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Let's Go to the Carnival:
Hybridization of Heterotopian Spaces in the Films of Kevin Smith

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This paper argues against the charges of puerility in the films of Kevin Smith. I analyze *Mallrats* (1995), *Clerks II* (2006) and *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* (2008). To illustrate my contention, I offer close readings of the director's films, particularly the protagonists' bodily/linguistic performances. My efforts will vindicate my assertion that through these *specialized* performances, through the forceful assertion of their marginal identities, the films' protagonists encroach upon, and finally appropriate, historically dominant spaces. As a result, the spaces they appropriate acquire a new, characteristic hybridity. Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopia* provides a framework for delineating the dominant and liminal spaces within Smith's cinematic/real worlds. Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the *carnavalesque* helps to elucidate the vagaries of the films' bodily and scriptural performances, while both Kevin Hetherington's concept of *utopics* and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of the *rhizome* attempt to marry Bakhtin and Foucault. through the notion of appropriation of public space through performance to ultimately achieve a utopian, pluralistic ethos.

INTRODUCTION

There is little to no critical exegesis on the films of Kevin Smith. Full-length studies have yet to be written and what is written has been relegated to film reviews and minor articles from movie critics. Although Kevin Smith's films have often been critically praised for their witty, erudite writing, they have been summarily labeled as puerile and vulgar. Roger Ebert called *Mallrats* "a conventional assembly of cliches." Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* magazine dismissed *Clerks II* as nothing more than "a pointless exercise in scatological jokes and bestiality gags." He repeatedly, and mistakenly, calls all of Smith's protagonists 'stoners' that are 'forever immature'. The *Village Voice*'s Robert Wilonsky decries Smith's "erratic writing and flaccid direction," yet calls Randall, one of *Clerks*' main protagonists, a "pustule of lewd ruminations." The *Voice*'s appraisal of Randall is creatively succinct yet ultimately reductive and labeling. I believe this labeling belies the films' social implications. In Smith's seminal films such as, *Mallrats* (1995), *Clerks II* (2006) and *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* (2008), the protagonists doggedly assert their authentic identities in hegemonic (consumerist, bourgeois) spaces such as the mall, cafe or convenience store. I will use the works of these social theorists to bolster my contention that the hybrid spaces Kevin Smith creates are those which foster close-knit assemblages of ardent personalities through both linguistic *and* bodily performance, those that purposely forgo any formations or hierarchies axiomatic to the dominating hegemonic system.

Smith's tenacity in asserting his identity in the public sphere without the exigencies of the Hollywood publicity machine is what sets him apart from most filmmakers. The main locus of

Smith's identity-formation was the comic book subculture. The latter's ethos permeates each of Smith's seminal films. Smith and his cohorts spent a great deal of time within these marginal sites--the latter defined by sociologist Kevin Hetherington as "sites that have social centrality for those engaged in transgressive and alternative activities" (121). They, like Smith's later cinematic creations, asserted their identities with the only weapons in their arsenal--their ability to express themselves, to extemporize on various topics, either through witty, fecund conversation or bodily performance that is simultaneously jovial and bombastic.

In these marginal spaces within the subculture, status is gained by how much 'cultural capital' one had acquired. The breadth of one's knowledge of the comic universe and one's zeal in articulating said knowledge with others in often-heated debates was important to all who inhabited these spaces. One can see in most of Kevin Smith's films that same zeal to express one's infinite knowledge of comics and related pop-culture intelligence (e.g. Star Wars, John Hughes films, etc) with others--either of their ilk or an outsider. The conversation Smith engenders through his writing is definitely Rabelaisian in that it is a beguiling mixture of the vulgar and erudite yet, at its core, is a celebration of popular culture. The autonomy and linguistic flair that Smith's cohorts and their cinematic counterparts exhibit in public spaces is considerable and completely antithetical to the protagonists of most 'teen comedies' (as well as their audiences). Witness an exchange between Brodie and his best friend, T.S. Quint:

Brodie: It's impossible. Lois could never have Superman's baby.
Do you think her fallopian tubes could handle his sperm? I
guarantee he blows a load like a shotgun--right through her back.
And what about her womb? Do you think it's strong enough to
carry his child?

T.S. Sure, why not?

Brodie: He's an alien, for Christ's sake. His Kryptonian biological makeup is enhanced by Earth's yellow sun. If Lois gets a tan, the kid could kick right through her stomach. Only someone like Wonder Woman has a strong enough uterus to carry his kid. The only way he could bang regular chicks is with a Kryptonite condom. But that would kill him. (Smith, "Mallrats Companion" 19)

This stylized, agonistic banter is a staple of the comic book subculture and of Kevin Smith's films. Notice that Brodie and Quint are not discussing sales in the mall; they are not girl-watching, and they are not engaging in the mindless, adolescent palaver like most mall denizens. In the age of technologically-mediated conversation between today's youths, Smith's films assert the power and fecundity of extemporized, unmediated, erudite pop-culture dialogues between interlocutors. Smith's refreshing use of Rabelaisian dialogue, along with other Bakhtinian *carnivalesque* elements such as the inversion of hegemonic control, where the fool becomes the master, as well as numerous references to the body's lower strata, can be seen to have a positive, regenerative effect on the audience and not simply be like most vulgar teen comedies released in theatres--empty, negative spectacles.

My decision to discuss the heterotopian spaces in Smith's films fills a glaring lacuna in cinema studies. Scholarly articles linking the Foucauldian concept to cinema are few and far between-- the bulk of them being relegated to foreign cinema only. Smith's use of locations is antithetical to most teen comedies; it is anything but arbitrary. He uses quintessentially

hegemonic public spaces in which to situate his marginal characters. Kevin Smith needs to be recognized as a more-than-capable filmmaker whose erudition and powers of social observation need to be given attention by highbrow cineastes and scholars alike.

The first chapter will first elaborate on the ethos of comic book culture including its inherent liminal spaces and key behaviors. I will then delve extensively into Smith's inexhaustive use of carnivalesque elements, including the concept of the 'grotesque body.' I will be culling from seminal texts by Mikhail Bakhtin and Kevin Hetherington. I also discuss the latter's notion of 'utopics' to articulate the exigent actions of the main characters, how they ingratiate themselves into, or overlay their utopian version onto, dominant spaces to create new, hybrid spaces--those accommodating to all who inhabit them.

The second chapter will discuss the cinematic spaces deployed in the films. I will elaborate on Foucault's seminal concept of the 'heterotopia' and Margaret Kohn's associative concept of 'counterpublics' to reveal the potentialities of public spaces. I then delve into Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'rhizome', an organizational paradigm that is distinctly *non-hierarchical* (non-hegemonic) in nature. The rhizomatic paradigm allows for a distinct hybridity of personalities, albeit dominant or liminal. It also helps to articulate a correlation between the disparate characters' external actions and movements and their overriding internal ideologies.

The conclusion will start with a recapitulation of my thesis statement. I will then attempt to summarize the main points of each of my chapters to provide a diagrammatic of both Smith films/performances as well as his personal ideology. The conclusion will end with a rumination on the tenuous nature of the independent filmmaking aesthetic amidst the hegemonic 'space' that

is Hollywood. It will also ponder the benefits/importance of identity assertion in today's society--
both in one's work and recreational activities.

MOVIE SYNOPSES

Mallrats

T.S. Quint and Brodie Bruce are two friends from suburban New Jersey, both of whom are dumped by their respective girlfriends on the same day. To ameliorate their mutual feeling of rejection, they go to the local mall to commiserate and hang out, as 'mallrats' often do. They team up with fellow mallrats and purveyors of mischief, Jay and Silent Bob (played by director Kevin Smith), and, collectively, they hatch a plan to wreak mall havoc and win their respective loves back. Smith's film is filled with his trademark sophomoric, scatological humor, hip 'alternative' music, and pop cultural references ranging from video games (Nintendo) and film (Star Wars and Batman) to comics (including Stan 'The Man' Lee, as himself). Bruce and his cohorts spend the day evading the consumerist demagogue Shannon and fascist mall security while trying to sabotage a dating show game run by Quint's girlfriend's father, the inimitable Mr. Svenning.

