ESSAY

Disability on Screen: Intertextual Doubling in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Do the Right Thing*

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Abstract: This paper provides a postmodern reading of Miloš Forman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* and the intertextual doubles expressed through depictions of disability, masculinity, and race. Drawing upon the scholarship of Jay Dolmage, Gordon Slethaug, and Vershawn Ashanti Young, I discuss how disability is used in these films as a prop for socio-economic issues. Unpacking the intertextual doubling of disability as 'problem space,' gender performance, and death metaphor illuminates how these films employ disability myths to explore issues of historical and cultural tension. The disability myths of isolation, social ill, internal flaw, ethical test, and enactment continue to actively stereotype people with disabilities and use their bodies as metaphors for violence.

Introduction

As Graham Allen explains in *Intertextuality*, "postmodernism is a term which is employed by many to refer to the current historical, social, and cultural epoch" (181). In literature and film, current historical, social, and cultural issues are expressed through "intertextuality" (45), which Allen defines as the encompassment of "that aspect of texts which struggles against and subverts reason, the belief in unity of meaning, or of the human subject, and which is therefore subversive to all ideas

of the logical and the unquestionable" (45). To discuss this process of textual relation and struggle, I consult disability, postmodern, and rhetorical theorists, including Jay Dolmage, Gordon Slethaug, and Vershawn Ashanti Young. I argue that Miloš Forman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* are intertextual doubles because both films use myths of disability to engage in issues of oppression. Billy Bibbit and Smiley create a postmodern interplay between the issues of disability, masculinity, and race; this intertextual doubling activates complex connections between these two films. To unpack these connections, I discuss 'problem spaces,' performances of masculinity, and disability/death imagery as issues that resonate with postmodern audiences.

Problem Spaces

In *Adaptation Theory and Criticism: Postmodern Literature and Cinema in the USA*, Gordon Slethaug defines "intertextual doubling" as "terms and images that subtly repeat from text to text, creating unexpected links, altering expectations, and resulting in radically revised meaning" (73). *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Do the Right Thing* share a social rhetoric embedded in the issue of territory. This territorial doubling indicates larger social problems within American culture. In *Disability Rhetoric*, Jay Dolmage provides an overview of disability myths. Billy Bibbit and Smiley can be sorted into many of these myths. For instance, Billy can be linked to the myth of '*Disability as Isolating and Individuated,*' which suggests that "people with disabilities in film and literature most often live in hospitals and institutions" (35). This myth perpetuates "the belief that disability should be isolating and is reinforced by, and also justifies, the 'warehousing' of people with disabilities in institutions, segregated classrooms, sheltered workshops, and so on" (43). I want to push this 'warehousing' myth further by suggesting that people with disabilities are often portrayed in film and literature as inhabiting what I will call *problem spaces*, which can include hospitals and institutions but also cities and neighbourhoods.

Forman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which is a filmic adaptation of Ken Kesey's novel of the same name, deals directly with the issue of territory. There are two kinds of territorial struggle represented in the film: community (patient/staff) and escape (patient/world). In the novel, Kesey describes the division of patients into two categories,

Acutes and Chronics:

> One side of the room, younger patients, known as Acutes because the doctors figure them still sick enough to be fixed, practice arm wrestling and card tricks. The Acutes move around a lot. [. . .] Across the room from the Acutes are the culls of the Combine's product, the Chronics. Chronics are in for good, the staff concede. Chronics are divided into Walkers like me, Wheelers, and Vegetables. (13-14)

Both patient categories deal with the issue of community. Acutes are voluntary patients who can, theoretically, leave the hospital at any time. Chronics, on the other hand, are involuntary patients confined to the hospital for life. This breakdown of people with mental illness and/or physical disabilities into defined communities gives the illusion of camaraderie and shared rights; however, these divisions actually depict prescribed social roles of immobility and exclusion.

