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### **Militarism, Misanthropy and the Body Politic: *Independence Day* and “America’s New War”**

*Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996) so resembles “America’s new war” that the film demands a closer look. A list of similarities might include the incineration of government and corporate monuments, the corridor of fire barrelling down an avenue,



**Fig. 1.** New York skyline after the attack

poorly informed  
newscasters, jumbled  
and distorted broadcast  
images with super-text;  
an emphasis on blue-  
collar and middle-class  
labour fire-fighters,  
police, cropdusters, and

migrant workers; the absence of the rich and powerful as well as corporate entities; a wooden president who can only say “nuke ‘em,” “smoke ‘em out,” “the evil ones,” “dead or alive,” “we are fighting for our right to survive,” and who would rather be on the ranch or in the air than behind a desk; military posturing rather than negotiation; high-tech

military planes that search for life through moonlike, rocky environments; the dismantling of communication lines, reducing some players to early forms of technology; conventional weapons, toxins, germs and nuclear bombs; the gathering together of many races against one who cannot speak our language, who have studied us for a long time, who are watching us from both within and above, whose place of origin we are unsure of, who are using our technology against us, and who want to exterminate us; government lies and cover-ups; missile defence shields; the redefinition of nationhood; questions surrounding race, gender, religious and sexual practices; victory culture; Second World War imagery; cropdusters; *kamikaze* pilots.

The day after the 11 September attacks, journalists' listservs received many postings about how *Independence Day* resembled the event, and Fox Cable Network, which owns the broadcast rights to the film, pulled it from rotation.<sup>1</sup> In this “new war” that resembles none other, viewers may cope in ways that psychologists say they do: by drawing upon pre-existing scripts from lived experience and from media, such as films, books and popular songs. Though other movies—*True Lies* (James Cameron, 1994), *Dune* (Frank Herbert, 1984), and *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998)—have moments resonant with the current conflict, no film resembles it as closely as does *Independence Day* (often known as *ID4*).<sup>2</sup> Equally important, no other invasion film has been seen by so many people in the last five years—*Independence Day* is one of the ten top-grossing films of all time.<sup>3</sup> It is also America's most recent apocalyptic war movie. Perhaps the terrorists also borrowed from *Independence Day*. It is easy to imagine viewers in the Arab world watching the film with multiple identifications—with the aliens, with a

cropduster-turned-*kamikaze* pilot, played by Randy Quaid, and with the celebratory white male war room.

While this article addresses how people in the U.S. might use *Independence Day*, it devotes more time to those characters and extras who are presented as misaligned with the *status quo* and subsequently othered and/or removed. *ID4* creates fear of an invasion and channels it into a hysteria linked to homosexuality, sex, race, gender, ethnicity and the body. The film's othering is also not trivial in relation to United States' actions and the war today—perceiving individuals and groups among us and without as “evil” can spur such questionable actions as military tribunals, detention of people without charging them with a crime, restrictions on civil rights, the withholding of foreign aid, reduction of domestic spending, inflation of the military budget, threats of war, and going it alone, outside of the world community. This piece asks: how might *ID4*'s dreamscape map onto President Bush's, the government's, the media's and the public's imaginary of 9/11 and the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars?

Here is a brief synopsis of the film: the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute (SETI), an obscure agency that monitors the airwaves for evidence of alien communications, discovers an unusual broadcast signal and forwards it to the Pentagon. It soon emerges that an alien spaceship has entered Earth's orbit, and smaller ships have broken off and placed themselves over strategic sites around the globe, perplexing the U.S. President and his staff. A cable technician, David Levinson (Jeff Goldblum), notices that the spaceship's signal is diminishing and ascertains that the aliens are “using our own satellites against us.” He and his father rush to the White House to meet with the President and his assistant, David's ex-wife Connie. The president, his entourage, David,

and his father, get out of Washington in time, but millions die, including the President's wife. The party heads for Area 51, a government facility in Roswell, New Mexico, where alien materials previously recovered—a ship and several carcasses—are the subject of ongoing research. Captain Steven Hiller (Will Smith) brings along a new specimen, a badly injured alien pilot he has just shot down in a dogfight. Levinson discovers that the military can implant a computer virus in the alien spacecraft, set off an explosion, disable the aliens' shields, and bring down the mothership and its progeny. David and Steven set off to do so. *Independence Day* ends happily with fireworks rather than global annihilation.

The most sustained analysis of the film, Michael Rogin's *Independence Day, or How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Enola Gay*, serves as a starting point for this article.<sup>4</sup> This book catches the film's extreme misanthropy by cataloguing the crude types that populate the film—the trash-talking, young African-American male, the neurasthenic, fast-talking Jewish American, the flagrantly gay man, the oppressed, domesticated woman. Most critics responded positively to *ID4*'s stereotypes, judging perhaps that these broad caricatures functioned like vaudevillian representations with the power to amuse and to ameliorate difference.<sup>5</sup> Rogin shows, however, that these representations function in ways similar to Stepin Fetchit and Amos and Andy, reinforcing the self-certainties of “mainstream” viewers at the expense of those who do not fit the mainstream's restrictive definition. While Rogin points to these representations, he does not consider how they work. A careful look at the film reveals something canny and disturbing.