Clerks II

Ten years after the events of *Clerks* (2004), Dante Hicks heads to work at the Quick Stop, only to discover it is up in flames. This unfortunate turn of events forces him and his friend, fellow clerk and best malcontent Randal Graves, to seek employment at the fast-food joint, Mooby's (a pseudo-McDonalds). Drug dealers/cronies Jay and Silent Bob also move their drug-dealing spot to this new location having just gotten released from jail for trafficking. Dante is at a crucible in his life. He is on the verge of leaving New Jersey and moving to Florida with his vacuous fiancée

Emma and leave his dead-end minimum wage lifestyle. This leaves Randal feeling rejected and betrayed. However, as the day progresses, Dante starts questioning whether it is worth moving down to Florida after all. Dante, unbeknownst to all, has had an affair with his Mooby's manager, the spirited Becky. They both secretly love each other, but both are reticent to act on their feelings. Dante is torn between following his heart or his head. To add to the confusion and hilarity, Randall spends the day degrading all around him, from the customers to the staff, especially the devout, dimwitted underling Elias. On the eve of Dante's departure to Florida, Randal decides to throw a farewell/bachelor party for his best friend which includes an 'interspecies erotica show!' Can Dante ultimately survive this day of depravity/profundity?

Zack and Miri Make a Porno

Twenty-somethings Zack Brown and Miri Linky, who have been friends since they met in first grade, are platonic roommates, who have never had sex with each other or have seriously contemplated it. Both work in dead end retail service jobs, and cannot make ends meet. They have no money for their upcoming rent, and with several utility bills past due, their electricity and water have been shut off. After speaking to a friend of a friend at their ten year high school reunion, Zack comes up with an idea to make money: make a porn movie, with themselves as the lead actors, and distributing the final product themselves. Zack figures they have a built-in initial market of their 800 high school classmates regardless of what those classmates think of either of them sexually, and that neither of them have any significant people in their lives who they would embarrass by having sex on camera. Beyond the obstacles of production, such as costs for equipment, the sound stage, sets and other actors, and actually finding those actors, Zack and Miri have to face the obvious question of what having sex with each other and what it will do to their friendship. They decide that they will treat it as a job with no effect on their friendship.

Through the hilarious obstacles of production, Zack and Miri, beyond whether this project will get them out of their financial hole, both question the true nature of their relationship and the depth of feelings they truly have for one another.

CHAPTER ONE

Carnival Ethos

In his seminal book *Rabelais and his World*, Mikhail Bakhtin asserts that the time of 'carnival' was one of liberation from the hierarchy and the rare merger of the utopian ideal and the realistic. Heterogeneous personalities, of various rank and position, commingled through the shared appreciation and embrace of carnival performance, both linguistic and bodily. Through the festival, heterogeneity turned into homogeneity. This chapter will focus mainly on the bodily/linguistic performances of the films' protagonists and will show how the latter, who derive from marginal spaces, encroach upon and appropriate dominant-ideological spaces. Kevin Smith's *mise-en-scene* closely follows the paradigm of 'carnival' popular culture which is characterized by "grotesque realism, billingsgate language, celebration of the lower bodily stratum, masquerading, crowning and decrowning, festive ambivalent laughter...suspension of hierarchal structures, and bringing oppositions together" (Karimova 48).

Smith agrees with Bakhtin in that carnival creates "threshold" situations where regular conventions are broken or reversed and genuine dialogue becomes possible. What Smith hopes to achieve with his films, and in particular *Mallrats* (1995), *Clerks II* (2006) and *Zack and Miri* (2008), is to transform stilted public spaces into those fecund with lively interactions amongst his variegated denizens and which maintain the compossibility of agonistic cultures. Smith, in a sense, wants the mall or the coffee shop to regain a semblance of its Classical/Enlightenment descendant-- the 'agora.' Smith's protagonists are stalwarts of the spaces they inhabit, as was

Socrates in the agora. Although it may seem an act of heresy to equate Socrates with one of Smith's protagonists, but one must be aware that the Greek philosopher was a notorious source of frustration, even a nuisance, to those he came across in the agora and those in power, but, at least, within the that public space, he was able to speak his mind, to make people question and reexamine their long-cherished beliefs. For Smith, the cinematic mall and other consumerist edifications can reach the potential of the agora in that they are all spaces wherein the inhabitants "both search [for] - and construct - meaning" (Muzzio, 144).

It is no accident that all three sites in Smith's films reek of a recalcitrant, consumerist (a euphemism for dominant-ideological) ethos, and it is through the 'carnavalesque' verbal/bodily performances of the filmmaker's protagonists within these spaces that the prevailing oppressive mindset is checked by that of the margin's. Noted sociologist and author Kevin Hetherington writes about these carnivalesque performances, or 'occasions,' in his book, *Expressions of Identity*:

Occasions are about the performance of identity and the ordering processes associated with them...the 'counter-cultural' actor is established through performative repertoires in particular spaces. The constitution of a persona of the Other, which often involves status reversals, transgressive practices and embodied forms of resistance to the instrumental rationality of modern life. (103)

In Hetherington-ian terms, Smith's films can be seen as occasions, his protagonists the 'counter-cultural' actors, and their carnival-like behavior the performative acts (what Hetherington coins 'utopics of the margin') used to impress their identities into the public, consumerist spaces of his

films. Brodie's refutation of both Steve-Dave and Fan-Boy, and his exchanges with Shannon, the pseudo-urbane proprietor of a haute male fashion store, employ physical comedy as do the scenes involving Jay and Silent Bob clashing with mall security.

The Fool

If one equates the mall denizens to the lay masses in Medieval times, Brodie could be seen as the 'licensed fool,' a sort of court jester imbued by Smith with the power to remonstrate those in ruling positions who would emasculate people of his ilk. The carnival jester, through invective or bodily performance, perspicaciously seeks to debase those in power--in this case, the consumerist-proprietors represented by Shannon and corporate media types embodied by Renee's father--the Lex Luthor-ish Mr. Svenning. A notable attempt by Brodie to equalize the cutthroat (Darwinist) playing field of the consumerist mall comes in his confrontation with the security and patrons of the mall's comic book store that occurs midway through *Mallrats*. The shop appears closed, and a long line of customers has formed. Brodie, unnerved because he can't get his comics, seeks answers, but is stopped in his tracks by an employee, 'Steve-Dave,' and his crony, whom Brodie calls, 'Fan-Boy.' A fight ensues, almost to fisticuffs, changing the entrenched social dynamic of the space. The comic book store is a place for validation and maintaining a feeling of communitas and the opprobrium Brodie's receives from the store's employees only augments Brodie's ire.

Brodie is comicdom's equivalent to the slyly perceptive 'licensed fool' of Medieval and Renaissance times. The licensed fool, knowing his continual barbs might sting the courtier's fragile ego, would purposely emote a self-deprecatory attitude. The latter acted as an analgesic, both lessening the sting of his jests and, most importantly, *endearing him* to his audience. For all

of Brodie's (and other Smith protagonists') vigor, he displays a markedly self-deprecatory attitude amongst his closest friends. Brodie willingly states to T.S. that with all of his pontificating, his knowledge of life is limited at best:

Brodie: Jesus, man--haven't I made it abundantly clear during the tenure of our friendship that I don't know shit? Half the time I'm just talking out of my ass...or sticking my hand in it. (Smith, "Mallrats Companion" 59)

Jay and Silent Bob need not be so self-deprecating. They are akin to the Medieval 'natural fool.' who was forgiven for his transgressions due to an ostensible 'innate dullness' of which he couldn't claim culpability. Jay, Brodie's cohort, is such a fool--id-driven and completely devoid of a reasoning faculty. Silent Bob never speaks, which marks any claims of intellectual depth spurious at best. Silent Bob's real-life counterpart, Kevin Smith mirrors his creations in that the tenor of his personal writings is simultaneously id-driven as well as self-effacing and deprecatory. It is precisely this dichotomous nature of Smith and his cinematic creations that endears moviegoers to the latter as they try in earnest to debase, or 'de-crown,' those who seek to disempower them.

