you help an old alter boy?” Those words emanate from the demon is something Karras has himself heard. Those words show the fact that Catholicism has become words alone and has no other strength to reveal the core of its doctrine. The traumatic fact is repressed by Karras. Though he doubts, he is still a priest. At this

moment, the Thing appears. He knows that this is something inside him but simultaneously is uttered from outside. And he is disturbed.

There are various scenes that describe and dramatize the extimacy. The most manifest one is near the end of the film when Karras and Merrin take a rest outside the bedroom on the stair. Karras walks into the room during the time when Merrin takes a pill in the bathroom. Karras finds in the room that on the bed is his mother as she previously appears in the hospital, tied to the bed. The mother here solicits him, appeals to him in a miserable voice why he has left her alone, and she looks at him in a pitiful manner. The gaze appears, and it is no longer in the demon's threatening shouts, but in the solicitation of Karras's mother's. The mother, sitting on the bed, whose gaze and voice recognize the failure of Karras as a son, makes Karras tremble and drives him out of the room. How can the demon, in the form of the mother, make Karras flee, if not that the gaze is of the privileged status in the structure of his subjectivity?

However, fleeing from the room is not all, for the end, as we know, looms in so far as it culminates in Karras' death. Why is Karras' death arranged as the final solution to the problem of possession? This death is, of course, to achieve the full identity of a son and a Catholic. Before fleeing from the room in which lies the demon in the form of his mother, Karras goes and checks the heart of the little girl. He sees

that Regan's heart is very weak and about to stop; that is to say, her life is about to fade away. Yet this body that the demon possesses takes the form of his mother. The two people converge on the same point that they both solicit him not to let her die. So after escaping from such a trauma downstairs, Regan's mother asks him if Regan is going to die. This question puts Karras back to determination. He must now be what he is – a son. Nevertheless we know that subjectivity and identity cannot stand together. In order to maintain his subjectivity, his identity must be kept unfulfilled. For example, in the burning child dream, the father is not a complete father in so far as he flees from the gaze of his own child into his consciousness. On the contrary, if he is a real father, he must not let his child stand there soliciting for the help that the father cannot give. In this respect, Karras chooses to confront the gaze of his mother, which under this circumstance, is Regan herself. And he, by jumping out of the window after being possessed by Regan's demon and destroying his own subjectivity, becomes a true son, so to let his mother, now Regan, live. Also, at that deliberate hurl of himself out of the window, Karras is also fulfilling his identity as a Catholic. As we see in the film, there is a place in which when Karras conducts the mass, he takes the bread and wine, and claims these to be the body and blood of Christ, the mystery of the Catholic faith. In this ritual, Karras knows that this body and blood are the core of the whole meaning of Catholicism, and more than that, by doubting his faith in the



Catholicism that is transformed into rituals, he knows that it is to become the body and blood that is the mystery of faith. In the process of exorcism, Father Merrin shouts out only words, the symbolic construction that masks the traumatic kernel, which is Christ's sacrifice. Of course, that doesn't work. It is only when Karras embodies the spirit of Catholicism, by becoming the body and blood as incarnation that salvation is attained. This is also the moment he becomes truly the follower of Christ, in which his subjectivity is demolished.

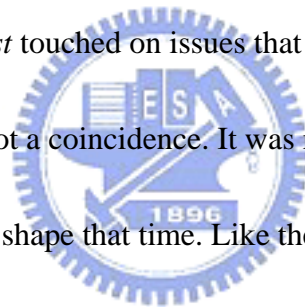
Having argued that in *The Exorcist* the subjectivity stands only when its identity is unfulfilled, there are some questions to be raised. What is the relation of *The Exorcist* with America? In what way can *The Exorcist* explain the formation of the American subjectivity? What would the film reveal when put into the American national context? Nick Cull explains in the essay "The Exorcist" the questions raised above. To begin with, the reaction of the American audience when the film first was released in 1973 tells how the film shocked the American audience. Cull writes:

Critics from the *Wall Street Journal* to Moscow's *Isvestia* were appalled, but audiences were overwhelmed by the result. As newspaper reported viewers fainting, Americans lined up to see what all the fuss was about, and then queued to see it all again. In San Francisco a deranged patron charged the screen in an attempt to kill the demon; in Harlem a priest attempted to

exorcise drugs from his neighbourhood; in Boston a woman was carried from the theatre murmuring: “it cost me four dollars but I only lasted twenty minutes.” (46)

The reaction of the audience discloses the fact that the film is so scary to Americans to the extent of shock and hysteria. Cull argues that the film is not so much a socio-historical product of the time as a proposal that the film shaped that time:

Yet the scale of the reaction suggests that the film -- like William Peter Blatty's 1971 novel of the same name, and on which it was based -- had hit a nerve. *The Exorcist* touched on issues that were all too alive for the world of 1973. This was not a coincidence. It was more than a product of its time; it actively sought to shape that time. Like the carved demon's head unearthed in the prologue. (46)



Cull then mentions that the producer of *The Exorcist* William Blatty, who bases his play on his own novel *The Exorcist*, alludes in his book to several contemporary evils at work. The major manifestation of evil Blatty mentions is what the American troops do in the Vietnam War:

Within the body of the book, Blatty selected an epigram that alluded to a further topical manifestation of evil: American conduct in the Vietnam War.

In late 1969 the world learned that American troops had massacred some

200 Vietnamese civilians at My Lai. The war in Vietnam had become a perverse pseudo-industrial enterprise in which units were rewarded for their 'body count' like insurance salesmen reaching their targets. It was this aspect of the war that attracted Blatty's attention. His epigram for part three of his novel came from a 1969 edition of Newsweek: "a [Vietnam] brigade commander once ran a contest to rack up his unit's 10,000th kill; the prize was a week of luxury in the colonel's own quarters." (47)

Besides the conduct of the American troops in foreign countries that is hard for Americans to face, Blatty also refers to the trauma within the country that has aroused much sensation to Americans:



The novel also alludes to what many Americans still regarded as the "original sin" of the era: the murder of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. In an early chapter the child Regan visits Kennedy's grave, and a Georgetown church, introduced as the site of JFK's marriage, is the scene of revolting desecrations (apparently perpetrated by Regan under demonic control). Blatty sought to draw these disparate manifestations of evil -- crime, Communism, genocide, war and assassination -- together into a cohesive presence. The demon of *The Exorcist* was the result. (47)

And the location of the setting is also significant in the way that the location is very much associated with the political power of America. Cull argues:

The use of Georgetown was significant. The district, close to the heart of Washington DC, was inseparable from American political power; a senator is among the guests at Chris's ritzy party. Chris and her circle add a cultural dimension to this power: her life is shown splashed on the cover of Photoplay magazine. The murder of film star Sharon Tate by Charles Manson in 1969 gave the “evil hits Hollywood star” scenario a chilling topicality. Beyond this, an “enemy within” the American movie industry was a favourite theme of isolationists before the Second World War and of anti-Communists after it. Blatty's story flirts with this same notion. Indeed, Father Merrin's warning to beware of the demon's voice as it mixes lies with truth is exactly the sort of thing President Nixon had begun to say about the American media as it probed the breaking story of Watergate. (49)

Cull's essay restores the political meaning of the film. The issues explained in his essay put the film back in its political context. From the deeds of sin done by the American troops in Vietnam War and the shocking assassination of President John F. Kennedy to the deception of the Watergate incident, which unsettles the mind of both

the public and the politics of America, there is one thing in common among these incidents that causes and inspires such fear in the American public as *The Exorcist* has reminded them again. That is the national trauma which cuts deep in the Americans' mind and then comes up with the fearsome guilt that cannot be quenched. It is this guilt that inspires so much fear that causes such sensation in the public. And in what way is this guilt a Catholic one? How does the catholic guilt split the American subjectivity? In his famous and insightful book of the observation of the American society from the perspective of a foreigner, *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville discovers that religion is very powerful in the maintenance of the republic polity of democracy in America: "Besides, in the United States the sovereign authority is religious, and consequently hypocrisy should be common. Nonetheless, America is still the place where the Christianity has kept the greatest real power over men's soul" (291). And among all the religious sects of Christianity, Catholicism is the most apt for the distribution of the idea of equality which helps to keep the public mind in pace with the republic democracy. Tocqueville writes:

The Catholic clergy in the United States has made no effort to strive against this political tendency but rather seeks to justify it. American Catholic priests have divided the world of the mind into two parts; in one are revealed dogmas to which they submit without discussion; political truth

finds its place in the other half, which they think God has left to man's free investigation. Thus American Catholics are both the most obedient of the faithful and the most independent citizens. (289)

Here in Tocqueville's description of the Catholics in America a certain contradiction is found. Now the subjectivity of the American Catholics is split between the lawful citizens and faithful religious servants. This obvious paradox exists because of the fact that one stands on the condition that the other fails. The aforementioned atrocities done by the American troops and the criminal assassination of Kennedy cannot be contained in the identity as true religious followers. Therefore this guilt drives Americans into their identity as lawful citizens endorsing the nation's politics. The Lacanian subjectivity as split finds its social expression in the contradictory logic that constitutes the American mind.

The Exorcist dramatizes the exorcism through which Father Karras' mental and religious crisis as a son and a catholic reveals the secret of Catholic subjectivity as split. At the same time the film also displays how the American subjectivity works, by visualizing the traumatic kernel that, in order for this subjectivity to function, can never be crossed over.