The cultural meanings of the cartoonish figures in the foreground are reinforced by a profusion of details in the background. While this play between the background and the foreground doesn't represent a novel strategy, its savvy use has rarely been surpassed. In *ID4* the vaudevillian characters, though objectionable, are familiar and legible. Furthermore the props and characters in the back of the frame are so subtly rendered, and pop in and out so quickly, that they remain barely perceptible. Nevertheless this background material adds depth to the cultural stereotypes—in ways as insidious as they are technically sophisticated—and forges new connections among them. Such an approach may have emerged from a new common practice.

David Bordwell points to a recent trend in which cinema is sped up and stripped down. Directors deploy rapid editing, choose distorting lenses and close-ups over wide shots, and compress what would normally comprise several shots into a single one.<sup>6</sup> In addition several scholars of acting have noted that contemporary film productions allot less rehearsal time than in the past, and suggest that characters are thus less fully realised. But big budget films can create richness by other means. Today's bloated production budgets and expanded shooting schedules allow time for the finessing of storyboards.<sup>7</sup> Sets are carefully constructed to match the wallop of the expensive effects. Contemporary films reveal a new kind of density through connections across shots and finely worked material in the background.

This article expands upon Rogin's study in a second way. While Rogin's analysis provides an excellent psychoanalytic and intertextual description of why the film was so pleasurable for viewers, this article describes several large-scale formal structures that might also have produced such effects. Filmic techniques linked to tone, form, pacing,

viewer identification and sexuality draw the viewers' attention away from misanthropic representations. In particular, Freudian devices of compensation and displacement help turn *Independence Day* into a dream-text that relaxes a viewer's critical distance.

Significantly, *ID4*'s densely textured misanthropic representations were deliberate attempts to obtain specific effects: *Independence Day*'s regressive character touches are missing from Dean Devlin and director Roland Emmerich's original script.<sup>8</sup> The script doctors may have added the additional material during later scripting sessions in order to give the film a bit more kick and increase box office, and maybe even to balance the film's special effects.

This article begins with a sketch of the construction of the stereotyped characters.<sup>9</sup> The paper's second half explores the ways that these devices support the stereotypes, and finally considers *ID4* as a rehearsal for America's current war.

### ***ID4*'s Stereotypes: Punishment of the Other**

The characters who get punished by the aliens' wrath group together as a type: the film diminishes their humanity, which allows them to help delineate the film's leading roles. Nearly all of the casualties in the first third of the movie seem to assume the viewer's complicity.



For many viewers, a sense of glee when flashes of light first erase the White House and the Pentagon may harden into a

numbed response when the aliens' incinerate populations and buildings later in the film. Other *ID4* characters experience the brunt of the aliens' aggression before the U.S. does: the Iraqis witness the unfurling of mushroom clouds, and the Russians suffer the first deaths. In the Oval Office, the White House staff watches news footage of the destruction in Novosibirsk, and a young boy's bloody, bandaged head is placed in the foreground of the screen. General Grey turns away from the sight—is he too busy, uninterested, or repulsed?<sup>10</sup> The television images elicit a re-enactment of Freud's narrative of a child being beaten.<sup>11</sup> The film cuts away too quickly from this scene for the viewer to fully take in what she has just seen. Off the coast of California, a plane with U.S. pilots flies into a grand, stormy fire cloud. (Okay, we've lost some of our own.) Three diminutive "welcome wagons," awkwardly jerry-rigged helicopters with large light panels jutting out from the sides, as at a rock concert, come to meet the aliens with a message of peace; but they are such a joke that, like enlarged mosquitoes, they deserve immolation by the aliens' death ray. The music underscores these blasts with ethereal music on impact—only after a long held chord does the music darken in tone. Next to go down are the UFO fans. One woman wants to bring back Elvis, many people partake in a rave, and most wave silly handmade placards like "Make Yourself at Home" and "Take me with You." An ebullient Tiffany runs up the ladder to meet the aliens, despite Jasmine's having warned her not to go. The first real character who dies—or who speaks more than four lines of dialogue, anyway—is gay and Jewish. His death lacks any semblance of dignity: he slouches, says "Oh, crap," and gets levelled by a car.

Even the moment before the building explodes is worth a second look. We cannot tell which buildings and cities are exploding. The second impact shows the aliens' blue

streak of fire touching the top of the building, reeling back in, and heading down again to initiate an explosion. Is the action reversible? Is this just a video game?