The disabled body is portrayed as a kind of 'problem space' within institutional and community settings and is "classed, gendered, and sexed" (Young 99) in certain ways. Acute or Chronic, every patient's body and voice is marginalized, and their history laid bare during group therapy. One of these group therapy sessions begins with guided exercise; this creates visual codes of demarcation between those with power and those seemingly without. This is also the first time that Randle McMurphy attends, having been transferred from a work detail in prison, and his gestures and expressions—stretching, yawning, winking—depict boredom and amusement. In the novel, these gestures and expressions occur after McMurphy has been introduced to Chief Bromden, whom Billy describes as "de-de-deaf and dumb" (Kesey 23). Billy, who has a speech disorder, takes this notion of aural and verbal silence a step further; he says: "If I was d-d-deaf, I would kill myself" (22). Billy's statement acts as the voice of American attitudes toward people with disabilities.

These attitudes represent disability on screen as a weakness. Postmodern viewers are thus presented with an opportunity to deconstruct myths associated with disability, gender, and sex and challenge the dominant narratives that contribute to stereotypes and perpetuate notions of eugenics and fear. Problem spaces are not necessarily sites of violence but, rather, spaces for the agitation of intermixed social is-

sues. The second kind of territorial struggle represented in the film is that of escape. Scenes of escape in the film—inside and outside of the hospital—emphasize the kind of postmodern 'realism' that Robert Stam discusses in *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation*. According to Stam, a postmodern conception of realism pertains to:

> [. . .] a feeling of authenticity. For Gilles Deleuze, realism no longer refers to a mimetic, analogical adequation between sign and referent, but rather to the sensate feel of time, to the intuition of lived duration, the mobile sliding of Bergsonian *durée*. Realism, it is important to add, is culturally relative. [. . .] The key point here is that realism is itself a discourse, an artful fabrication, one that creates and reshapes what it speaks. (11)

In the film, feelings of authenticity are conveyed through escapist scenes involving basketball, fishing, and games. These activities are associated with performances of masculinity.

I will further discuss masculinity in section two. For now, let us focus on two scenes of escapism. First, in the novel, McMurphy forms a basketball team. In the film, basketball scenes are much more prominent than in the novel, and feature escapism through teamwork. The most interesting figures in this process of emotional escapism are Chief Bromden and Pete Bancini. Bancini suffered brain damage as a child. Bromden is believed to be mute, although it is later revealed that his muteness is a performance. Bromden's use of disability as a means of not participating with others is troubling in the sense that it characterizes disability as an 'otherness' that can be stepped in and out of. McMurphy teaches Bromden to raise his hands and teaches Bancini to carry the weight of a man upon his shoulders (see Figure 1). This scene of escapism is mimetic—it takes place within a confined space, which is under surveillance, in order to offer a false sense of freedom. This is the same environment that the patients experience indoors, and represents the postmodern 'realism' that Stam mentions, where visual representations of confined spaces speak to a social call for openness and freedom.

Figure 1: McMurphy, on Bancini's shoulders, teaches Bromden how to score a basket

The second scene of escapism takes place outside of the hospital grounds and combines feelings of realism with acts of violence. In the novel, McMurphy plans a fishing day-trip with the Acutes. This fishing trip is not an exercise in healing or therapy but, rather, an exercise in distraction. In *American Literary Criticism Since the 1930s*, Vincent Leitch defines intertextuality as "a text's dependence on and infiltration of prior concepts, figures, codes, unconscious practices, conventions, and texts" (245). McMurphy uses the boat as an off-site location to engage in sexual intercourse with Candy Starr, a local sex worker. This scene of emotional escapism depends upon prior conceptions of masculinity and sex. The Acutes are portrayed as sexual voyeurs and people with disabilities as sexual deviants. The association of disability with deviancy, through comedic scenes such as this one, positions the disabled body as a problem space with ableist social environments. In essence, the problem in this scene is the portrayal of sexual expression by people with disabilities as 'funny.'