Chapter 2

The Implosion of National Defence in *The Hulk*

Ang Lee is one of the few filmmakers as a foreigner in the American film industry to aim at a critique that carries the subtlety an American director would often lack. I find his three films (*The Ice Storm*, *Ride with the Devil*, and *The Hulk*) particularly interesting in that their topics are all about America, in a straightforward manner, without the vacillation that a American might have when shooting films about a completely American problem. Yet what makes the three films so special is not only their direct association with America, but also their power to destructure from inside what America is. That is, the three films, I argue, faithfully reveal the conflicts and contradiction both structuring the concept of America and decentering it at the same time. The three films link with each other on the ground of this underlying self-deconstructing force. This self-contained contradiction and conflicts that render the three films its thematical entity can be associated with the concept of “deconstruction.” Derrida in “Letter to A Japanese Friend” writes, “Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity. It deconstructs it-self” (4).

For Ang Lee in these three films, the central point of this destructuring structure is the motif of Lee’s “outsidedness,”¹⁰ the distinctiveness of being outside of

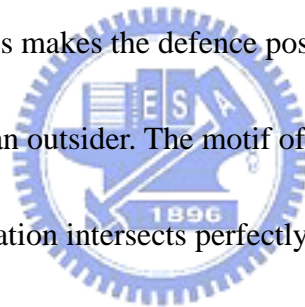
something, from which the force of maintaining itself and collapsing germinates. The outsidersness is constituent of the motivating power that links the three films together.

The Ice Storm deals with America in its 70's while *Ride with the Devil* is staged in the 1860's about the Civil War. The two films penetrate into the sensitive part of the American society in its usually sensitive moments. *The Ice storm* pictures the middle class family (the main constituent of American society) at the time when the Vietnam War was lost. "Outsidedness" is revealed in the disorder and lack of dislocation of the patriarchy within the family and the nation. *Ride with the Devil* depicts the racial interaction (a black man fights on the side of the South) that subverts the regular national myth of America in the most traumatic time of American history (Americans armed against each other). The outsidersness lies in the racial aspect. *The Hulk*, released in 2003 touches explicitly upon the military theme. The timing the film was made is equally sensitive as the Iraq War is still going on. What is so particular about *The Hulk* is that the story aims directly at the problematic issues related to the national security of the United States. The film is expositive of how the nation defends itself and how it secures itself through the comic book figure, the Hulk, thereby revealing the secret of America's national defence and security as never before.

The chapter is "The Implosion of National Defence in *The Hulk*." Note the paradoxical connotation in the juxtaposition of the two terms "implosion" and

“defence.” Defence means to defend a nation by bearing arms against a foreign force, an alien object from without. Its purpose is to protect the ground of the nation’s certainty and validity, so that it be kept pristine. And yet “implosion”¹¹ indicates an eruption, an explosion from inside which makes problematic the order this nation assures and scrap the coherence of that order. “National defence” serves the purpose to maintain this order for the nation, which is the United States of America. Therefore by this title I try to reveal that the secret of the national defence of America (to defend America from the threat from outside) is to be examined from inside of America.

Something inside that explodes makes the defence possible. It can therefore be said that inside the nation there is an outsider. The motif of “outsidedness” and that of the military for the defence of a nation intersects perfectly in *The Hulk*. This chapter seeks then to reveal the secret of the establishment of America on the facet of its military power.




The three aforementioned films made by Ang Lee all carry with them a self-mutilating force, which threatens the social, racial, and military aspect. The reason is that Ang Lee is a foreigner to America. When trying to make the film of *The Ice Storm*, Ang Lee himself says in *Shi Nian Yi Jue Dian Ying Meng*:

When I shot *The Ice Storm*, it is from the perspective of an outsider that I look at the turning era of America. In America, many people have lived through that era; therefore they are familiar with it. In 1973, I was still in

Taiwan, just entering the Art School. The coincidence is that that year was also when I was liberated. (Zhang 195)

In this passage, Lee openly admits that the perspective which he exploits is that of an outsider. While making *Ride With the Devil*, Lee says, “I cannot escape from everything inherited from the culture of Asian nor can I completely accept what is western. Between what is old and new, which one can I choose over the other” (232)? This points out the predicament only an outsider has.

Therefore when it comes to *The Hulk*, it is inevitable to see how Lee plays his “outsidedness” in it. Gina Marchetti writes in “Hollywood/Taiwan: Connections, Countercurrents, and Ang Lee’s *The Hulk*”:



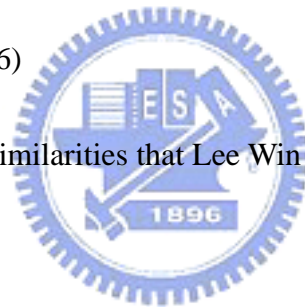
... this film boldly sets a coloured (though he is green) in opposition to the U.S military and makes him survive. ... Does Ang Lee feel anxious and embarrassed as Lee Win Ho, who comes from Taiwan and is accused as a spy in America? ... the Hulk, like Ang Lee who makes him, belongs to the minority, like those from Latin America, labelled as “the threat to the national security” and put under severe surveillance. *The Hulk* is a reversed Asian fantasy in which under the Western white male domination (which can be further related to politics of the United States), there lurks the coloured whose unresolved anger from the position of the minority is ready

to destroy or bring salvation to western civilization. (82)

Marchetti associates Ang Lee with the accused spy Lee Win Ho, and puts them together in the category of the minority, like Latin American who are “the threat to the national security,” Marchetti further explains:

The Hulk/Bruce Banner seems to respond to the ordeal that an Asian from Taiwan encounters. When Ang Lee and his team tried to work on *The Hulk*, Lee Win Ho was still fighting with the U.S government. . . . This case, however, reveals a new hatred and prejudice for Asian Americans, especially Asian immigrants. (86)

Marchetti goes on listing the similarities that Lee Win Ho and Ang Lee as well as the Hulk bear.

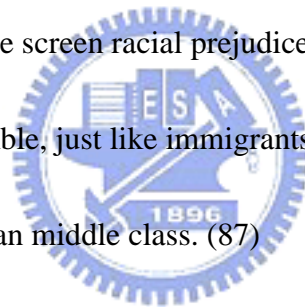


Born in Taiwan, Lee’s wife is an Asian scientist (a microbiologist whose field of study is much more similar to that of Banner than Lee Wen Ho to Banner. Thus Ang Lee probably sees more in the difficulties Bruce Banner faces because of the case of Lee Win Ho. In *The Hulk*, there are lots of scenes of nuclear explosion, laboratories in dessert, and focuses on computer screen. As a result, to compare the laboratory in Los Alamos where Lee Win Ho stays to the dessert military base where the Hulk is born would not be too exaggerated. And like Lee Win Ho, David and Bruce

Banner are both under certain surveillance. (87)

Thus, to watch the film in the Asian perspective, Marchetti finds that there are several characteristics of the Hulk/Bruce that can be associated with the fate of being an Asian Americans. She proposes that Banner's family is just like a typical Asian American family if we ignore the skin color. She writes:

In fact, leaving aside their appearances as white, Banners play out the "typical" Asian American family. If we see Banners as they participate in a racial make-up party, some of the details of the story make more sense under the logic of the screen racial prejudice. ... Banners are left alone in a world ready to crumble, just like immigrants who must work hard to mingle in the white American middle class. (87)



First, the name Bruce is itself full of Asian memory in America:

The Hulk is born with the appearance of King Kong, which makes the character clear in his identity as an Asian. The Hulk's display of ChingGong-like ability is typical of an Asian Gong Fu hero in traditional Gong Fu films made by Hong Kong and Taiwan. This makes it suitable for Lee to name the Hulk "Bruce." (86)

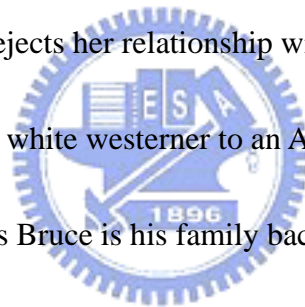
And Bruce's personality resonates with the typical Asians.

In a suburban white community, he (Bruce) is different and has difficulties

in mingling in (even his stepmother admits that). Though he lives in a well-being environment, he cannot be at ease (constantly having nightmares). In such an academic milieu as the Berkley, he feels temporarily at ease. Riding bicycle to school, not taking off his helmet, going all out in scientific experiment and computer makes him a freak. (87)

Even Bruce's relationship with Betty reveals his Asian temperament: "... she (Betty) rejects him because of his "lack of passion" and "emotional distance." The two characteristics are both the general misunderstanding from westerners' imagination"

(87). The way Betty's father rejects her relationship with Bruce can also be compared to the general rejection from a white westerner to an Asian--familial and racial aspect: "The reason the general rejects Bruce is his family background; that is, the general's detestation for David Banner. It can trace to the gene, racial, or personal cause" (87).



And this racial, familial, and gene difference can cause the deep-rooted culturally-ingrained prejudice:

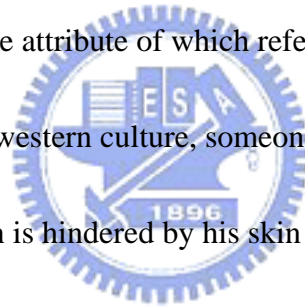
The general even suspects the family intrigue by the Banners because he cannot believe that Bruce, after parting from David for thirty years, does the research of the same academic field. And this is another impression American generally bear – Asians tend to secretly gather for conspiracy, forming families and gangs. Those impressions are in the general's mind.