De-Crowning

Jay and Silent Bob's humorous efforts to disable mall security chief LaFours, and the planned talk-show stage's manifold, are exercises in 'transgressive' performance. Hetherington asserts:

The process of identity formation that is involved here is one that requires the use of the body in ways that are in some way liminally

out of place, 'excessive' or challenging. Through an extended carnivalesque embodiment, these identities come to be associated with new modes of ordering their social world--a process that is represented by the use or deployment of the body. This ordering conveys social messages about the position of this person within a terrain of contestation: notably that between rejected centrality and affirmed marginality...this identity, an embodied identity through which it comes to express itself, can be described as an identity which seeks to be marginal, different, other, unrepresentable and in flux. It valorises marginality and uncertainty. (153)

Instead of surreptitiously sabotaging the stage, Silent Bob proudly dons his makeshift-bat suit, and swings on high wires, to swoop past his enemies. The sight of Silent Bob in Batman regalia, in vertiginous flight, seems so unorthodox in the setting of a mall, it is almost fantastical. Within his own subculture, within the spaces of the comic book store or convention center, he would be applauded for such antics, just as Jay for his pantomime of Wolverine's 'beserker attack' in which Smith adds claw sound effects to match Jay's spastic movements. Unfortunately, Jay and Silent Bob's efforts fail, as in one instance where the latter misses his target and winds up crashing through the wall of a women's dressing room. As Bob's Batman cowl crashes through the wall, we get a glimpse of the gratuitous flesh of the changing girl, but all scopophilic pleasure fades when the girl punches him in the head causing it to fall downwards in defeat. In the end, the ersatz superhero is reduced to a ridiculously dressed peeping-tom. Her emasculation of Silent Bob is a small victory for the consumer over the mallrat or, in microcosm, dominant culture over the marginal. Silent Bob's chastisement, as well as Shannon's physical chastisement of Brodie,

act as checks to their hubris, and add to the mosaic of scenes written by Smith which shows the continual oscillation of power between those who reinforce the dominant ideology (shopping, capitalistic inequality) and those on the margins.

The culminating scene of the game show is perhaps the ultimate scene of *carnavalesque* humor. The stage is rudimentary at best, in the tradition of the Medieval road show, and the emcee is a washed-up bore, dressed in an abhorrently-colored tuxedo. Jay's emasculation of the original contestants, in order to allow Brodie and Quint to surreptitiously stand in for the romantic suitors, is a cogent assertion of his marginal identity. Although Jay is continually placed behind the curtain to visually articulate his outside status, he gets his comeuppance when, in the role of the carnival 'drug-vendor,' he offers his 'dooby-snacks' (joints) to the seemingly witless college student-contestants. They get high and wind up on the floor, supine and unconscious after fighting a bout of the munchies. The late-arriving college student, Gil Hicks, remains to go up on stage with Brodie and Quint as the third suitor. Hicks, when asked by the female questioner what their first date would entail, smarmily tries to show off his erudition, which elicits a vociferous response from Brodie:

Gill: First, I'd take you shopping to stores you'd wanna shop in.

Then we'd do a little lunch, probably at the Cheese Haus, followed by some golfing. And at night, we'd take in an opera, probably 'Die Fledermaus.' And then I'd follow it up with a drive to a secluded beach, where I'd pop on the radio, and we'd slow dance 'till the sun came up

The audience ooooooo's

Brodie: That was the biggest load of crap I've ever heard. (Smith, "Mallrats Companion" 73)

Brodie's repeated deflation of Gill's ego is Smith's plea for anti-intellectualism as is the former's exchange with Mr. Svenning:

Svenning: It's my Junior College class ring. Cum laude, sixty-nine.

Brodie: I also hope to cum loud one day, preferably in a sixty nine.

(52)

Brodie, along with Randall and Zack, are id-driven characters. They represent the Dionysian side of our natures which lust for sexual conquest and other forms of instant gratification. Randall's initiation of an 'interspecies erotica' show, and Zack's filming of a porno within the confines of his workplace, show the protagonists' utter disregard for decorum and sensible thought. For them, the spectacle, the conflagration of the rational, is the thing.

Randall, from both *Clerks* movies, is what his best friend Dante calls, 'chaos incarnate.' Like Brodie from *Mallrats*, Randall chooses to square off verbally with anyone on almost any inane subject. He is impetuous, brash, and his motivations, like many comics collectors, are nostalgic in nature. He squares off with a fellow employee and customer of Mooby's (a pseudo-McDonalds) about the significance of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy:

Randall: Those fucking hobbit movies were boring as hell. All it was a bunch of people walking. Three movies of people walking to a fucking volcano. (Smith, "Clerks II" 36)

He then pantomimes all three movies in a matter of seconds. Each pantomime consists of him walking in a somnambulistic manner for a few feet. The final time he pretends to drop a ring, looks down, and then turns around and says: "Even the fucking trees walked in those movies" (36). The customer counters what he calls Randall's 'simplistic analysis' of the trilogy with the fact that the films' director, Peter Jackson, won an Academy Award for Best Director, an honor that George Lucas has never received. Randall responds very precociously: "Lemme tell ya' something- if Peter Jackson really wanted to blow me away, he would've ended that last 'Rings' picture at the logical closure point--not the twenty five endings that followed" (37). At the end of his diatribe, Smith cuts to a medium two-shot of random customers witnessing the agon. Both nod affirmatively with one of them whispering, 'Fucking A.' The customer who is pro-Rings clearly represents the popular sentiment, defining the trilogy's value on the amount of industry awards it has won. Randall speaks for the silent majority who, even though they admire the films, they have, in fact, repeatedly have opined about the ending to *Return of the King*. To seal his victory, Randall tells his adversarial customer: "That look [between Sam and Frodo] was so gay, I thought Sam was gonna tell the l'il Hobbits to take a walk, so he could saunter over to Frodo and suck his fucking cock. Now that would've been an Academy Award-worthy ending" (38). Randall's audacious response makes the customer vomit all over the register. Remember that in the atmosphere of festival, the spectacle is the thing, and eliciting a bodily response from the *Rings* fan equates to a victory in Randall's mind.

Nostalgia

Randall's zeal in denigrating the *Rings* trilogy while exalting the *Star Wars* triad of films also reveals that he lets nostalgia promulgate his responses. Kevin Smith aligns himself with the Bakhtinian notions of the liberating power of laughter and that certain humors/behaviors are

intrinsically tied to popular culture or, as I see it, popular, nostalgic sentiment. This deep-rooted sense of nostalgia is what also fuels die-hard comic book collectors. Putsz repeatedly claims that people frequent comic book shops to reacquaint themselves with the feelings they had collecting as a child. The awe-inspiring sight of myriad books, either hanging, shelved, or neatly ensconced in acid-free white collector's boxes. The fecund conversations between yourself and the store's owner. An amalgam of images and feelings that you can cull at a moment's notice and which centers you, focuses you, affirms who you truly are. Midway through *Clerks II*, an old high school enemy-cum-internet millionaire, Lance Dowd, comes into Mooby's to insult Dante and Randall's lot in life and their complete lack of ambition. Randall lashes out at Lance, calling him his high-school nickname of 'pickle fucker.' The encounter troubles Randall afterwards, and he and Dante take an impromptu break. Randall wants to go go-karting and Dante acquiesces. Smith gives us a beautiful sequence, a peaceful repast from the heated world of capitalist enterprise to show two friends having pure, unadulterated fun. Smith intersperses the song *Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head* to add to the scene's bittersweet effect. It is a sequence of camaraderie that recalls the utopian ideal of carnival--the idea of a Arcadian repast, a deep feeling of fraternity, amidst the hurly-burly and social inequities of everyday life. The scene's sense of regeneration, a staple of carnival feeling, can also be found in Smith's films' crudest moments.