In *Do the Right Thing*, the issue of racial territory within New York cities and neighbourhoods illustrates problem spaces within American

culture. In his essay "Spike Lee, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X: The Politics of Domination and Difference," Gordon Slethaug discusses the ways in which Spike Lee positions Martin Luther King's and Malcolm X's rhetorics in his films via representations of black communities. Writing about racial and economic issues was integral for Lee during this time because the "New York City of the late 1980s and early 1990s was mired in boycotts, riots, lootings, and murders" (K. J. Lee 741). In fact, unemployment rates were on the rise because of the stock market crash, and this "seriously impacted the jobs of the black working class of Queens and Brooklyn" (Slethaug, *Spike Lee* 124). These narratives of racism, violence, and unemployment represent Brooklyn as a social problem space within the film. Smiley demonstrates radical resistance against this space by preaching Malcolm X's rhetoric in order "to make viewers think about these issues and begin to firm up workable social alternatives" (133).

In the film, Smiley dresses like a tourist, with a combination camera and cassette player around his neck (see Figure 2). His tourist-like clothing codes him as an outsider within his own community. Because that inner-city borough already represents black communities that have been othered, Smiley's position within the film as black *and* disabled renders him doubly othered. This social position is reinforced by his stuttering and the selling of postcards to Bed-Stuy residents that feature the faces and rhetorics of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Slethaug further decodes Smiley's role in the film:

> That Smiley reappears about a dozen times as he listens to Malcolm X's speeches and tries to sell the postcards suggests the importance of these black leaders to the action. His inability to articulate their names, however, is open to several interpretations: (1) the film's difficulty in choosing between disparate political positions on race relations; (2) the fading relevance of both Malcolm and Martin; and (3) a dialogue putting them into conversation with possible alternatives that go beyond either position. ("Spike Lee" 132-133)

A fourth interpretation of Smiley's role can be made by arguing that his stuttering represents the viewing of social politics through a disability lens. Smiley can, therefore, be slotted into the myth of '*Disability as Sign of Social Ill*,' which describes "disability as symptomatic of a devi-

ant culture" (Dolmage 36).

Figure 2: *Smiley sells photos of Malcolm X in front of The Yes Jesus Last Baptist Church*

In this sense, Smiley's "difference is used as an analogue for an ill or evil that is not isolated to the individual, but reflects a social problem" (Dolmage 43). There are many scenes in which Smiley acts as a mediator between African-American and Italian-American cultures. I will briefly discuss two of these scenes in order to demonstrate the way in which other members of the community position Smiley as 'a problem body' within 'a problem space.' In "Re-engaging the Body: Disability Studies and the Resistance to Embodiment," Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell define such as cultural figuration of the disabled body as "the faulty body" (379). My renaming of 'the faulty body' to 'the problem body' is not meant to suggest that the disabled body is 'problematic' in any way but, rather, that society often employs the disabled body as a mediary force between their socio-economic problems.

In *Do the Right Thing*, Smiley acts as a mediary force between African-American and Italian-American cultures and rhetorics. In an early scene, Mookie delivers pizza to a patron of Sal's Famous Pizzeria, and Smiley stops him on the stairwell to sell him a picture of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King standing together. This unity of black rhetorics follows Mookie when he ascends the stairs and Smiley repeats m-

sound names: "Mookie. Malcolm. Martin" (Do the Right Thing). Such consonance plays on the experience of blackness and what it means to live in a community experiencing violent socio-economic change. Smiley's vocalization of black rhetorics establishes his voice as the mediator between Mookie's Bed-Stuy, Malcolm's violent, and Martin's peaceful rhetorics.