No matter how hard Bruce tries, he cannot completely escape from his father's influence, as a result, failing to mingle in the American society.

Bruce's gene (or race) predetermines his "difference", thereby, his "isolation." (87)

Even David Banner plays one role in this cultural map where Asianness in American and the Hulk is drawn:

David also embodies some Asian typical characteristics. The role of shabby and dark cleaner is like either an immigrant worker or a gangster. He is also a "mad scientist," the attribute of which refers to a mad freak, an educated Asian internalizing western culture, someone who has gone mad because his career promotion is hindered by his skin color. (87)



In the interview by Elvis Mitchell in "Ang Lee on Comic Books And Hulk as Hidden Dragon," Ang Lee says:

. "The film was never tested with an audience," he continues. "Just a few studio executives saw it with hundreds of holes, because the special effects had to be filled in later. But they wanted to make an Ang Lee movie – whatever that is – so they never tested it." (11)

So *The Hulk* is very much an Ang Lee movie without too much of the market control of the way it is presented. Lee is the main motivating force behind the screen.

Moreover, it is in fact Ang Lee himself that plays the Hulk in the film. Elvis Mitchell in his interview writes:

And how did he direct the action for his computer graphic protagonist
 “Ends up I did it myself.” He says. “They shot me performing the action.
 By making the movie, I guess I was like the Hulk, and I ended up literally
 playing the Hulk. I wanted continuity and reality, and once I showed them
 what I wanted, eventually they put me in a big suit, because they needed the
 weight, and started shooting me.” As Mr. Lee discusses why he finds
 Marvel characters so fascinating he seems to be addressing his own
 destiny. ... “I think there’s always an alter-ego for me in my movies”

(11)



It is no coincidence that Lee himself plays the Hulk since he overtly asserts that there is an “alter-ego” in his movie. In “Becoming The Hulk” by John Lahr, Lee says, “To me, the whole process of making the movie is the process of ‘Hulking out’” (74).

If we juxtapose together the fact that Lee puts himself in the role of the Hulk and the time when the incident of Lee Win Ho was at its peak, plus the facts listed by Marchetti what the Asian characteristics are in the film. It can be concluded that what is projected into the hulk is Asian’s Asianness in the context of American’s national security. So to put it this way, what really hulks out of Ang Lee is his Asianness.

Again in “Becoming the Hulk,” Lahr writes:

Lee had begun by using other actors, but for key emotional moments he took over the job himself. The work had some side benefits. “I got to yell and let aggression out,” Lee says. “It was very therapeutic.” Frederick Elmes, his cinematographer, says, “Something inside him allowed him to let go.” (75)

The reason why he at “key emotional moments” must take over the Hulk and act the role on his own is now clear to us. Lee must make sure that his own Asianness is ingrained in the Hulk.



So now it can be argued that the hulk in the film is the abject of the U. S military, and what the American abject is really this Asianness. And Lee really makes the Asianness embodied in the Hulk a horror. In “Mild in the Streets” by David Denby, Denby observes how Lee elaborates the scene to make the hulk really a fright to be later on spitted:

Yet Lee punctuates the scenes in manipulative ways that make us wary: he throws seething nebulae onto the screen, sends clouds of invading blood corpuscles creeping across computer models, and relies on such dubious tricks as shock zooms – a sudden jerk back from, say, the eye of a frog, as if recoiling in fear at what might lie within the animal. All this zipping,

whirling hash from the director of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is intended, I suppose, to prepare us for the big moment when Bruce first swells into motherhood – when the horror is released. (85)

Here Denby associates the disgusting things shown in Ang Lee’s manipulation of camera with the hulk as the horror. The idea of the hulk as those disgusting things and as the abject is thus suggested by Denby.

In Barbara Creed’s “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection,”¹²

she explains what the abject is:



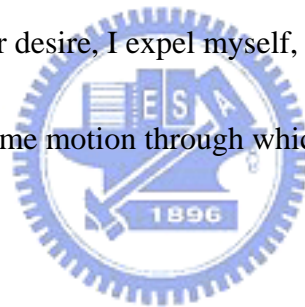
The place of the abject is “the place where meaning collapses”, the place where “I” am not. The abject threatens life, it must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self. ... Although the subject must exclude the abject, it must, nevertheless, be tolerated, for that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life. Further, the activity of exclusion is necessary to guarantee that the subject takes up his or her proper place in relation to the symbolic. (38)

That is to say, though the subject must exclude the abject (since the abject challenges

the validity of the subject), the subject needs the abject to assist the validity of its own to stand. The dialectics of the subject/abject is mutual. One can do without the other, but one must always exclude the other. And by the act of exclusion and the motion of abjecting, the subject can establish itself. Kristeva in *The Power of Horror* writes:

Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself.

(3)



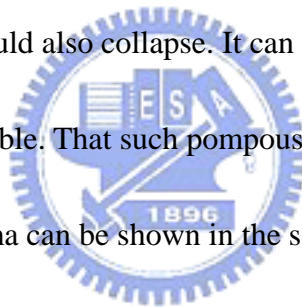
The hulk in the film thus plays such a role as the abject excluded by the U.S military subject. As a consequence, inside the nation there must be an outsider. The Hulk presents directly to us a non or super human being. Its uniqueness, whether in appearance or in strength, makes the Hulk a must of his own identity as an outsider.

It is this uniqueness that relentlessly discloses what America really is. The first thing to be noticed is the creation of the Hulk. It is in a military laboratory that Bruce's father initiates such an experiment on himself. Although it is strictly regulated that such an experiment cannot be carried out, it cannot be denied that it is in the

military that all the facilities and equipments serve as the condition of this attempt. Though it is not clearly shown in the film for what exact purpose the laboratory is, there can be no doubt that it serves the military utility, as the budget is provided and the management is run by the military, which is to say, the military institutions give whatever the scientists need, including Bruce's father, when proposing the project aiming for military use. In such a case, the military produces the Hulk whom they later on try to destroy. In other words, the outsider must be created so that the military can function, whether to later destroy him, as in the case of the Hulk, or to mask him, like the imprisonment of Bruce's father. Hence the Hulk is depicted as both a threat and a benefit to the nation. After the military has captured the Hulk, Betty and the general discuss how to deal with him. The general, at the beginning, talks high talk about how the Hulk is a threat and must not be let out. But this narrative which attempts to make coherent the national trauma cannot but show that this trauma, this outsider the military has created, structures the nation's position--at is, especially the profit-making intention. Betty soon points out that the military wouldn't keep him alive unless they think they can use him as a new kind of weapon. The Hulk as an outsider becomes then an object for both maintenance and eradication.

America then, is a country that needs to put a lot of effort, not to solve its problems, but to keep them afresh so that it can be defined by them. In the film, the

Hulk represents the problems. The military force tries to destroy him from one location to another. First in the underground military base, then in the desert and the canyon, then back in the city. The switch of scenes shows the omnipresence of America's military surveillance. In the process it is proven that the Hulk cannot be destroyed by lethal weapons. But destroy it the military must for whatever reason, and if they do not, their claim that the Hulk is a threat would collapse. It is, paradoxically, this claim that is the backbone of all their actions which structure the security of the society, therefore, of the nation. If this narrative collapses, the other side of the coin – the profit-making aspect – would also collapse. It can thus be argued that because the Hulk is dangerous, it is profitable. That such pompous military actions are only a hollow shell to mask the trauma can be shown in the scene where Betty shows up in front of the Hulk, with which all the dangers the Hulk is assumed to possess now disappear. In the crane shot in which Betty and Bruce hold each other, the soldiers and military forces become useless and they simply stare blankly at the two of them. This proves that the military do not solve problems but try only to maintain that problem. In the next scene, the Hulk becomes Bruce again, but the military, in order to keep their mission going, must again separate Betty and Bruce as if they did not know that it is only with Betty that Bruce is Bruce, and that the military narrative about the security of the society could only come thus far. Of course, such a narrative cannot be



true, for if it be, the military would be useless and deserted. Thus in this case, the outsider can never get inside America, for America needs the outsiders to be outside, so that the concept of America can sustain itself.

Now we can see the American military subject is a split one. It splits between two realities. One is that the military protocol that forbids the experiment on human subjects, as Ross said in the beginning to David Banner:” Banner, I know where you are going – but manipulating the immune system, it’s dangerous and stupid. I’ve told you a hundred times, and the president’s science advisor has made it absolutely clear – no human subjects” (27). The other reality is that there is in fact experiment on the human subjects, which later on results in the birth of the hulk. As Lacan points out in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, the subjectivity is split between the “consciousness re-weaving itself,” and the “voice of the child” (70). The consciousness re-weaving itself here is the Cartesian subject that does not doubt. It is the subject that rests on its own certainty of its self. Here the “return to the real” refers to the burning child’s dream described clearly in chapter one. Lacan continues to explain the split condition of the subject:

The fact remains that this split is still there only as representing the more profound split, which is situated between that which refers to the subject in the machinery of the dream, the image of the approaching child, his face full

of reproach and, on the other hand, that which causes it and into which he sinks, the invocation, the voice of the child, the solicitation of the gaze –

Father can't you see... (70)

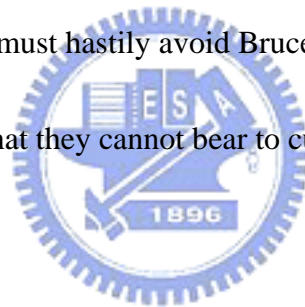
In the dream, the solicitation of the gaze into the father for help or for condemnation makes the father awake into the “consciousness re-weaving itself,” into the subject of certainty which consults himself that it is only a dream. The child gazes into the father’s failure of identity as a true father that protects the child from burning. The failure persists in the wakening of the father from the dream into his consciousness in which his failure of identity is made even. The gaze of the child sees him, but he does not see it. The fire burning on the child is also the fire burning on the father--the fire of the guilt.