The Grotesque Body

Carnival's fusion of positive and negative imagery pertaining to the body's lower stratum is evident in the initial words of Kevin Smith's autobiography, Tough Sh*t:

I am a product of Don Smith's balls...Dad's balls have been, to my way of thinking, too rarely celebrated. Unless you count whatever

attention Mom threw their way, I don't feel they've gotten their proper due for their part in what became of me...People need to be regularly reminded that they began as cum. not to diminish them or cut 'em down to size--quite the contrary: I tell people they were cum once as a gesture of my awe at their very existence and to pat 'em on the back. There are no losers in life because every one of us who is born is a *huge* fucking winner. (1-2)

Smith's 'carnavalesque' use of vulgar language and references to the lower sexual parts of the anatomy are not meant to be divisive, but to incite the 'laughter of all the people. His purposeful injection of scatological imagery and colloquialisms into his prose allows Brodie, Randall and Zack to sound like familiars to the audience. Their familiarity to the audience is akin to the barker's during carnival. The barker's speech was an amalgam of the profane and the colloquial, an "absolutely gay and fearless talk, free and frank, which echoes in the festive square beyond all verbal prohibitions, limitations, and conventions" (Bakhtin 167). His voice animates the crowds/denizens of the marketplace Smith's protagonists' proclivity to profane what is socially thought of as sacred, to pontificate on the taboo, is due to the filmmaker's ubiquitous use of the Bakhtinian trope, the 'grotesque body.' The latter is evident in the opening soliloquy of *Mallrats*, delivered with aplomb by Brodie:

One day my cousin Walter got this cat stuck up his ass. True story. He bought it at our local mall, so the whole fiasco wound up on the news. It was embarrassing for my relatives and all. But the next week he did it again. Different cat, same results, complete with another trip to the emergency room. So I run into him a week later

in the mall and he's buying another cat. And I says to him, 'Jesus, Walt! You know you're gonna get this cat stuck in your ass too. Why don't you knock it off?' And he says to me, 'Brodie--how the hell else am I supposed to get the gerbil out?' My cousin was a weird guy. (Smith, "Mallrats Companion" 1)

Smith's films are replete with scatological humor and negative imagery of the lower stratum of the body. According to Bakhtin, Rabelais employed the trope of the 'grotesque body' as a celebration of the cycle of life. The body was a comically malleable figure of profound ambivalence--linked positively to birth and renewal and negatively to decay and death.

Mallrats' scatological humor is certainly negative in that it seeks to debase those in power. Shannon's preference for anal sex and Svenning's emasculation by Brodie's 'stink-palm' leads both antagonists to being ostracized by society. *Zack and Miri* has a scene with anal sex where the female has complained about being constipated before she films a scene. The cameraman unwisely wants to play auteur, and gets beneath the two actors to get a unique angle. In Smith's typically hedonistic fashion, the scene's climax (literally and metaphorically) is both a physical and emotional release for both the porn star and the spectator at the expense of the 'artsy' cameraman. *Clerks II* is a bit more circumspect in its grotesque imagery. Yes, there is a scene with a man copulating and fornicating with a donkey, and a heated discussion on the acceptability of going 'ass-to-mouth' during coitus, yet for all its belaboring on the anus, the film meditates on the cycle of life by making Dante's boss, Becky, pregnant. Dante is about to marry a rather headstrong Jersey girl who finds her home state inhabited by outcasts and retards. He doesn't really love her, but he sees marriage with Emma as something solid and promising amidst his precarious and uneventful existence. He secretly loves Becky and unbeknownst to

Dante, he is the father of her baby from a one-night stand they shared at work, after hours. Becky represents the earthy, fecund goddess while Emma is endowed with more androgynous traits. She is headstrong, condescending to Dante, and possesses, according to Randall, a clit that looks like a miniature penis (Dante absentmindedly told Randall this salacious info). Smith makes Emma's external genitals grotesque to mirror her *inner* grotesqueness.

Another scene of genital grotesquery involves co-worker Elias' conversation with Randall on why his girlfriend and him have not had sex. He tells Randall, in earnest, that his girlfriend has a 'pussy troll' housed in her vagina named 'Pillow Pants' who will not allow penile penetration. They can have sex on the day of her eighteenth birthday when she finally urinates the troll out. The cut to Randall's frozen expression of horror is hilariously augmented with music from Stanley Kubrick's macabre, *The Shining*. Randall then gingerly asks if they've ever kissed. Elias said that they would've by now if it wasn't for 'Listerfiend'. Randall correctly assumes that Listerfiend is his girlfriend's 'mouth troll.' Elias' character is uber-Christian and his outlook on life wholly untainted, yet for Smith, he represents dogmatic religious fanatics. Smith is a devout Christian and a serious theologian in his spare time, yet he knows all too well how church dogma/authority has oppressed many people over the centuries, especially those in power during the Medieval/Renaissance power where the Church was the ultimate, and seemingly infallible, authority. Smith is not really debasing Elias, just what in microcosm, he unwittingly represents.

Carnival was the quintessential social commentary on the internal grotesqueness of those who governed poorly. Commoners made mocked demonstrations of pissing and shitting on those in power to remind them of the heights of depravity man can reach in his reign over others. In a sense, their mock defecations and urinations were mock ablutions for the bourgeois, a pseudo-

cleansing for their crime of propagating and maintaining the omnipresent, thoroughly depraved state of affairs. The power inherent in the people's festive-carnival was "to turn the official spectacle inside-out and upside down, just for a while; long enough to make an impression on the participating official stratum" (Boje 4). With his films, Smith doesn't seek to promulgate a social revolt of the marginal subcultures on the dominant one which will engender a lasting utopian environment. Within the temporal confines of his films, his protagonists assert their liminal identities in public spaces to:

create a sociation that is affectual rather than traditional. The identity that is formed is not one that is unified, perfect and lasting, but one that is a monstrous heteroclite, whose syncretism is overpowering because its momentary transitional state requires a concerted reflexive process of self-identity in the context of forms of emotional identification with others. It is an identity that is performed. (Hetherington 101)

This organized identity is what William Connolly calls rhizomatic, that is, a structure that does not emerge out of a single root (arboreal, tree-like) but is made up of diverse social formations linked through a web of multiple connections. Such a structure suggests a system of participation that has no center and no hierarchy" (Kohn 90). A rhizome might be "a variety of human constituencies, each touched by what is dense, multifarious networks, human and nonhuman, in which it participates" (Connolly 94). The rhizome confounds the individualist/communitarian binary.

The end of *Mallrats* witnesses the coming together of disparate entities at the T.V. show in the mall and their gradual acceptance of Brodie as a formidable and charismatic personality. When this anomalous mass of people, or a heteroclite, comes together, a rhizomatic *pluralism* is established which generates "an ethos of generosity and forbearance among its elements" (94). The binary of dominant/marginal is extinguished and a syncretism of outlooks is accepted and established. Brodie and Rene will be accepting of each other's idiosyncrasies and shopping preferences. Brodie will promise, albeit reluctantly, to start taking Rene shopping. He will succumb to the consumerist ethos, yes, but he still will maintain/exercise the unique, anti-authoritarian practices inculcated by his marginal subculture.

The end of *Clerks II* finds Randal and Dante re-buying and refurbishing the dilapidated Quick Stop convenience and video store that they worked out for over a decade. Although they are now business owners, Randall will never capitulate to the demands of his customers because that would negate his agonistic proclivities. Zack and Miri, with their cohorts, set up a lucrative porno-making business. Finally, they have achieved fiscal success, yet in their mock-promotional commercial for their newly formed company, created during the ending credits by Smith, they are seen to throw everything off their officious-looking desk and make love right in front of the camera. Creating a spectacle is integral to Smith's protagonists' assertion of their identities and their well-being. It is how they strike an accord between their warring rational and irrational impulses. They seek, through their liminal performances, to hybridize public spaces, to make personal impersonal spaces and their zeal to fashion a utopia amidst reality is the epitomization of carnival.

CHAPTER TWO

Heterotopia

Kevin Smith's protagonists protest against the privatization of public spaces. They seek to transform, or to personalize, their surroundings through verbal and bodily articulation of identity. Identity expression is crucial to Smith as is his choice of cinematic spaces. He deliberately chooses public spaces that are permeated by dominant ideologies--consumerist meccas such as the mall, the fast food franchise or the coffee shop. These sites, historically and etiologically spaces of fecund conversation and relationship building, have now been transmogrified into spaces of diverse populations that never quite seem to *connect*--they resound with a sort of Baudrillard-ian alienation. In his films, Smith creates confrontations between the hybrid personalities in these sociably recalcitrant spaces in order to create a pluralistic ethos.