In essence, Smiley is the body that links together risky cultures within Bed-Stuy. In fact, Smiley's "consumption of city space represents a prime means by which he negotiates the ups and downs of life in a so-called risk society" (Miles 66). Moreover, when Sal and Pino sit down to discuss Pino's desire to leave the family business, Smiley interrupts this conversation. This upsets Pino, who shouts: "Get the fuck out of here!" (Do the Right Thing). Three black men on the street corner can be heard replying: "You leave that boy alone! You know he ain't right!" (Do the Right Thing). Smiley himself becomes upset at Pino's anger and, while retreating, stutters: "F-f-fuck you!" (Do the Right Thing). It is this slight against Smiley that ultimately convinces the black community to boycott Sal's Famous Pizzeria. I will return to this boycott scene in section three.

Performing Masculinity

Thus far, I have argued that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Do the Right Thing* are intertextual doubles because they employ the same technique of using the disabled body as a problem space to visually illustrate and mediate cultural issues of oppression. I want to transition now to a discussion of masculinity within both films. To do so, I will define postmodern masculinity, and then discuss the construction of masculinity and disability in both films based on mirroring scenes of play (featuring water imagery, the radio, and photography).

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and *Do the Right Thing* share similar constructions of disability and masculinity. This shared view of body and gender performance is postmodern because it simultaneously depicts past constructions of disability and masculinity and challenges present viewers to subvert these structures. In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon argues that:

> Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. [. . .]

> Postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. Nevertheless, the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us. (1-2)

In both films, the postmodern commitment to doubleness is conveyed through visual cues pertaining to water, the radio, and photography. These shared cues link the films intertextually and can be understood as using a postmodern lens through which to examine the issues of disability and masculinity.

Let us begin with water scenes from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. In the novel, the dominant water scene is Charles Cheswick's drowning. His death is instigated by both Nurse Ratched and McMurphy, who discuss the rationing of cigarettes during a group therapy session. Cheswick responds: "I ain't no little kid! [. . .] I want something *done*! Hear me? I want *something* done! Something! Something! Some—" (Kesey 149). Cheswick is not actually concerned with the attainment of his cigarettes in this scene but with the ways in which others try to emasculate him. For Cheswick and the other men, acts of play—including gambling, music, television, and smoking—enhance their masculinity in a setting where body, gender, and sexuality are otherwise constrained. Because Nurse Ratched ignores his request for control over his own choices and desires, Cheswick commits suicide in the swimming pool:

> But just as soon as we got to the pool he said he did wish *something* might have been done, though, and dove into the water. And got his fingers stuck some way in the grate that's over the drain at the bottom of the pool, and neither the big lifeguard nor McMurphy nor the two black boys could pry him loose, and by the time they got a screwdriver and undid the grate and brought Cheswick up, with the grate still clutched by his chubby pink and blue fingers, he was drowned. (151)

Cheswick's death within a setting typically associated with therapeutic recovery renders the swimming pool a site of social violence.

In the film, this drowning scene is replaced by a different kind of water scene. In an effort to escape the loud radio music playing in the day room, McMurphy and the Acutes retreat to an old hydrotherapy room, where they play Monopoly. When a fight over property ownership between Dale Harding and Taber becomes heated, McMurphy hoses all of the men down with water (see Figure 3). Here, water is associated with the alleviation of tension. Amal Treacher Kabesh argues that this kind of spontaneous act by McMurphy is actually a 'taunt,' 'provocation,' or "way of proving bravery and growing manhood" (68). Most of the Acutes respond positively to this water play. Billy, however, moves out of the line of fire because being soaked in water "demands [him] to scrutinize the self or to be scrutinized by others" (69). The reality of this demand visually pins disability against masculinity and suggests that typical forms of male play can also be used as forms of punishment.