In *The Hulk* there is also a fire of guilt. It is burning on Bruce Banner. The fire burning on Bruce results from the second reality--the birth of the hulk on the condition made possible by the military laboratory. This fact cannot be accepted by the military subject who never doubts that the first reality--the military forbids experiment on human subjects – is what the military clings to. When Bruce is crushed by his turning-to-green destiny, his tormented face grimaces. His suffering (which he bears since he is born to be unique by the hulk-destiny) when transforming into the hulk is expressed in his contorted gaze. This gaze solicits at Americans “can't you see

I am burning?” and his gaze burns America for its failure to save him. And as in the film, the American military never attempt to face the failure (the military does not consider the way to cure Bruce). They only think of how to destroy him. The reason is now clear. To cure Bruce is never a choice because Bruce’s hulk-destiny is one impossible to solve. It is the deadlock the military can never untie.

Thus the America’s subjectivity is split by the constant return of Bruce’s contorted expression, as we see in the end of the film Bruce survives, who is out there ready to have next series of the film where the American military must have another war with it and in which they must hastily avoid Bruce’s next grimaces becoming the hulk, instead of helping him that they cannot bear to cure.



Chapter 3

The Invisible Race That Never Exists

Men In Black is a comedy which dramatizes the fantasy of an American society where humans (in this film, the Americans) and aliens, disguised as humans (or Americans), coexist. The harmony of such a co-existence in the American society is mediated by the secret agency Men in Black, who belong to an unknown institution under the governmental control. Through Men in Black's secret contact with the aliens in the society, they make sure that the society is intact from the fact showing itself that aliens do exist.



In such a case as *Men In Black*, the dramatization of the American fantasy deals clearly with the issue of “the alien.” The double meaning of “the alien” intersects perfectly in the film. On the one hand, an “alien” denotes an “other” – someone or something unknown that comes from an unfamiliar place. In this aspect, an “alien” could refer to anything unfamiliar, including a person, an animal, a species, and an object. Therefore, to put this meaning in the national context, it can be related to nativism. Brian N. Fry writes in *Responding to Immigration: Perception of Promise and Threat*:

Nativism is generally associated with immigration and immigrants, but has also been used to analyze events in which native-born Americans were

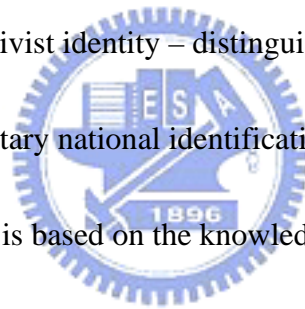
perceived and/or treated as “aliens” in some sense. The word “alien,” which generally suggests that some one is “not of one’s own,” incorporates all of these connotations and is used here to underscore this perception. As Sartre points out, contrastive identities are more than simple categories. They are also *passions* because they tell us who we are by telling us who we are not. “Others” are “pretext” for our identities. (18)

On the other hand, the word “alien” denotes particularly extraterrestrial life forms – any life from the planet other than the earth. In *Men In Black*, aliens are socially, racially, specially, cognitively, aliens to humans/Americans. However, they are human form incarnated. They are disguised as human. Therefore, they are humans/Americans as well as aliens. This means that both socially and specially they are alien to human/American.



“Aliens” that are alien to American society in the social and special aspect in this film form the main argument of this chapter. “Aliens” that are specially different is related to the racial difference in the American society. The difference of the species of aliens from humans/Americans in the film is associated in reality with that of the races in America. Owing to the fact that the double meaning of “the alien” is quite obvious, aliens that are specially different are at the same time socially different. And species issue in the film is in reality that of the race. As a consequence, the problem of

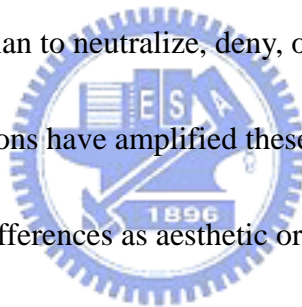
the racial difference cannot be discussed without that of the social difference. These complexities of meanings imparted on the racial and social difference in the American society all converge in the film on the aliens disguised as humans/Americans. In other words, from the perspective of *MIB*, the concept of being an American is not as unitary as the word implies. Aliens disguised as humans/Americans split the American subjectivity whether racially and socially. Meanwhile, the identity of being an American because of the social difference appears to be contradictory and incomplete. On the contrary to what Fry mentions about Sartre's idea that contrastive identities cause the reinforcement of nativist identity – distinguishing “others” from one's own identity and highlighting a unitary national identification – *MIB* reveals that the identity of being an American is based on the knowledge of the non-existence of a contrastive possibility.



In *MIB*, there are sharp visual contrasts that constitute the American subjectivity--as to how this subjectivity stands and builds itself. The most immediate contrast is the black/white pair of the MIB--agent K and J, starring respectively Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith. Ken Korman writes in “Soft Wire” about this pair, “The story, which features Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith as undercover government agents who “licence, monitor, and police alien activity on earth” positively swells with comedic possibility. ... Smith and Jones play off one another

beautifully” (95). The juxtaposition of black/white character in Hollywood film is very common. But its message is not simple. The black/white pair forms the contrast which emphasizes the difference of race. Sharon Willis writes in *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film*:

Our culture continues to be preoccupied with difference. From the most banal and everyday of practices to the most spectacular and extraordinary of representations, differences mark our cultural production. For some time, however, our contemporary investments have tended to eroticize and aestheticize rather than to neutralize, deny, or smooth out difference. Popular representations have amplified these eroticizing impulses by elaborating social differences as aesthetic or sensational effects. In the movies, dedicated as they are to spectacle, then, it is not surprising to find an intense focus on those differences that we are inclined to associate with visibility – gender and race. So powerful is our cultural wish to believe that differences give themselves to sight that the cinema is able to capitalize, both ideologically and finically, on the fascination that dazzling visual contrasts exercise upon us. At the same time, as films read our social field, they may both mobilize and contain the conflict, uneasiness, and overwrought effect that so often accompany the confrontation of differences



in everyday practices. Cinema seems to borrow and channel those energies through a volatile range, from terror, panic, shock, and anxiety to titillation, thrills, excitement, fascination, pleasure and comfort, while it proliferates representations of social difference as a central or peripheral spectacle. (1)

The film as a social production that contains as well as channels the conflict and contradiction of the society wields its power of fascination to highlight the difference.

This difference can be an ideological one and a financial one. The difference of race and gender is amplified and made an attraction because of the ideological difference

that splits the society, but is capitalized financially by the film production. John

Lippman writes in his essay “ ‘*Men In Black*’ Puts Sony in the Green, Reaping 51

Million for July 4 Weekend” about how Sony made a profit from the production of

MIB:

Men In Black generated 51 million at the box office during the three-day holiday weekend, delivering Sony Corp.’s Hollywood studio its first big hit summer movie in six years.

“With this kind of launch, hopefully it will be a very profitable film,” said

Robert Levin, President of Marketing at Sony Pictures Entertainment. The

studio spent at least 85 million to make the sci-fi comedy starring Will

Smith and Tommy Lee Jones and about 20 million to market and distribute



it in the U.S. (B10)

This paragraph does not refer to the cause of the attraction of the film and the tremendous success of the ticket sale, but what is written about “starring Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones” corresponds to what Willis calls “our cultural wish to believe that difference give themselves to sight.” The popularity caused by the difference (visually, racially, socially, ideologically) can also be seen in the invention of the web-based games tied to such a film. Anna Wilde Mathews in “Sony Envisions Web-based Games Tied to Its Films” about the market attraction of *MIB* in video game, “Sony Pictures Digital Entertainment will launch a new series of Internet-based games tied to moves such as its forthcoming “Men In Black: sequel in an effort to get consumers to pay for what is effectively a promotional too for films” (B6).



Difference¹³ has been made the best marketing tool to boost *MIB* as is proven by the film’s video game.