Marco Cenzatti, author and Harvard University Lecturer on urban planning, concurs with Smith, stating that:

Confrontation between different publics is an essential element of plurality, since it is through disagreement and conflict that different social groups avoid isolating themselves or being pushed into isolation and it is there that an additional *space* on which members of different, more limited publics talk across lines of diversity develops. (83)

This 'confrontational space,' he asserts, is "a confrontation of heterotopias...where Foucault's 'juxtaposition of incompatible spaces' occurs" (83). The concept of 'heterotopia' was first introduced in 1967 by philosopher Michel Foucault in his seminal article, "Of Other Spaces." He wanted to focus on 'outer spaces' (as opposed to mental inner spaces) or the emplacements (physical places) within which we live our lives. Although Foucault admired fellow philosopher Gaston Bachelard's approach to investing an almost supernatural meaning into our lived spaces, the former wanted to take a less fantastical approach to these spaces. Foucault saw Bachelard's visions as inherently utopian and therefore, fundamentally unreal (highly poeticized). Instead, he wanted to take a pragmatic approach and study the cluster of relations that define physical sites which have a distinct relation "with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations designated, mirrored, or reflected by them" (Foucault 17). Foucault's concept of 'heterotopias' are counter-emplacements that simultaneously represent, contest, or invert their counterparts *that are actually localizable*.

Foucault goes on to articulate several possible types of heterotopia. There are heterotopias of deviation' which are institutions like prisons and mental hospitals where people who behave abnormally are incarcerated. These are akin to 'heterotopias of ritual or purification,' which are isolated and not freely penetrable. One needs permission or access to enter, such as saunas or any other exclusive club. Another example is a 'heterotopia of time' such as a museum which encloses objects of antiquity from the ravages of time. These spaces simultaneously exist in time and outside of time. A final example, the one most germane to this paper's argument, is the 'heterotopia of difference,' which is a real space that juxtaposes several spaces, and acts as a microcosm of different environments. Cenzatti concurs, stating that when "compared to the fixed spaces and changing population of heterotopias of crisis and to the fixed populations spaces and

fixed population of heterotopias of deviance, heterotopias of difference are characterized by a multiplicity of changing spaces with changing populations" (83-84).

The mall, as a 'heterotopia of difference,' contains spaces that are potentially mutable or elastic--completely antithetical to the recalcitrant spaces/barriers which comprise 'heterotopias of deviance' like prisons and mental institutions. The fact that the 'mall' is an assemblage of disparate spaces, both smooth and striated, allows for the intersection of bodies. In fact, this intersection of bodies is what transforms the mall from a place to a 'space.' Space, on the other hand, is defined as *practiced space*. De Certeau further asserts that "a *space* exists when one takes into considerations vectors of direction, velocities and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it" (117).

Kevin Smith's *Mallrats* (1995), *Clerks II* (2006), and *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* (2008) can be interpreted as such an agglomeration of movements--disparate entities, with different agendas and vectors of movement, all fighting to appropriate public spaces to imbue them with some personal meaning--to the point where a hybridity occurs between the dominant and marginal agendas. Cenzatti discusses this idea of a spatial hybridity:

The spaces that the new identities, interests and needs produce, testify to the ephemerality of the space of representation. The same physical location can take on different spatial meanings according to the social groups that occupy it, whether at different times. The layering of public spaces in the same physical location brings

counterpublics together in contact and confrontation with each other. (83)

The genesis of the concept of 'counterpublics' was elaborated upon by noted sociologist Margaret Kohn in her book, *Radical Space: Building the House of the People*:

In addition to looking at the way spaces fill needs, we have to consider how they reinforce or challenge broader structures. The function of a space emerges from its relationship to other spaces in the way that it reinforces or challenges the dominant concentrations of power. (90)

Kohn's counterpublics are concretized, tangible spaces that are physically separate, but no less important, than their 'dominant' counterparts. The social dynamics within are mirrored in the structure's architecture, in its physiognomy. For example, a house which contains the members of a close-knit socialist sect may contain numerous, warmly decorated, intimate spaces fecund for gathering and sharing of one's ideas. Propinquity (physical as well as emotional *nearness*) to one's housemate is crucial to the spatio-social relations within the counterpublic, relations deliberately antithetical to the vast, alienating, baroquely designed halls of the dominating ideological institutions. In a sense, the former are heterotopias in that they are the mirrored inverses of the latter, both structurally and ideologically.

The idea of mall as concretized, consumerist public place is first reinforced in Smith's establishment scene of the array of stores in *Mallrats*. They all uniformly fit together, yet Smith adds notes of 'carnavalesque' cultural critique in the physiognomies of the stores. The latter bear such satirical names as *Fashionable Male*, *Popular Girl* and *Smoking Flesh* (for a tanning salon)

which are intended to seduce the average yet narrow-minded, beauty-obsessed consumer. For Brodie, and those of his ilk, the counterpublic to the mall would be the liminally-placed comic book shop. However, Smith has ingeniously placed the latter store within the striated, geometrical space of the dominant superstructure. His characters must now coexist and express themselves within the same concretized space. The filmmaker also purposely has his protagonist barred from his place of refuge and play. As a result, Brodie must become nomadic in a sense, banished from his home, bent on recapturing, or reterritorializing, other spaces acquired by the exigencies of the dominant, consumerist apparatus. In fact, the protagonists of both *Clerks II* and *Zack and Miri* can be seen as nomadic. Dante and Randall are, in a sense, left homeless, by the burning of *The Quick Stop*, their workplace and 'home-by-proxy' for over a decade and Zack and Miri are left to inhabit the spaces of their liminal storage unit-cum-shooting studio as well as the backroom of the coffee shop to sleep and work as a result of their apartment being inhospitable (they haven't paid their bills, resulting in no heat, lights or water). These currents of nomadism and reterritorialization of space in Smith's films recalls Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the 'rhizome.'

Rhizome

In Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic paradigm:

Culture spreads like the surface of a body of water, spreading towards available spaces or trickling downwards towards new spaces through fissures and gaps, eroding what's in its way. The surface can be interrupted and moved, but these disturbances leave no trace, as the water is charged with pressure and potential to

always seek its equilibrium, and thereby establish smooth space...the planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and organization, instead favoring a nomadic system of growth and propagation. (3)

The term 'rhizome' comes from the Greek and means "mass of roots." Rhizomes are often called 'rootstalks' and develop from axillary buds that are *diageotropic* or grow perpendicular to the force of gravity. A rhizome works with planar and trans-species connections, while an arborescent model works with vertical and linear connections. Chronology and organization typify the hierarchal or arborescent model --the goal of which is to form a genealogy of thought, an overarching, vertical progression of thought acquired by all instead of a fraternity of ideologies coexisting within an assemblage. Thought is limited to the dominant philosophy, movement is planned through a purposely-designed, gridded (striated) system. Botanistic terminology aside, the rhizome typifies non-hierarchal thought and sideways (egalitarian) movement--movement perpendicular to the norm--between organisms of variegated personalities and disparate personal ideologies.

The Mall

In *Mallrats*, Shannon and Brodie are embodied counterpublics who are forced to inhabit the same spaces due to the exigencies of Smith's script. Shannon is an adjutant to the consumerist elite; he aggressively walks the spaces of the mall as if he owned them, decrying anyone who does not possess a well-defined shopping agenda. He is always seen as traversing the mall vertically, albeit in escalators or elevators--his northward vector of movement, both physically and metaphorically, revealing his hierarchal mindset. He prefers to travel through striated spaces-

-gridded/apportioned spaces more conducive to hierarchal paradigms. Striated spaces prohibit free choices of movement, favoring instead predesigned paths/vectors of bodily movements to inevitable destinations. Shannon obsequiously follows the vector of the 'avid consumerist,' visiting store after store, starting on the ground floor, then moving up to the second using the prescribed transportation which connects the two (escalators, elevators).