Figure 3: *McMurphy hoses the Acutes with water*

During race riots, water is often used to control large crowds. In *Do the Right Thing*, the dominant water scene involves the Bed-Stuy community and a fire hydrant. A few youths uncap the fire hydrant and use a metal can to create a spray of water. Two things of note happen in this scene. First, Ella Ahmed is carried kicking and screaming against

her will into the flow: "What are you doing? Put me down! Oh my God!" (Do the Right Thing). Mister Señor Love Daddy watches this happen from the radio station and laughs. The young male who carries Ella against her will shakes hands with his friends. This equates black masculinity with acts of voyeurism, domination, and violence against women, aligning with Kabesh's view that "the struggle for power necessitates that masculine subjectivity ignores and/or denies the cost of the ruthless pursuit of power over the self and others and the injuries and wounds caused" (111). Second, Smiley is pushed toward the fire hydrant and screams while upholding a picture of Malcolm and Martin (see Figure 4). This scene of forced inclusion reinforces the exclusion of people with disabilities from civil rights. Both Ella and Smiley represent figures whose participation is either objectified or silenced.

Figure 4: *Smiley is pushed toward the fire hydrant*

In *Your Average Nigga Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*, Vershawn Ashanti Young discusses race and gender performance, and suggests that "racial fantasies" (99) are used to learn your way in and out of racism (100). The aforementioned water scene is a performance of masculinity *and* disability *and* race. This is not a doubling but a tripling of 'fantasies' that mark the fire hydrant as a physical means to express the complex perceptions of these three issues in terms of past and present struggles. The film calls the audience to "interrogate these

practices and the unconscious beliefs that inform them" (108). Smiley's presence in this scene slots him into another disability myth, that of '*Physical Deformity as Sign of Internal Flaw*,' which "describes the body of an individual and accentuates its foreignness, abnormality, or exoticness, allowing for insinuations of internal deviance or lack" (Dolmage 35). What Lee demonstrates is the tangled workings of social constructions that work with and against American traditions.

Both films also contain scenes involving the radio. In "Fixing Men: Castration, Impotence, and Masculinity in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,*" Michael Meloy describes the climate of the 1950s that Kesey and Forman represent in their literary and visual texts:

> The themes of control, submission, and alienation link to gender, representing similar fears of female empowerment and a male power rendered impotent by a sterile social structure. In the postwar era, the discourse of gender and sexuality was, indeed, culturally linked to the political climate of surveillance. (5)

In the novel, the topic of surveillance is linked to masculinity in the scene where McMurphy asks Nurse Ratched to turn the radio volume down. In the film, the loudspeaker acts as a surrogate radio, and is used as a surveillance device that disciplines the patients and calls them to receive their medication. McMurphy also asks one of the black orderlies: "How about breaking out that deck of cards you got locked securely in that cabinet and I'll see if I can make myself heard over that loudspeaker?" (Kesey 93). In the film, a deck of cards is already present, and it is the nosiness of the music that McMurphy wants something done about. Unlike music in *Do the Right Thing*, which is used by Radio Raheem to protest against racial discrimination, music in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is used as a form of control. McMurphy's rebellion against forms of control manifests in rebellious displays of masculinity.

In *Do the Right Thing*, there are two scenes featuring Smiley that illustrate the complex construction of black masculinity. First, Sal asks Mookie to deliver pizza to Mister Señor Love Daddy, so he walks with Vito, Sal's younger son, and discusses the abuse Vito suffers from his older brother, Pino: "You should kick his ass next time he hits you. Fuck him up" (Do the Right Thing). Smiley enters this dialogue be-

tween an African-American and an Italian-American in front of the radio station, which features the slogan "WE LOVE" (Do the Right Thing). Mookie shoos Smiley away: "Smiley, not now! Smiley, get out of here!" (Do the Right Thing). The fact that Smiley's body is physically positioned between the words 'WE' and 'LOVE' suggests that Malcolm's and Martin's opposing rhetorics can be united through social acts of peaceful dialogue rather than through violence. Therefore, Smiley's masculinity becomes representative of cultural and linguistic expectations and realities.