Still the tension of the filmic visual contrast and the ideological meaning that this contrast brings and expresses is well contained in *Men In Black*. The most obvious visual contrast is the black/white pair. This contrast highlights the racial difference in the film. The filmic working and mapping of the black/white figures emphasizes this difference. But what is the ideological grip that associates the white with the black to form the contrast in the film? According to Sharon Willis, the racial contrast of the

black/white difference is highly problematic. In *High Contrast*, Willis writes about her intention to explain the political meaning of this contrast:

The aim of this study is to restore a political content to the social differences that many films exhibit as mere aesthetic contrast. Of course, political “content” is itself constructed in relation to fantasy. But this is in no way diminishes its power. Whether we are speaking of race, of gender, or of sexuality, fictive constructions and fantasies lend historical and material force to the matter of difference. (2)

In other words, the black/white pair is in no way a simple visual pleasure. The aesthetics of the contrast has itself a political content. The political content restored by Willis to the contrast of race, in one way, explains the politics of race or the identity politics in the aspect of the filmic aesthetics. Willis continues to explain how race is marked in filmic or literary representations in America:

These contemporary representations of “race” emerge in a culture marked by the difficulty that “whiteness” has had in seeing itself as racialized. Since this culture is thoroughly racialized, this means that whiteness has had a hard time seeing itself at all. Where it can juxtapose itself to “blackness,” blackness becomes the bearer of racial meanings so that whiteness can emerge as free from meaning. (3)

The “culture” in Willis’ idea is the American one. Since the dominant race in American culture is the white, the dominant ideological structure of the American society is the ideology of the white. “Blackness” in this sense is an other--a color other than the white. Therefore “blackness” becomes the contrasting element to the white. But “whiteness” cannot be an other that makes this contrast because “whiteness” is the backbone of the ideological structure. “Whiteness” sees the “blackness” because “whiteness” does not see itself at all. “Whiteness” sees the “blackness” on the condition that it does not know that “blackness” can look at “whiteness” in the same way that “whiteness” looks at “blackness.” This racial paradox is further explained and developed by Willis:



In fact, we might suggest that in contemporary U.S culture, the metaphoricity of race is, precisely, sustained through its display. Display, of course, always entails a spectator, a gaze. But if the metaphoricity of race depends on display, in this historical context, it also depends on a dominant culture that works to imagine its own gaze as unseen. A gaze that forgets that it can be seen seeing, an attentive ear that forgets that its hearing presence can be felt, itself overheard. This is one way of figuring the dominant culture’s attention to nondominant – or to opposition – cultures, to the figure of “race” that seem to fascinate it since this gaze seems unable to

imagine another gaze to meet its own. (4)

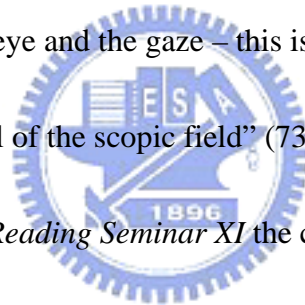
The aforementioned metaphoricity of race means that by focusing the subject-matter on racial equality displayed in the racial difference, to disguise the real social problems is possible. Race is metaphorical because in the case of the film, for example, racial difference forms the contrast which seems to indicate that the problem of the social difference, like that of the racial difference, is solved. That is why Willis mentions that “the metaphoricity of race is sustained by its display.” To understand Willis’ idea of display, the three concepts must be further clarified – the function of display, the dominant culture, and the gaze.

The relation of the three concepts can be associated with the Lacanian idea of the gaze and that of the subjectivity as split. In *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan explains the relationship between the gaze and subjectivity by using what Aristotle has called *tuché* and *automaton* :

It is a question, then, of revising the relation that Aristotle establishes between the *automaton* – and we know, at the present stage of modern mathematics, that it is the network of signifiers – and what he designates as the *tuché* – which is for us the encounter with the real. (52)

The *automaton* is, in other words, the unconscious – the networks of signifiers. The subject then is one of the signifiers certain of its existence, as the Cartesian subject

who does not doubt, “Descartes did not know, except that it involved the subject of a certainty and the rejection of all previous knowledge – but we know, thanks to Freud, that the subject of the unconscious manifests itself, that it thinks before it attains certainty “(37). Therefore the real must always return and the subject must always escape the confrontation with the real. The subjectivity is then split between the return of the real and the reweaving of the consciousness of the subject, between the gaze and the eye. Now what “the gaze” is becomes clear. The gaze is distinguished from the eye since the eye is that through which the subject of certainty looks at things but does not meet the gaze, “The eye and the gaze – this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field” (73). Antonio Quinet explains in “The Gaze As An Object” in *Reading Seminar XI* the concept in a much simpler way:



In other words, the drive indicates that the subject is seen, that there is a gaze which aims at the subject, a gaze we cannot see because it is excluded from our field of vision. The gaze gives us the distinction between what belongs to the imaginary order and what belongs to the order of the real where the drive manifests itself. The real can be defined as the register in which the drive manifests itself. ... The visible world of our perceptions is a world of images. In addition to the world of vision, there is the realm of the invisible that is the register of the gaze. The former is an imaginary

perceptual order; the latter is real. In one we have images, in the other drives. ... there are two grammatical attitudes: “I see,” which is the specular order, and “being seen,” which indicates object a as a modality of the gaze in the scopic order. (140)

After the clarification of what Lacanian gaze is, Willis’ three terms – display, dominant culture, and the gaze – can be put into the context of Lacan’s conceptualization. The dominant culture can be associated with the Other that splits the subjectivity into the real and the imaginary while “display” can be related to the fantasy that guarantees the certainty of the Cartesian subject. The Lacanian gaze is in a way similar to the invisible gaze of race mentioned by Willis. This dominant culture is of course the omnipresent white patriarchy which socially, racially, and ideologically dominates the American society. The relation between display and fantasy must be further clarified. Žižek explains what fantasy is in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*:

before being caught in the identification, in the symbolic recognition/misrecognition, the subject ($\$$) is trapped by the Other through a paradoxical object-cause of desire in the midst of it (a), through the secret supposed to be hidden in the Other: $\$ \diamond a$ – the Lacanian formula of fantasy. (44)

Because the subject is trapped in the Other without a reason, to look for the reason, to fantasize the cause of the Other – the supposed *a* – becomes the fantasy that makes even the gap cut over in the subject by the Other. The fantasy serves the function to support the construction of reality – the Cartesian certainty of the subject. This is, in Žižek’s term, the function of ideology:

“Reality” is a fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire. It is exactly the same with ideology. Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy- construction which serves as a support for our ‘reality’ itself: an ‘illusion’ which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel. (45)



The display mentioned by Willis also serves the function to sustain the metaphoricity of race. The American subject, through display, constructs the reality that the metaphoricity of race is complete in itself, that the real of the social inequality of race is sutured over by such a display that the American subject is assured of its social reality – the structure of white dominant patriarchy. That is why in contemporary representations, Willis points out, “whiteness has had a hard time seeing itself at all” (3). The dominant culture as the Other can be explained in a more specific way as “a culture marked by the difficulty that ‘whiteness’ has had in seeing itself as

racialized”(3).

This kind of contradiction of racial paradox and conflicts that sustains the dominant American culture as captured in the contemporary filmic representations is well contained in *MIB*. Willis continues to write in *High Contrast*:

As limited but significant number of African American-authored productions have entered popular cinematic distribution over the past several years, the dominant culture continues to demand that films by and for African Americans display – and fix – some kind of “social reality” that lies beyond or beneath fantasy. Such a demand maintains its own privilege of ignorance under cover of the authority it grants to certain filmmakers. At the same time, big-budget Hollywood productions as well as television dramas more and more often introduce African American characters – redeeming, judging, or threatening – whose race is coded as incidental or contingent. More often than not, these peripheral figures – Ella Shohat calls them “guests in the narrative” – emerge as accidental or incidental presences whose impact is often much more powerfully visual than verbal.

(5)

It is this “social reality” that is the display--the fantasy-construction built to keep off the real of the society, to fend off the gaze that pierces the subject itself and tears off


the representation of what an American is not. This real of the society can be seen in the remarks in “The Cheerful Believer In the Flying Leap” of Will Smith, African American counterpart of the character in *MIB*, who speaks the conditions of the racial difference in American society:

“I grew up in a Baptist household, went to Catholic school, lived in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood and hung with the Muslim kids,” Mr. Smith says. Which is not to say there was no bigotry. “In Catholic school, people, people who were supposed to be representatives of our creator treated the black kids differently, and that was hard on me,” he says. But he also learned from that experience. “It made me forge a personal relationship with my creator, and it made me deal with the fact that to many people I’m a nigger.” (Diamond 12)

The inequality of racial difference is covered by figures of the “guests of the narratives” or this kind of “black/white” pair whose hat-tipping function serves to mask the kernel of the social structure of the white dominance. And the racial difference in an equal social position is the fantasy-identity of being an American. Willis points out this fear that the “social real” might emerge to reveal to the public that this identity based on fantasy is fact unfulfilled and incomplete:

In its repulsive return, this figure also exhibits, or crystallizes, an anxiety

about judgment, a fantasy that the truth of wilderness might emerge in another's gaze. But the dominant culture posits this gaze only in order to represent it consistently as internalized and ventriloquized, as a marker of difference in a scene where subjects do not engage in reciprocal exchange, but, rather, in mutual surveillance. So while such figures mark allusions to the social field, they simultaneously operate as indexes of paranoid fantasies that situate African Americans as the ones who know the truth about race, while avoiding any occasion for reciprocated gaze that would cease the dominant culture to look at itself through another's gaze. (60)

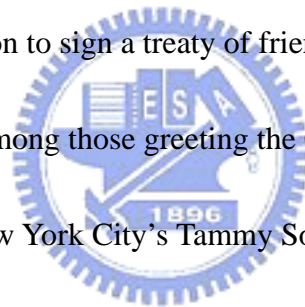


In order to avoid the reciprocated exchange of the gaze, the dominant culture must seek to pretend to internalize the gaze by representing in its own way. So that the real gaze, before it emerges itself, has already been replaced by a represented gaze pretended to be captured by the subject. The subject looks into the represented gaze with his eye to shun off the real gaze that knows his true identity.