Brodie's more lateral (willed, not prescribed) movements suggests a non-consumerist mindset. He prefers traversing smooth spaces, those more amenable to fecund social interactions and a sense of embodiment between disparate entities. Smooth spaces are inherently rhizomatic in that they are non-hierarchal in design and allow for autonomous and free movement in and out of spaces. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze assert that *smooth space*:

is filled by events or haecceities [essences], far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects...smooth space is occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities, as in the desert steppe, or ice. The creaking of ice and the song of the sands. Striated space, on the contrary, is canopied by the sky as measure and by the measurable visual qualities deriving from it. (479).

The 'essences' that Guattari and Deleuze speak of can clearly be defined as personalities or the articulation of one's identity in the spaces of their living environments. Striated spaces reek of a preordained pattern, of subservience to intangible forces (which alone intimates a lack of personal autonomy. Smooth spaces seem to allow an entity's utterances and natural movements to flow and resound without repression. It is important to note that smooth and striated spaces

can be seen in both a geographical and metaphorical sense. Architectural design of a space, e.g. the 'gridded mall,' as well as the behavioral vagaries/movements/interactions of its inhabitants, both contribute to the overall physiognomy of the space.

Although Deleuze and Guattari's passage ostensibly intimates a objective/subjective binary to 'the dyad of smooth/striated,' the authors caution not to view this dyad as if it were a dialectic, but rather as if it were a continuum in which "smooth and striated space" exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to smooth space (316). The mutability of these spaces is of huge import and helps to elucidate Shannon and Brodie's traversals through the designated mall spaces. Shannon in *Mallrats* traverses what Henri Lefebvre coins 'spaces of the dominated' which are passively experienced, wherein:

Spaces and corresponding bodily practices appear naturalized. The arrangement of living and working enacts crucial social distinctions such as boundary between kin and outsider, production and reproduction, individuality and collectivity...we experience these constructions and concomitant concepts with an implicit sense of inevitability. Yet space is not something static. (Kohn 506)

Smith's protagonists seek to overlay behaviors from their personal life and liminal culture onto the consumerist one--*to obfuscate any delineation*. Brodie and his cronies seek to transform the utilitarian, geometric spaces into representational spaces. Lefebvre defines the latter as:

spaces which imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects...representational space is alive. it has an affective kernel or centre...It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations...it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic. (39)

These spaces ultimately become an aggregate of shared human experiences and interactions that transcend their initial geometric, objectively-planned, urban origins to become loci of subjectivity. What is initially seen as simply a field of appearances can now be "seen to be inhabited by *multiple* subjectivities; the phenomenal field [is] no longer the haunt of a solitary ego, but a collective landscape, constituted by other experiencing subjects as well as by oneself" (Abrams 37).

This weaving of a 'web or intersubjectivity' between a space's disparate entities is a process known as 'becoming.' According to Deleuze and Guattari, 'becoming' occurs when "one piece of an assemblage is drawn into the territory of another piece, changing its value as an element and bringing about a new unity...it is a process of change, flight, or movement within an assemblage" (Heckman 1). The beauty of an assemblage is that it lacks organization. Movement to, within, and from the assemblage is unfettered. It is rhizomatic, or non-hierarchical, in nature and allows autonomy of movement and the ability to stimulate a paradigmatic change in whatever space it creeps into.

Mallrats' penultimate scene of the game show is a cogent example of this 'weaving of subjectivity.' Although he has exhibited an inordinate amount of brashness throughout the film,

Brodie is curiously timorous when being introduced as a contestant. His buddy, T.S. Quint, literally has to knock him out of his stupor. He instantly shrugs off his nervousness and displays his trademark Mephistophelean grin. He becomes animated, thereby animating the spaces around him. As expected, he becomes verbally abusive to the third contestant, the falsely erudite Gil Hicks. When the show victoriously ends with T.S. Quint in the arms of his beloved, Brodie hugs the exasperated suitor Gil with almost fraternal ardor, thereby breaching the rift, both spatially and personally, between the two.

After Quint is satisfied, it is Brodie's turn to win back his paramour. He has appropriated a tape of Shannon having sex with an under-age girl. He has enlisted the aid of the technologically adept Silent Bob to rig a VCR player amidst the nebulous manifold of the show's stage. While lowering himself (a deliberately non-hierarchical vector of movement) within the visually hostile manifold, Jay throws him the tape and it misses him, getting lodged in the manifold. Silent Bob, mimicking Jedi powers, tries to acquire the tape with the help of the 'Force.' Unbeknownst to Silent Bob, Willem, another spaced-out mallrat, has spent all day trying to decipher a 3d image of a sailboat on an easel and is now leaning on the base of the manifold, weeping (The fact that everybody but him can decipher the image shows his profound alienation from the denizens of the mall). He suddenly starts screaming and shaking the manifold like a Hulk imprisoned. His shaking loosens the tape and it falls neatly into Silent Bob's hands. The latter grins, thinking he has mastered the 'Jedi mind trick'--a fact that would make him a veritable God within the comic book subculture. The scene shows Silent Bob having an almost spiritual breakthrough amidst the nebula of iron and commerce signified by the stage manifold. In his mind, he has accomplished something within the consumerist space that he could never do in his own, more extensively travelled liminal spaces.

After Silent Bob successfully plays the tape, and the police immediately arrest Shannon. At the end of the movie, Rene accepts Brodie's apology and the promise of a better relationship. The end of the movie also promises Willem's acceptance in a scene where he's sitting by the manifold, after his tantrum, and the words appear on the screen that read: "Willem does eventually see the sailboat." He looks up gingerly into the camera and responds with an incredulous "Yeah?" and starts to smile. The spaces of the mall, their pervasive atmospheres, are decidedly less hostile to the ebullient personalities which have invaded them.

The mall show's producers were so impressed with Brodie's antics on stage, that they offer him the hosting duties of *The Tonight Show* with Rene as his bandleader. We see Brodie making sexual pantomimes in front of the audience (as he did in the mall dating show) and slyly winking at the audience. The culminating scene of the talk show reveals Silent Bob and Brodie's appropriation, and even domination of alien spaces. Brodie, like Smith's later protagonist Zack, has retranslated the panoptic view of the mall security camera and televisions according to his own agenda, they are subservient to his agenda. His later appearance as host of *The Tonight Show* is an articulation of a marginal character's appropriation of elitist spaces. Not only does he upend the 'politically correct' ethos on the set, but he turns the seemingly panoptic gaze of the T.V. camera from one of harsh observation to universal adulation. The audience's fervent applause for Brodie shows the former's acceptance of his liminally-learned behaviors--a newly-pluralistic ethos.

The Coffee Shop

In *Zack and Miri*, the coffee shop, humorously named *Bean and Gone*, has gone through a transmogrification. What has been historically a place of intimate, fecund conversation has

been reduced to an ersatz panopticon, full of banal palaver and equally banal recorded moments. The store's mistrustful manager has installed a security camera to watch his lackadaisical employees. On a smaller scale, patrons of the store surreptitiously record Miri in the coffee shop backroom changing her clothes. They mirthfully zoom in on her panties, laughing like satyrs during a forest gathering. Eventually, Zack catches them and throws them out. They quickly disseminate the video online under the irresistible title, 'Granny Panties.' Zack and Miri are, in a sense, imprisoned within the shop, emasculated through the privileged, almost godlike views of others. Smith, however inverts the power process, by having Zack acquire the camera for the purposes of shooting his porno inside the coffee shop after hours.

Zack sees the aesthetic potential of the homogenized, bourgeois decor as filtered through his own artistic sensibility. For the first time, he sees the commerciality of the store as benefitting him. The store is now subservient, its spaces malleable, to his artistic whims. Zack climbs a ladder to ferret out his boss's surreptitiously placed camera. The process of ascending the ladder is metaphorical, revealing Zack's zeal in gaining the upper hand on his boss, to reaching the higher plane of existence where the dominant forces play about. The scene, in microcosm, is Zack's spiritual rebirth. The appropriated digital camera is now an instrument of the creative process; it will no longer be used for oppressive purposes, for the diminution of one's potential. The private spaces of the coffee shop are now fodder for public consumption and expression. The coffee shop is purposely juxtaposed to Zack's original site for filming his porno. The site is a marginal, nondescript storage space--its permeating stench the result of ubiquitous fecal matter left by homeless lodgers. The space is briefly a utopia for Zack and company, a place for creative expression, until it is bulldozed by an encroaching development company. The run down garage is an inversion of the heterotopian spaces of the coffee shop.