The second scene involving Smiley and the construction of black masculinity also involves Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out. In this scene, the three men discuss Sal's Famous Pizzeria, and call for a boycott (see Figure 5). Raheem is probably the biggest masculine authority in the film. His boombox acts as a symbol of black masculinity, as do his LOVE/HATE knuckle rings. In *Do the Right Thing: A Spike Lee Joint*, Spike Lee says the following about Raheem's character:

> He's lost, like a lot of Black youth. Their value systems are all screwed up. They're after more gold teeth, gold chains, and gold brass knuckle rings. They don't understand how worthless that shit is in the long run. They are still BLACK, POOR, and UNEDUCATED. (59)

Figure 5: *Smiley, Radio Raheem, and Buggin' Out listen to the radio*

That these three men stand together visually represents the interaction

of the dominant social issues at play within the Bed-Stuy community: disability (Smiley), masculinity (Raheem), and race (Buggin' Out). The radio, on the other hand, symbolizes resistance against authority and all systems of privilege.

Before Smiley enters this scene, Raheem and Buggin' Out stand against a wall, listening to the radio:

> BUGGIN' OUT: Check this out. Y'know Sal's.
> RADIO RAHEEM: Yeah, I know dat motherfucker.
> BUGGIN' OUT: I'm trying to organize a boycott of Sal's pizza joint. Ya see what I'm saying? (S. Lee 238)

Someone from the community shouts at Raheem to lower the volume on his radio. Slethaug explains that "the younger generation is angry and hostile: their music is loud and their language non-standard, aggressive, and filled with rude expletives" (*Adaptation Theory* 162). This notion is confirmed as soon as Smiley enters the scene, shouting "F-f-fuck you!" (Do the Right Thing) at the unknown caller. It can be concluded, then, that "volume becomes a measure of power and control in a society where, otherwise, people have little positive control and responsibility for their own lives" (Slethaug, *Adaptation Theory* 162). Smiley's voice becomes the postmodern encompassment of agitated spaces of disability, masculinity, and race through profanity aimed at an unknown caller who, within this framework, represents society at large. Masculinity becomes a performance of difference within a community defined by difference.

Both films also reconceptualize masculinity through photography. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, photographs are linked to games. McMurphy keeps a deck of pornographic playing cards (see Figure 6) and teaches the Acutes how to play betting games, such as poker and blackjack. Card games, smoking, pornography—these activities are meant to sustain heterosexual masculine identities in an otherwise sterile environment. When McMurphy arrives on the ward, he establishes friendships by engaging in a game of cards. He says to Cheswick:

> Hello, buddy; what's that you're playin'? Pinochle? Jesus, no wonder you don't care nothin' about showing your hand. Don't you have a straight deck around here? Well say, here we go, I brought along my own deck, just in case, has something in it

> other than face cards—and check the pictures, huh? Every one different. Fifty-two positions. [. . .] Easy now, don't smudge 'em; we got lots of time, lots of games ahead of us. I like to use my deck here because it takes at least a week for the other players to get to where they can even see the *suit*. (Kesey 12)

McMurphy's use of his own deck of cards is critical because it alludes to his stint in prison for the statutory rape of a fifteen-year-old girl. He flashes these cards like trophies in his meeting with the doctor and assures him that the girl was "plenty willin'" (40). His degradation of women for his own pleasure speaks to a masculine culture of sexual violence.

Figure 6: *McMurphy shows his deck of pornographic cards to Mancini*

In *Do the Right Thing*, there are two scenes that focalize the issue of masculinity via photography. First, photographs are best represented in Sal's Famous Pizzeria, where there exists a Wall of Fame featuring famous Italian-Americans. In the scene where Buggin' Out orders a pizza, he questions why Sal has featured no black men on the Wall of Fame since all of his customers are African-American (see Figure 7):

> BUGGIN' OUT: Yo, Mookie? How come he ain't got no brothers up on the wall?
> MOOKIE: Man, ask Sal, alright?
> BUGGIN' OUT: Hey, hey Sal, how come you ain't got no brothers up on the wall here?
> SAL: You want brothers on the wall? Get your own place; you can do what you want with it. (Do the Right Thing)

This exchange illustrates a tension that pits one performance of race against another. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, masculinity is defined by rebellion and sex. In *Do the Right Thing*, masculinity is defined by other men, particularly those of your same race. In this scene, Smiley idles outside, with his hands pressed against the window. This pose renders him an outsider and stereotypes disability as 'isolating' or 'othering.'