This step of positing the represented gaze in order to build up the fantasy that covers up the gap of the split subjectivity between the eye and the gaze, is the act of surrogacy. Carroll Smith Rosenberg develops his idea of surrogacy in "Surrogate Americans: Masculinity, Masquerade, and the Formation of the National Identity" and argues that surrogacy is the key to understanding the American identity. In this essay,

Rosenberg explains the formation of American identity from the founding moment of the United States in the late 18th century when the European settlers engaged in bloody war with the Native Americans for expansion of territory. An episode at that time reveals particularly the European Americans' complicated layered formation of national identity. Rosenberg writes:

On 21 July 1790, a flotilla of ships dotting New York harbor fired rounds of military salutes as delegation of Creek warriors stepped ashore in New York City, still the nation's capital that summer. They had been invited by President Washington to sign a treaty of friendship with the new United States. Prominent among those greeting the Creek delegates were officers and members of New York City's Tammy Society, carrying bows, arrows, and tomahawks and bedecked in "Indian" costumes. (126)



The Tammy society dramatically plays out the role of the braves and sachems of the Indians during the greeting. In short, the European Americans surrogate the Indians. This act of surrogacy is an important constituent of the new nation's identity. The definition of a "surrogate" must be explained first:

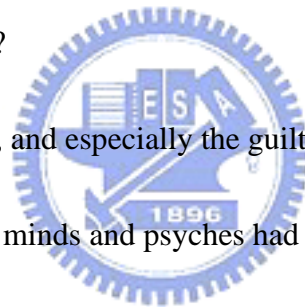
A "surrogacy" according to the Oxford English Dictionary, stands for or replaces a lost or absent other. The term refers to an officially appointed successor or deputy, the person given authority to represent the absent one,

act in the other's place, exercise the other's rights. (Rosenberg 1328)

Then what is the political and social meaning of surrogacy to represent an absent one in this context of the founding of the United States?

Imaginatively enacting the vanished figures, surrogates weave the absent ones back into the social fabric, albeit not as they were but as those who remain choose to remember and represent them. ... In this way, surrogacy works to suture the wounds change gashes open. (Rosenberg 1329)

And what are the wounds that change gashes open? What is behind the wounds that require the surrogacy to mask?



The horror, the rage, and especially the guilt Native Americans inspired in European American minds and psyches had to be pacified. The figures of the savage, terrifying Native American and the savage, terrifying European American who had relentlessly battled him had to be domesticated, incorporated into the ongoing civil and orderly world European Americans worked to create. (1330)

It is the guilt that lies behind the act of pacifying masquerade. The guilt carries on the American society of its order, its grand narrative of the nation, and, to be further associated with the racial difference, the representation of the filmic creation of the black/white pair as the fantasy of its own improbable and unfulfilled identity. And

indeed “difference” is central to surrogacy:

They did so, however, not in ways that denied change or obliterate absences.

As we have seen, difference, not sameness, lies at the heart of surrogacy. ...

How else could European American newcomers affirm their innate

Americanness, their national identity? They had to assert that residence in

the New World had rendered them Americanness – different from

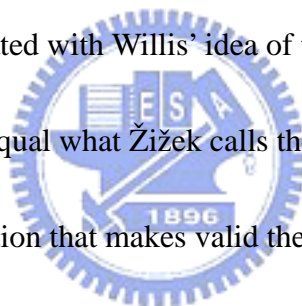
Europeans. (1330)

The purpose of surrogacy is to highlight and incorporate the difference. The surrogacy,

the masquerade can be associated with Willis’ idea of the display. While the display

can be explained in a way to equal what Žižek calls the fantasy, surrogacy is therefore

the enactment of the fantasization that makes valid the certainty of the subject.



As a result, *MIB* is a costume party in which aliens are dressed up in the human suit to make up the display that the American society is an orderly one where different species coexist harmoniously. This peaceful coexistence is a metaphor for the narrative of the racial harmony of the American society. Yet this melting-pot society is a costume party portrayed in *MIB*. The condition of the society’s own existence is based on the disguise of its real situation, the costume drama that turns one into what he is not, to sustain the reality. At the same time, *MIB* also reveals the possibility of the represented difference encountering the real difference – the reciprocal exchange

of the gaze between ordinary Americans and aliens – the result of which is the annihilation of either side.

In the film, the difference of species between humans (Americans) and aliens is the metaphor for the racial difference in the American society. That is why in the film, aliens wear the outfit of the ordinary Americans. This metaphorically explains the position of the minorities in the Americans society. As *High Contrast* points out that dominant culture only looks at the black in the way that the white does, and the reverse is therefore impossible. If the reciprocated gaze is exchanged, the

consequence would be dire. The film portrays the result of the exchanges of gazes.

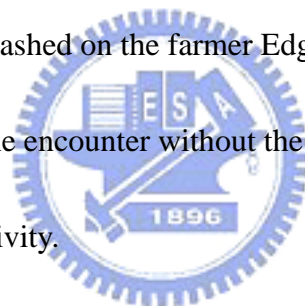
There are various encounters. In the very beginning of the film, the camera traces a flying bug, and shows the angle of how a different species looks at the world. Yet when the bug flies in the midst of the high way, there occurs the encounter between humans (Americans) and the bug. At the chance that the bug looks directly into the eye of the car drive, the bug is annihilated, crashed on the glass of the truck.

The second encounter portrays very thoroughly the situation where the real emerges. The sheriff (an ordinary American subject who never doubts his own existence) sees “Miky,” when the alien political refugee disguised as Mexican immigrant reveals himself. The sheriff is unbearable of the real and is almost annihilated. It is after the MIB destroys Miky and uses the memory eraser that the

sheriff is kept alive and “forgets” that there are aliens.

The third encounter is when Edward (Will Smith) of NYPD, after a hard long chase, sees the alien wave the gills in the eye. This strange phenomenon of wavering of the gill is the prelude to the deeper knowledge that the real of the alien is about to reveal itself. Yet the alien jumping the roof commits suicide. By annihilating himself, the real stops coming to the fore in its fullest, and Edward can therefore carry on his own certainty about his American subjectivity.

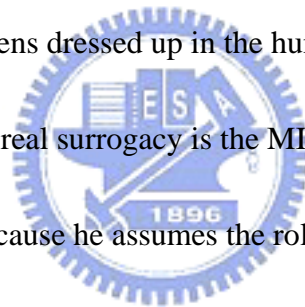
The fourth encounter is when the atrocious bug reaching the earth. The bug lands on the earth with its vehicle crashed on the farmer Edgar’s truck. Edgar comes out of the house to see the visitor. The encounter without the MIB’s presence results in the destruction of Edgar’s subjectivity.



The two realities – there are aliens and people do not know that there are aliens – that constitute American society are impossible to overlap except by the mediation of the agency of MIB. In other words, the white (in the film is metaphorized as the ordinary Americans) is unable to look into the real racial difference (metaphorized in the film as the difference between aliens and humans). What the Americans can look at is the represented difference – the difference represented in the way that Americans are tolerable. That is what the film *MIB* is about. In this way, the aliens must always return and show up. And the MIB must

always be there erasing the memories of the ordinary Americans and eradicate their doubts. The American subjectivity is therefore split between two facts.

What is the Americans' need for the costume party of *MIB*? The purpose of the masquerade, of the party of surrogacy, is to incorporate the difference that the Americans do not have and to suture over the wounds that the change of society brings forth. The displayed American society is a surrogate one which presents what an American should be. The lack of difference, the inability to be different, is what sustains the identity of being an American. From this perspective, the most obvious surrogacy in the film is the aliens dressed up in the human suit. However, to put the film in the *High Contrast*, the real surrogacy is the MIB agent J. He is in fact a white dressed up in a black's suit because he assumes the role in the film to display the difference, the fantasy of the American social grand narrative.



Chapter 5

Shit Happens¹⁴ in America

Each of the three films, *The Exorcist*, *The Hulk*, and *MIB* dramatizes one aspect of the secret in establishing the American subjectivity. Each explores how this subjectivity is built on religious, military, and racial terms through which this subjectivity, while being constructed, is also ripped apart and makes split. With such a split subjectivity, the identity of being an American is found to be established on its own unfulfillment as caused by the gap which splits the subjectivity.

Besides the subjectivity as split that is caused by the function of the object a , I discover also a more complicated relation: as the films unfold their scenarios, the idea of the “abject” comes to the fore and achieves its own effect. The object a in the scopical field as the gaze is the cause of the production of subjectivity. And yet the subject does not know it, for if it sees the gaze looking at it, it would be annihilated. To fend off such an aggression of the gaze which constantly encircles the subject and is at any time ready to break in to cause anamorphosis, the subject must cling to its own certainty to ensure that the subject exists for its own right, that the subject looks at where it does not see the gaze, while it is itself always seen. The dialectical relation of the two is that one (the subject) cannot see the other (the gaze), or one (the gaze) always sees the other (the subject) who does not see the other. But I find in the

films that there is something else beside the gaze. That is the abject. The abject is the filth which the subject tries to get rid of. The subject always flings out the dirt to avoid itself from being contaminated. The process of getting rid of the filth is the abjection. In this way, the abject also forms a dialectical relation with the subject.