Shortly after the garage is bulldozed, they all return to the coffee shop, dispirited. Zack is in his normal self-deprecatory mood. Then he looks around and has an epiphany--shoot the porno in the coffee shop. An odd juxtaposition of images and odors races through everyone's mind, but they acquiesce to Zack's ideas and follow his movements. They do not follow Zack because he is a demagogue. Rather, they assemble around him because he is capable of unpredictable behavior and of mentally juxtaposing seemingly contradictory images in his head. It is precisely the radical way in which he sees things that allow for the assemblage to stay together, through adversarial climates. Zack and his friends are an assemblage that, although separated many times by inner strife or vagaries of relationships, they always wind up together by sheer force of their collective will. The latter is a veritable battering ram to the ideological bulwarks inherent in striated spaces (e.g. the coffee shop) that normally relegate Zack, Miri, and those of their ilk, to liminal spaces--this ostracization justified by the abstract, yet in the dominant ideologist's eyes, justifiable reasoning.

Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on that type of reasoning:

It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire "exterior," over all flows traversing the ecumenon. If it can help it, the State does not dissociate itself from a process of capture of flows of all kinds, populations, commodities or commerce, money or capital, etc. There is still a need for fixed paths in well-defined directions, which restrict speed, regulate circulation, relativize movement, and measure in detail the relative movements of subjects and objects. (385)

Zack and friends will not adhere to prescribed paths and relativized futures; they will not have their flows, either bodily or mental, stymied. Zack has an ability, through creative/artistic sensibilities and perspicacity to appropriate spaces for non-dominant uses. And within these rhizomatic, pluralistic spaces, a uniformity of feeling develops among its denizens. Elena Past, in her article, "Lives Aquatic: Mediterranean Cinema and an Ethics of Underwater Existence," applies the idea of the rhizome to the cinematic spaces of Wes Anderson's 2004 film, *The Life Aquatic of Steve Zissou*. She contends that in a film that is characterized by a linguistic [and I dares say a personalistic] pluralism, the sea becomes a rhizome which obliterates, if only temporally, the antimonic subject-positions which pervade the film. Past states that as the characters immerse themselves in the marine space, their shared silence and awe at the pie-colored, gracefully moving shark and other species:

Their wide eyes and gaping mouths resemble the silent movements of the fish that swim by observing them...concurrent with the new bionetwork around them, the characters are suddenly able to move differently *and* to interact differently. They demonstrate in part a capacity to become fish-like, forming an assemblage (as a school of fish) suspended in a moment of pure movement and supported by the lilting currents of the Mediterranean. (48)

Past posits that in Anderson's film, the sea becomes the rhizome, an ephemeral, but integral plane of existence when people of disparate backgrounds and temperaments come together in a space characterized by unanimity of thought and feeling and a sense of awe and wonder. The ephemeral nature of the recalls Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that the rhizome "has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (25). In

Smith's films, the consumerist spaces where the characters come together through spectacle are rhizomes. In a sense, the temporal nature of cinema dictates that the films themselves are indeed rhizomes, intermezzos in our daily lives where we feel an interconnectedness, ephemeral though it may be, to personalities we normally would never encounter in real-life.

The Fast Food Franchise

In *Clerks II*, Randall tries to break down the spatial binarity of consumer and retailer. Randall's initial display of his cultural capital to the *Lord of the Rings* (see Chapter One) fan was intentionally emasculating, the former's next attempt to bridge the gap between producer and consumer is erstwhile yet just as damaging. Randall is mad that an old high school acquaintance had come in to the restaurant to denigrate Dante and him, making them feel like shiftless 'porch-monkeys.' Unbeknownst to Randall, there is a couple located at the back of the store who get outraged at the utterance of the derogatory word. Randall gets screamed at by Becky and Dante, the customer actually lunges at him. When the customer leaves, after several attempts at pacification have failed, he responds by saying that porch-monkey is not a racist slur and that his grandmother called him that all the time, presumably for being lazy. Randall proudly declaims that he is taking the moniker of 'porch-monkey' back to original, more innocuous roots. He proceeds to tape 'Porch-Monkey 4 Life' on the back of his work jersey, placating the aghast looks of customers with his reassuring stance that 'he is taking it back.' Randall finally realizes the utter futility of his efforts when at the end of the movie, when the cops enter the restaurant to stop an interspecies erotica show, a black, rather husky, officer reads Randall's shirt and charges at him, apparently ignoring Randall's erstwhile glance and futile attempts at reconciliation.

Randall's earnestness is a result of the absolute *insularity* of his upbringing. Smith, in his autobiographical works, discusses the almost hermetic nature of his adolescence in the suburbs of Red Bank, NJ. Although geographically, Red Bank is about an hour's drive from New York City, it seemed a million miles away to Smith and his cohorts. The city was positively cosmopolitan, a gigantic, intimidating Other, to them. Smith found refuge and esteem within the comic book subculture and other marginal spaces within his hometown. To this day, Smith retains a profound fondness for Jersey and especially for his comrades that were so integral to his identity formation. His childhood friends Walter Flanagan, Brian Johnson and Jason Mewes became the models for Brodie, Randall and Jay, respectively.

All three's proclivity to surrender to their id, to exhibit seemingly racist/sexist tendencies, is Smith's tribute to the intrinsic energies of their real-life counterparts. Smith obviously doesn't condone the spewing of racial and sexual epithets of his characters. Their outbursts are rather an exaggerated articulation of the estimable bravado of Smith's real-life cohorts--his fondness for his friends shines through their cinematic counterparts. Within the liminal spaces of Red Bank, their bombast was only equaled by their extraordinary naivete of the machinations/ideologies of spaces outside their own. What acts an audience analgesic to his characters' caustic actions is that he makes them endearing, innocuous 'fools.' Smith's ideal would be that the patrons of Mooby's accept his idiosyncrasies with a modicum of empathy and perhaps admiration for his bravado. Randall's attempts to 'take back' the racial phrase is his abrupt, yet naive, way of trying to eradicate its historicity, its abhorrent genealogy, and open it up to newer interpretations/acceptances--actions redolent in rhizomatic spaces.

Randall's attempts to overlay, or rather imbue, his subculture's inherent behaviors and ideology onto Mooby's consumerist spaces are, ostensibly, only semi-successful. He, Dante, Jay,

Silent Bob and the interspecies performer are all jailed for public display of lewd behavior. In their shared cell, a space that normally suppresses personal expression and fecund conversation, Randall, for the first time, gingerly tells Dante that he loves him as his best friend and that they should reopen the Quick Stop together, where they, and not the normal oppressors, are in charge of their destinies. Dante agrees and Jay and Silent Bob agree to officially bankroll their initial investment from their hard-earned drug selling under one caveat: they are allowed to hang outside the store at all hours without reprimand.

Smith gives us an endearing montage of Randall, Dante and a pregnant Becky refurbishing the Quick Stop, all the while the song, *Everything*, by Alanis Morissette, plays on the soundtrack. The chorus of the song goes:

You see everything you see every part
You see all my light and you love my dark
You dig everything of which I'm ashamed
There's not anything to which you can't relate
And you're still here.

The lyrics articulate an intra-empathy between personages of an assemblage that is typical within a rhizomatic paradigm. This assemblage, coined by Deleuze and Guattari as a "Body without Organs" or a body without any underlying organizational principles (organs). The Body without Organs (BwO) is also a "plane of consistency which concretely ties together heterogeneous or disparate elements" (507). Heckman asserts that "rather than the unifying principles of a system of organization, the BwO's system of embodiment is constituted through principles of

consolidation" (2). Morissette's lyrics hint at a solidarity based on a deep feeling of embodiment between personages who are allowed to have symbiotic relationships with each other through non-restricting, or smooth, spaces.

The last shot of the movie is a reverse dolly that is carefully planned by Smith. As the camera moves backwards, Randall leans on the counter with a newspaper while Dante takes inventory of the cigarettes. This excerpt is verbatim from the book of the film's script:

Dante: Can you feel it?