Figure 7: *Buggin' Out and Smiley visit Sal's Famous Pizzeria*

In the second scene, Sal's restaurant has already been boycotted. Smiley's presence in this scene is critical because his smile is scripted as a symbol of rebellion. Here is an except from the script:

> ANGLE–SMILEY
> Smiley sits up from where he hid during the burning and looting of Sal's Famous Pizzeria. Smiley looks around and goes di-

> rectly to the smoldering Wall of Fame. He stands there. Smiley pins one of his Malcolm X / Martin Luther King cards to the Wall of Fame.
> CLOSE–PHOTO
> CLOSE–SMILEY
> We're on Smiley's face and a smile slowly travels across. It's the first time Smiley has smiled in years and nobody is there to see this event. (S. Lee 255)

This places Smiley into the disability myth of '*Disability as Ethical Test*' (Dolmage 42). Ato Quayson describes this myth as involving the use of disability as "some form of ethical background to the actions of other characters or as a means of testing or enhancing their moral standing" (36). The fact that Smiley is the instigator of the boycott and that no one is around to see him smile complicates other performances of body, gender, and race by challenging rhetorics of oppression through acts of deviance.

Disability and Death

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and *Do the Right Thing* are also intertextually linked through scenes of death. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Billy's body becomes a source of change within the hospital. The loss of his virginity is intermeshed with the issues of freedom, choice, nonconformity, and disability 'cure.' In "Organic Hesitancies: Stuttering and Sexuality in Melville, Kesey, and Mishima," Christopher Eagle suggests that Billy's "prolonged virginity is shown to be the primary cause of his stutter and his loss of virginity its instantaneous cure" (207). In the film, McMurphy plans to leave the hospital with two female sex workers, but Billy stops him, and asks if Candy might stay behind. McMurphy interprets this as a desire for sex and sits Billy down in a wheelchair (which is later used to push him into a private room with Candy).

When Nurse Ratched discovers that Billy and Candy had sex, she confronts Billy in the hallway:

> BILLY BIBBIT: I can explain everything.
> NURSE RATCHED: Aren't you ashamed?
> BILLY BIBBIT: No. I'm not. (One Flew Over the Cuckoo's

Nest)

This is the only time in the film when Billy does not stutter. In "Interactions in Cuckoo's Nest: Elements of a Narrative Speech-Act Analysis," Lars Bernaerts argues that "utterances can be a protest and an apology at the same time" (282). For Dolmage, Billy fits into the myth of '*Disability Drop*,' where "characters with disabilities 'drop' the act of being disabled as part of the climax of a narrative" (37).

For McMurphy, Billy's speech act opens up the institutional space for reworkings of existing power dynamics. Billy's statement is powerful because it rejects Nurse Ratched's insinuation of shame. This is also the first time that anyone has ever really been forced to *listen* to Billy. His sexual experience boosts his masculinity and decreases his disability in the eyes of the other patients; this kind of visual rhetoric is ableist because it defines disability as inability. The staging of Billy in a wheelchair is another visual cue that objectifies his body. According to Eunjung Kim, the film "posits prostitution and a non-disabled female sex worker as a fleeting and necessary rite of passage in the physical and psychological rehabilitation of disabled men" (139). This 'sexuality of disability' (142) is later fetishized when Billy commits suicide. After Billy's response, Nurse Ratched vows to inform his mother. For Billy, the word 'mother' is a kind of nodal violence that triggers feelings of anxiety and self-hatred.