Unlike the gaze as the cause of subjectivity, the abject helps to define the subject by contrasting its own filth with the pristine condition of the subject. In other words, the subject “needs” the abject as the negative, contrasting element to foreground its own positive existence. So through the analysis of the three films via the concepts

“the gaze” and “the abject,” I grasp the idea of “America” and “American” in a different perspective – that America as a country exists because of its own lack of knowledge of its own impossible existence, and there is always a “shit” there ready to be cast out so to define what America is.



Therefore the problems of America revealed in the three films through the analysis of the three chapters above are to be found within the American narrative of the state of the Union itself. Yet to look into the three films without the Lacanian psychoanalysis would derive quite a different conclusion – that the problems of America is to be explored on the surface. This otherwise conclusion is caused by the oversight that the subjectivity of America is split between the impossibility to resolve the problems and the fantasy (or in this case, ideology) that holds on to the certainty

to make coherent the irresolvable problematic kernel. The kernel, as some undoable knot, is not what comes from outside to intimidate the subjectivity, but on the contrary what sustains the subject itself. Any external problems are in fact those within the subjectivity itself, only that the subject is unable to face it.

The first chapter expatiates on how *The Exorcist* plays out the idea of the gaze and the abject as hinging on the subjectivity of America. The reason why *The Exorcist* comes first in my analysis is that it provides a textbook dramatization that both conceptualizes and visualizes the major theoretical axis of the Lacanian gaze and Kristevaian abject unfolding one version of the national narrative of America. In a way therefore *The Exorcist* paves the way for the theoretical framework for the chapters to come. *The Exorcist* is the metaphor of the interplay between subjectivity and identity, and between the subject and the object *a* and the abject, all formulating America as it is now.

But when first looking into this film, I find the motif of “guilt” particularly intriguing and indeed such is the basic element behind the tone of *The Exorcist*. More precisely, guilt is the cause of its story. This unseen trauma weaves the characters together, Father Karras and Chris, the mother alike. It is also the unseen trauma that makes the demon find Karras and drives him to the final consummation for abandoning his life. This basic motif is very much resonant with the burning child

dream Lacan speaks of when expatiating on the concept of the gaze. So I bring the Lacanian gaze into this film and dig out the deeper ideological routes taken for making the film. This ideological track is the socio-political formation of America on the condition of which this film is produced, arousing such a great sensation in the public.¹⁵ So at first the Lacanian gaze suffices in digging out the ideological formation of the American national narrative. Later I find that it is not enough to only interpret this film using the concept of the Lacanian gaze. To be more precise, it is “incomplete” to speak only of the Lacanian gaze. The reason lies in the role of the demon. What is its role to play in the interpretation of the film’s scenario in the Lacanian terms? To say that the demon is the object *a* is inadequate for an object *a* is something beyond representation. The object *a* only bursts into the representation by distorting it. The subject either is destroyed by it or shuns from it into the representation again, whereas neither can explain the demon. Therefore the role of the demon leads me to think of the Kristevian abject. As the abject, the filth, the demon appears as the negative contention with the subject. To stitch this idea into the motif of the guilt draws out the complete ideological map of the film. It then appears that the demon is the shit of the religious hierarchy, thence the excrement of the nation that bases its foundations on such a religious hierarchy.

The same goes with *The Hulk*, except that the role of the hulk takes effort to

unravel its own knot of mystery. What is the hulk? What does the American military really try to eradicate by pursuing him? Gina Marchetti provides me the answer to the “hulk mystery.” In her essay “Hollywood/Taiwan: Connections, Countercurrents, and Ang Lee’s *The Hulk*,” Marchetti associates Ang Lee with the accused Asian spy Lee Win Ho and reveals the relation of the position of Asians in America with the hulk. The resemblance of the scenes of biotechnology with the work of Ang Lee’s wife in America, the struggle of Bruce Banner to mingle in the white middle class society as the Asian immigrants usually experience and face, and the super natural power the hulk possesses after the traditional Asian image of Ku Fu practice, provides the clue that the hulk is insinuated as an Asian and the idea that the hulk really embodies Asianiness. The military actions using the weapons of mass destruction are to abject the filth, the shit of the American society. As I argue in the third chapter, this process of excreting the green shit is to help define the functions of the military itself. And the hidden meaning is that what is really being abjected is Asians’ Asianness. The military subject forms a dialectical relation with the hulk and therefore the American society abjects the Asians in the way of the dialectics between subject and abject. But what lies behind the grandiose show of the abjecting the green excrement? It is the guilt that the American society is not able to face – the inevitable production of inequality under the grand national narrative of equality for all. Bruce’s grimaces



when the transformation into the hulk takes place are what the American fear most and dare not even face. The grimaces remind Americans what makes Bruce suffer the torment of being the hulk and why the hulk is the shit being abjected. The deep-hidden guilt motivates the unfolding of the film just as that it is also guilt that mobilizes the scenario in *The Exorcist*. The difference between *The Hulk* and *The Exorcist* is that in *The Hulk* there is no one to smooth the guilt to bring about the true American identity. The army does not disarm itself (for if it were disarmed, what would the military be without its weapons?) and does not therefore destroy itself. The military keeps on masking its own guilt. The general, for example, does not face the pang that Bruce bears on the genetic distortion experimented by Bruce's father in the military laboratory. The general keeps on goading Bruce to transform into the hulk. The military is aware that weaponry cannot only eradicate the hulk but makes him stronger, and that Betty is the key to solving the problem. Yet still, the general chooses to apply the military method which is obviously impossible to remove the green stain that marks the failure of the American military.

In *MIB*, however, there is not so obvious a tension of the anxiety the guilt puts on display. On the contrary, the film is a comedy full of light-hearted humor and laughter. The city chase of NYPD for aliens is full of funny jokes and bizarre encounters. Yet it is this hilarious comedy that displays the guilt. I bring up the issue of the race in *MIB*

with the help of Sharon Willis' book *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film*. The black and white characters form a clear contrast. This kind of contrast is very visually dazzling and therefore forms a difference. This difference, however, is very much the result of some deliberate filmic tactics. The black/white difference is posited as the visual attraction for the purpose of internalizing ideological sameness in the racial aspect. This racial sameness is of course the white. The dominant structure of power in the American society is of the white. The white social structure totalizes the society in every aspect so that it forms the sameness of social power. It is this sameness that must capture the posited gaze of the difference to avoid the exchange of the real gaze of the black, which it cannot tolerate to look at. The black/white difference in *MIB* therefore tries to present what the American society on the racial aspect is not. In this way, the film displays the American fantasy of racial equality, which is the ideology that sutures over the traumatic inequality of race. At the same time, the film dramatizes the possibilities of the encounters of the real difference in the scenario of the story. Note, however, the consequences of such encounters are dire, but it is covered up by laughter. It is after all a comedy. The nightmare is now a joke. Since it is a joke, the audience can rest contently in the certainty of the fantasy that this is a nation of racial equality.

The three films play out the scenarios that dramatize the conflicts and

contradictions between subjectivity and identity, between what it is meant to be an American and how to sustain that identity without ever achieving it. What strings the three films together is guilt. The exorcist drives out the demon by flinging himself out of the window to attain his identity as a Catholic. In *The Exorcist*, that is to say, the identity is fulfilled, but the subject is destroyed. Father Karras faces the undoable knot that binds a Catholic to sacrifice and also the unbearable sense of his guilt to be a son. Father Karras crosses over the guilt so that he can be a Catholic (to follow Jesus to sacrifice), as well as a son (to sacrifice for Regan so that she can be a daughter to Chris). It is when the destruction of Catholic subjectivity appears that one's identity is attained. But the demon is not destroyed. It is just gone. This excrement of Catholicism will indeed return to challenge Catholicism itself because Catholicism needs this shit to highlight with the religious hierarchy. It is easily guessed that there would be next series of the film, in which the demon returns. The demon cannot disappear for the shit always happens. In *The Hulk*, the military's creation becomes its own reason to sustain its existence. The display of the American military's grandiose weaponry is to eradicate, not an enemy outside, but a product of its own innovation. This war against "the enemy from outside" will not stop because the American military must continue to exist. There must always be some "hulk" out there for the military to consume its ammunition. In other words, the military must always find the



reason for its existence by looking for more enemies. The enemies are the excrement of the military for itself to abject. Like the demon in *The Exorcist*, the hulk is driven out of the country, but it is not gone. The end of the film suggests its possible return as the military confirms what the general speaks on the phone with Betty that it will return and they must beware. On the other hand, the grimaces of Bruce are easily set aside because the military only talks about how to avoid the return of the hulk, but never mentions how to get rid of the condition of the production of his grimaces. The guilt is too strong and they must hide in the fantasy that the military is always right.

In *MIB*, the guilt is hidden behind the joyous laughter. The comforting visual pair of black and white displays this guilt by representing what in reality is not. The costume party in which the aliens appear is the play of fantasy that surrogates the impossible ideal that the American society claim to have. Through the joking and the making fun of the alien encounters, the guilt caused by the racial inequality is suppressed.