Randall: Feel what?

Dante: Today's the first day of the rest of our lives.

The pair nod, then relax, looking around the store with a smile.

Soul Asylum's "Misery" starts to play. As we slowly pull back,

Dante and Randall's smiles start to drop as they realize what

they've done, and the color in the shot drains to BLACK &

WHITE. Somehow, amazingly, are right back where they started.

(Smith, "Clerks II" 113)

Smith's last lines belie the film's ambitions. The erection of the new Quick Stop is a spiritual rebirth for all involved. Dante and Randall has come full circle in their nomadic wanderings through consumer-land. Their reterritorialization of the Quick-Stop has now created a hybrid space--that of personal expression and obeisance, to some level, to the clientele. The backward-tracking shot reveals a 'milkmaid,' or a lady who obsessively searches for the greatest expiration

date on gallons of milk, even if she has to take out every one. Her idiosyncratic behavior is now tolerated (milkmaids were met with a distinct opprobrium in the first *Clerks* film).

The structures built at the end of *Clerks II* and *Zack and Miri*, the Quick Stop and porn studio offices respectively, are, in a sense, counterpublics in that they stand for, or have been built as, a concretized structure that challenges the status quo. The inhabitants of said structures are from the periphery, yet struggle to restructure, metaphorically, the entrenched social hierarchy of their societies by going into business for themselves. They don't desire fiscal or social 'upward mobility' but simply an egress from the constrictive consumer spaces they formerly inhabited into spaces that allow their personal ideologies to mix with /pepper the normally stifling or mundane world of running a business, one that caters to others in smooth, symbiotic spaces--spaces that align with William Connolly's concept of 'rhizomatic pluralism.' The latter is defined as a "way to rethink the public sphere as a system of participation that has no center and no hierarchy...expanding the concept of the public sphere to include a variety of subaltern counterpublics can overcome elitism and homogeneity...it must provide, at least temporarily, a space protected from the dominant discourse in which an alternative can be imagined, lived and articulated" (Lefebvre 507). Smith's films are such spaces.

CONCLUSION

Kevin Hetherington states that:

The contemporary free festival is the epitome of the carnivalesque: a subversive, threatening, grotesque occasion with its untamed communitas, disorder, drug taking, hedonism, anti-authoritarianism, and bizarre costume; all of which are articulated through visible, bodily expressions of release from imposed social constraints.

(153)

There is no better encapsulation of Kevin Smith's films than this quote. Smith is the generation X successor to Federico Fellini using ribald comedy, with its inherently crude imagery and language, to create a world which celebrates its anarchic dimensions. Smith's films also rival the Italian master in their deep-rooted sense of nostalgia for the seemingly hermetic culture each filmmaker grew up in. The hermetic world of Smith's upbringing consists of such liminal spaces such as the suburbs of Red Bank, NJ, an enclave that seemed a million miles away from anything bustling or urbane (such as New York City). Other liminal spaces of equal import to Smith's identity are those within the comic book subculture. No other filmmaker of his or any generation has so strongly imprinted his liminal culture onto the ubiquitous movie screens of mainstream culture. This is why Smith sells out one-man shows on his world-wide tours--because he has articulated the comic book subculture so well in his films, its inherent idiosyncratic behaviors

and deep rooted sense of pop-culture nostalgia, and how it bleeds into everyday culture. Therefore, the audiences, whether they have a great or little affinity to the subculture, deem it their responsibility to come out and support him. No filmmaker that I know of has that drawing power outside of theatre returns.

Smith's nostalgia is so intrinsic to his identity that he surrounds himself, both personally and artistically, with a group of people that he has mostly known since adolescence. His childhood friends have profoundly influenced his writing and his compelling personal rhetoric which is on virtuosic display in his podcasts and one-man appearances. Smith models himself on one of his personal heroes, hockey legend Wayne Gretsky. What he admired most of all the Great One's enduring records is that of 'most assists.' Smith wonders at the total lack of vanity Gretsky must have possessed in order to help each of his teammates succeed with goal-making. Gretsky did not see himself as 'top of the heap' and it is precisely this non-hierarchal sense of being or of self is exactly what Smith has tried to emulate as he has grown more successful.

The planes of space that Smith transverses are definitely rhizomatic in nature. Whether it be in his personal or professional spaces, Smith gathers disparate personalities who get to speak with their authentic voices, albeit it podcasts, the Comic Book Men TV show, or as co-creator of comic books with Smith, with no fear of censure. The power structure in Smith's universe is *not* hierarchal and the dominant voice is *not* privileged. In Smith's spaces, spirits move with an almost collective will, yet are not segmented or obstructed by physical or ideological barriers. There is a clear symbiosis with Smith personal and professional lives. For instance, his podcasts promulgates movie ideas and cinematic experiences become fodder for his one-man shows and podcasts. The most cogent example of this cross-pollination (an identifier of a rhizomatic relationship), is Smith's 2014 film, *Tusk*. The idea of an urbane recluse who horrifically

transforms a gregarious podcaster into a walrus by means of mutilation and subterfuge started as an innocuous podcast conversation between Smith and his producer/partner Scott Mosier. The result has been one of Smith's most talked about films.

Smith recently stated that he was quitting film in order to podcast full-time, that Hollywood stifled one's creativity. However, since he has started to independently finance his films, things look promising for the future of Kevin Smith films. As of now, he does have at least three films in his queue to direct, including the last two parts of his self-titled 'Canadian Trilogy', the first of which is *Tusk*. If the latter is any indication, Smith's talent seems to be flowering right now. His last two films, *Tusk* and *Red State* (a dramatic meditation on religious fundamentalism) are an enticing melange of horror, incisive social commentary, and comedy. Smith has stretched beyond writing his stock characters in recognizable milieus, showing a versatility and pathos that is most refreshing. Yes, he still writes crude dialogue, but he also writes stretches of dialogue that rivals the mellifluousness and cadence of Quentin Tarantino's best dialogue. The latter is most obvious in actor Michael Parks' dialogues and jeremiads in both *Red State* and *Tusk*.

As I opined earlier, There is little-to-no critical exegesis on the cinematic output of Kevin Smith. I hope that in the future, a scholar more perceptive than I will write a cogent thesis on his oeuvre. Smith is the quintessential auteur-filmmaker. His films are celebrations, mini-carnivals where personal expression is absolute and societal hierarchies obliterated. His cinematic spaces are shared by all and welcome to all and no behavior or speech within is verboten. No one is more deprecatory in their comments about Smith's aesthetic than Smith himself. Yet his self-negation is a ruse; it purposely belies the fact that Smith an ardent and intelligent artist; he is the quintessence of independent filmmaking. Smith has himself said that he loves to join in fecund, ribald conversations on any topic, no matter how inane, and the fact that he gets paid for it is

simply a bonus. If we cull anything from Smith's films, it is that our society is in dire need of fruitful conversations, unmediated by ubiquitous electronica.

Now comes the time to address the ubiquitous claims of excessive puerility and sexism by both critics and audiences. It is only natural that Smith will alienate certain social factions with his films, but, alas that is the fate of most artistic output, but if one will only try to detect Smith's penchant for Rabelaisian excess, the comic aggrandizement of our (i.e. society's) collective desires in the vehement outbursts of his characters. The audiences' endearment to the latter is directly proportional to their grasp/acceptance of Smith's (as well as their own) subversive nature, his astute knowledge of popular culture as well as his endearment towards his creations and their real-life counterparts. I suggest both scholars and audiences stop dismissing Smith's work as simply crude and unworthy of critical analysis and start engaging in fruitful conversations about his films. Who knows what *identifications* could be made, what nuggets of wisdom could be culled from such 'digging in the dirt?'

According to Foucault, utopias are phantasms. They are illusory and unobtainable. The most that one could hope for, as Smith does, is to inhabit heterotopian spaces that *welcome* a multiplicity of personalities, ideologies, etc. Whether these spaces are lasting or ephemeral is not the point. The point is that they *are willfully created* by those inhabiting the dominant consumerist/individualist spaces that are paradigmatic in our society.

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