In the film, the doctor, Nurse Ratched, and the Acutes discover Billy's body in an office after he has committed suicide (see Figure 8). The blood on the wall and on Billy's throat is striking in an otherwise neutral visual palette. Further emphasis is placed upon the throat as Nurse Ratched kneels beside Billy's body to check for a pulse. In the novel, this image of death and disability does not occur; instead, the Acutes remain in the day room, and wait for Nurse Ratched to return from the office and inform them of what has happened. The doctor cries:

> 'Nurse!' he yelled. 'Good lord, nurse!'
>
> She ran, and the three black boys ran, down the hall to where the doctor was still calling. But not a patient got up. We knew there wasn't anything for us to do now but just sit tight and wait for her to come to the day room to tell us what we all had known was one of the things that was bound to happen.

> She walked straight to McMurphy.
>
> 'He cut his throat,' she said. She waited, hoping he would say something. He wouldn't look up. 'He opened the doctor's desk and found some instruments and cut his throat. The poor miserable, misunderstood boy killed himself. He's there now, in the doctor's chair, with his throat cut.' (Kesey 274)

In the novel, Billy's body is not positioned on the floor, but in the doctor's chair—the ultimate seat of power in a hospital setting. His body is less of a theatrical spectacle in the novel, but it is still a prop that represents the consequences of rebellious masculinity.

Figure 8: *Nurse Ratched and the doctor check Billy's pulse*

In *Do the Right Thing*, throat imagery is also prominent. In the penultimate scene, Mookie throws a garbage can through the front window of Sal's Famous Pizzeria. Smiley is the first to enter, the first to ransack, and the one who starts the fire. Water imagery returns in this scene when firemen arrive to hose down the restaurant and the crowd. When the police arrive, a riot ensues, and Smiley angrily cries out as the police choke Radio Raheem to death (see Figure 9). In "The Politics of Inner-City Identity in *Do the Right Thing*," Philip Hanson states:

> If the riot is an expression of communal identity, then the power relations the film presents—an occupying police force, a white-owned business in a black neighbourhood where locals own little– serve to recall the colonial aspects of ghetto existence and the external constructions of blackness that circumscribe community and individual potential. (61)

In this scene, disability is intermixed with death as Smiley tries to vocalize police brutality. The fact that Smiley is shown shaking, crying, and yelling while Raheem is choked to death suggests a complicated relationship between internal struggles and external social issues. What Lee attempts to do is "re-write" (Brooker 113) and "re-function" (114) existing social problems that make oppression a perceivably fixed part of black and disability cultures.

Figure 9: *Mookie, Smiley, and Ella scream as Raheem is killed*

Conclusion

Disability, gender, and race studies share a mutual concern for the development of "frameworks aimed at improving quality of life for socially-disadvantaged groups" (Keith and Keith 105). *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Do the Right Thing* depict American attitudes that rely upon oppressive constructions of disability, masculinity, and race. These films are relevant in the postmodern age because they offer "new ideas about the body, ethics, and social justice" (Corker and

Shakespeare 4). By discussing problem spaces (institutions, communities, and bodies), performances of masculinity (via water imagery, the radio, and photography), and disability/death imagery, my goal has been to illustrate the ways in which *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Do the Right Thing* are intertextual doubles through their use of characters with disabilities as props for socio-economic issues. In this paper, I have pointed out the disability myths at play in both films, and noted problematic social attitudes and systems in order to suggest that making sense of identity is integral to the reconstruction of radical rhetorics and the creation of "a politics of alliance" (Corker and Shakespeare 9). As intertextual doubles, these films share a concern with changing figurations of oppression, and give rise to a postmodern revisioning of myths that engage with representations of discriminated bodies. In Malcolm's words, these films allow a postmodern audience "to see what they used to only look at" (26).

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