The three films, through Lacanian psychoanalysis, show the real problems contained in the American society, except that the films have dramatized it, and visualized such a complex ideological formation between the identity and subjectivity of America.

Note

¹ I apply the word America instead of U.S because I consider there is a certain distinction of meaning to be made to differentiate the two concepts. America is much more associated with the concept of the nation while U.S is more understood as the state. So there are three words to specify their meanings. They are country, nation, and state. Raymond William in his book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* defines “Country habitually includes the people who live in it, while *nation* is more abstract and *state* carries a sense of the structure of power” (81). U.S then gives more the impression of the state associated with the structure of the power. Nation, according to William, refers more to the abstract of the people than to simply the people. In this way, nation can be explained culturally, politically, socially, ideologically, and even racially. Let me cite another example to clarify the distinction. John Hughes in his article “America’s public diplomacy needs a boost” criticizes Bush’s Middle East policy for his militancy that arouses the sensation of anti-Americanism in the world. Yet Hughes distinguishes the idea of U.S government from American people. Hughes writes:

But non-Americans differentiate between US policy and the American people and way of life. Pollster James Zogby, on the basis of five years of polling Arab publics, told a House foreign-affairs subcommittee last month

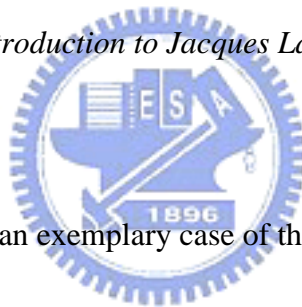
that "[i]n almost every case, Arabs liked our values, our people, culture, and products. They did not like our policies."

Here we see Hughes applies U.S to policy, while America to the people and the way of life. And Zogby's remark reflects this difference too. America in Zogby's polls can be explained as values, people, culture, and product, while U.S is still linked with its policy. It is the complexity and the abstract of meaning that I apply America instead of U. S in my argument.

² To discuss the nation as subjectivity can also be found in Žižek's argument.

Žižek in *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*

writes:



Here we have again an exemplary case of the Lacanian logic of not-all where the universal function is founded upon an exception: the ideal leveling of all social differences, the production of the citizen, the subject of democracy, is possible only through an allegiance to some particular national Cause. If we apprehend this Cause as the Freudian Thing (das Ding), materialized enjoyment, it becomes clear why it is precisely “nationalism” that is the privileged domain of the eruption of enjoyment into the social field: the national Cause is ultimately the way subject of a given nation organize their collective enjoyment through national myths.

What is at stake in ethnic tensions is always the possession of the national Thing: the “other” wants to steal our enjoyment (by running our “way of life”) and/or it has some access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. (165)

Here the “national Cause” by which “subject of a given nation organizes their collective enjoyment” discuss the nation as subjectivity. Another explanation for the nation as subjectivity can be found in the definition of nation brought up by Ernest Renan in “What is a Nation?” in *Nation and Narration*:

A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. A nation’s existence is, if you will pardon the metaphor, a daily plebiscite, just as an individual’s existence is a perpetual affirmation of life. (19)

The interesting metaphor of the nation as an individual’s existence provides the idea of the nation as subjectivity as well. To extend Renan’s idea of the nation as a collective solidarity, the subjectivity of America discussed in my thesis can therefore be seen as the collective national myth shared by Americans. With this myth that Americans generally believe in, the nation can thus stand. And it is on this general

ground of the national myth that the discussion of the American identity is therefore possible and based.

³ I have limited my discussion of *Men In Black* to Part One because it is itself a self-contained entity, which can be analyzed alone. Including Part Two would have to cover the issues irrelevant to my discussion.

⁴ I adopt the Lacanian gaze that explains the subject as split. And I apply no other concepts, such as alienation in the signifier, castration, subject of signifiers because the concept of the Lacanian gaze involves both alienation and separation.

This is a much more complete way to explore subjectivity.

⁵ According to Lacan in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, the subjectivity is split between two awakenings – tuché and automation. The tuché is “the encounter with the real” (53) whereas automaton is “the return, the coming back, the insistence of the signs...” (53). Lacan explains this through the “burning child dream,” in which the bereaved father dreams of his dead son gazing at and soliciting him, saying “Father, don’t you see I’m burning?” He wakes up, escaping into the first awakening in which “the consciousness [is] re-weaving itself” (70), from the second awakening where “the solicitation of the gaze” (70) happens.

⁶ The idea of subjectivity stands only when the identity is unfulfilled is derived from Kien Ket Lim of National Chiao Tung University, who expatiated on this idea in

the course of “Special Topic on Film Theory: Lacan and Žižek” in the fall of 2003. He associates the two concepts “subjectivity” and “identity” on the base of the burning child dream. The father in the dream is not able to bear the guilt of not being a father because the child’s death fails his paternal responsibility. When the child in the dream should solicit help when being burned, a true father should rescue him from the fire. But this father escapes into reality so that he can tell himself it is only a dream. He fails his identity as a father by weaving his consciousness to fend off the burning of the unbearable guilt out of the bereavement of the child.

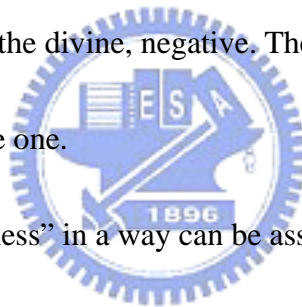
⁷ According to *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* by Dylan Evans, the Thing, explained in the context of *jouissance*, is a “forbidden object of incestuous desire”(250). But later on, it disappears in Lacan’s late seminar, though still retaining the major drift of *objet petit a*.

⁸ Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* cites the description from Freud the case of the “burning child” dream:

A father had been watching beside his child’s sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bed room into the room in which the child’s body was laid out, with tall candles standing around it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body

murmuring prayers. After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: "Father, don't you see I am burning?" He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found the old watch man had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them. (44)

⁹ What I mean here by negative and positive is in the Christian sense, in which the demon is, in opposition to the divine, negative. The Christ's incarnation is in the usual religious sense a positive one.



¹⁰ This idea of "outsidedness" in a way can be associated with extimacy. For Ang Lee to film America, he is an outsider, a foreigner. Yet his film touches some sensitive topics that narrate America in its real situation, instead of its national myth. These kinds of narration put the American national myth in its predicament, even it shatters such a myth. An outsider that recognizes the true American identity is therefore the innermost of America. This echoes the tone of the extimacy.

¹¹ I adopt the word "implosion" in its usual sense that it denotes explosion from inside. I didn't make the effort to consult others' theories of implosion and therefore didn't probe into the possible association of others' theories of implosion with my

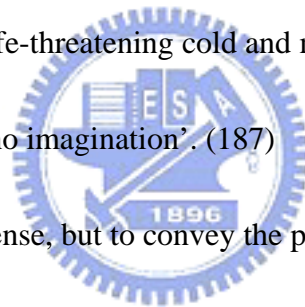
thesis here. This is the part I will look into, if the time and opportunity allow me in the future. However I can offer a brief explanation of the choice of the word implosion applied in the thesis of this chapter. As in the previous chapter where I explained the condition in which the subject is split, extimacy will take place in which something intimate but is excluded outside. If the gaze, which is also a part of the subjectivity, breaks into the field of vision, subjectivity will collapse. This means also that the subjectivity is mutilated from within, and implosion resonates precisely with such a situation. That is why I apply the concept to this chapter.

¹² I quote from Creed's essay "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection" a passage to explain the abject in order to make Kristeva's concept more legible. I do not extend the discussion of Creed's idea of the monstrous feminine, nor do I think it is related to my thesis of the chapter. Therefore such a discussion of the association of the abject with the monstrous feminine is omitted.

¹³ I think the idea of the difference as proposed by Willis is different from the outsideness discussed in the second chapter. As the argument goes in this chapter, the difference in the American popular representation is in fact a display to mask the real of sameness. Yet the difference revealed in Ang Lee's outsideness is an authentic one not made for display. Therefore the difference appearing in these two chapters is not exactly the same.

¹⁴I derive the term “shit happens” from Meaghan Morris’ essay *Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema: Hong Kong and the Making of a Global Popular Culture* in which Morris discusses Sobchak’s idea of history in the new media era in which history through media can coincide with the present in simultaneity:

The history/shit analogy is evocative: the phrase ‘shit *happens*’ conveys a sense of the present not only as invaded by unwelcome eventfulness but also as lived with the stolid survivalism of the hero of Lee Tamahori’s *The Edge* (Anthony Hopkins), who explains to his would-be assassin (Alec Baldwin) amidst life-threatening cold and man-eating bears: ‘I’m not dense. I just have no imagination’. (187)



I borrow the term not in her sense, but to convey the persistence of the abject to challenge America, and the persistent return of the real which the American subject perpetually avoids to guarantee its subjectivity.

¹⁵ Nick Cull in his essay “The Exorcist” writes the public’s reaction to *The Exorcist*:

Critics from the Wall Street Journal to Moscow's Ivestia were appalled, but audiences were overwhelmed by the result. As newspapers reported viewers fainting, Americans lined up to see what all the fuss was about, and then queued to see it all again. In San Francisco a deranged patron charged the

screen in an attempt to kill the demon; in Harlem a priest attempted to exorcise drugs from his neighborhood; in Boston a woman was carried from the theatre murmuring: 'it cost me four dollars but I only lasted twenty minutes'. (46)



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