Rogin argues that *Independence Day* was made in part as revisionist history—to defuse the newly emergent claims that Americans were wrong to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and to return Americans to our previously imagined place on moral high ground.<sup>12</sup> *ID4* is coy about the U.S. deployment of nuclear weapons over American soil. General Grey notes that civilian casualties should be held to a minimum (not non-existent), and the bombing is figured off screen. We see a quick shot of one-half of a tank and flying balsa wood at the edge of a road.<sup>13</sup>

### **The European-American Woman**

Rogin argues correctly that *Independence Day* advocates a return to cold war ideology and its notions of domesticity.<sup>14</sup> Though it's touching in the film's opening—and perhaps progressive—that both the president and the cable technician plaintively ask their wives to return home, the film makes these women pay too high a cost for non-compliance. The president's wife dallies, repeatedly looking over her shoulder, and dies from an internal haemorrhage. On her death bed, she apologises to her husband, wishing she had come home. (In a subtle rhyme, Connie almost dies as well. She keeps looking back as bombs hit civilians, but an Air Force officer shoves her into the elevator.)

Of the four major female characters in *Independence Day*, two survive—Connie and Jasmine—and two do not—Tiffany and Margaret Whitmore. At the film's beginning, the two women survivors are committed to their careers. Toward the end they become women who patiently wait while their men go off to war. The film sanctifies this shift by

fixing their bodies—they stand rigidly—and medium close-ups reveal their faces framed in halos of glowing light. Perhaps Connie and Jasmine have not lost too much, however; if we look closely, the film did not have many opportunities for these women in the first place.

As *ID4* unfolds white women become excluded from the public sphere. The president's wife cannot return because she is going to a luncheon. Later, we discover she is conducting interviews, but we never find out what they are for, and we suspect that they might be trivial. Connie, the president's secretary, mouths the words of his speeches, but she is made to resemble an intern or a personal assistant.<sup>15</sup> White women in the backgrounds of shots have been subtly placed to create a negative impression of their power. At the beginning of the film, one woman stands within a group of male officials in the cabinet room, but as the president crosses her path, he reminds her to tend to his daughter—she is only the daughter's governess. In the far corners of the war rooms, we can occasionally spy one woman with dark brown hair, but her hair is cut so short that she might be taken for a man.

In later scenes women no longer appear in the war room. The film's final third, which contains the grand space battles, forgoes the opportunity to present female fighter pilots, even though the commanding officers must scrape the bottom of the barrel for anyone who possibly can serve. The drunken cropduster, Vietnam Vet and former alien abductee, Randy Quaid, has to suffice. In the final space battle scenes, all of the airborne fighters are, finally, white men—young, middle-aged and old—no women or people of colour remain.<sup>16</sup> Here we have a mirror image of the same inner circle of white men who decide policy. (They are all gathered together in the cockpit of Air Force One.)

The film equates sex and reproduction with a fear of women's bodies and of the alien—all are conflated as monstrously feminine. The first off-screen voice we hear (and the film's third line of dialogue) says "come on, come on, come on baby," as if someone were in the act of childbirth. The camera then dollies past the barrier to reveal a tall African-American male in white underwear. The camera finds a double for Connie, the president's wife and the governess, with tousled hair, body barely cloaked in a short kimono-like night-gown, and legs provocatively spread across a swivel chair before a Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute desk and monitor. The film works with bookends. At the end of the movie, David Levinson and Steven Hiller recall this early scene by calling each other "girl," the monster "baby" and saying "come on, come on, come on, we're in."

The first scenes conflate the alien invasion and men's interest in women not as co-workers but as dames. Most of the first ten lines are pedestrian, but a man who is awakened in bed says: "If this is not an insanely beautiful woman, I'm hanging up." The president tells his wife, referring to their daughter, "I'm sleeping next to a beautiful, young brunette." In a later rhyme, both the president's wife and the alien nestled in its spaceship die of an internal haemorrhage. Even the daughter's depiction in regards to women's bodies and reproduction is perverse. She is called the munchkin and told to "grow and grow." Is she to help the human race outstrip the aliens' enormous population? *ID4* frequently makes reference to a lack of manpower.<sup>17</sup> In Area 51, Dr. Okun praises the handsomeness of the found alien spacecraft, "She's a beaut," and the munchkin steps forward and gazes at it as if it were her own reflection. Perhaps the scene with father and daughter in bed is benign, or perhaps it carries a whiff of incest. Whitmore does taunt his

wife that he is sleeping with a beautiful brunette.<sup>18</sup> Like the somewhat licentious scene at SETI, this one suggests that humans might be up to some hanky-panky that brings on the aliens' ire.

Rogin argues that the alien ship's entrance is polymorphous—both anal and vaginal—but if you look closely, it's more vaginal: three triangles are bounded by two long, gently sloping convex lines.<sup>19</sup> As we enter the one open triangle in the middle, a long tunnel leads us to a partially barred ending, which suggests fertile bands of mucus. No cervical obstruction hinders our fighter pilots.

### **The White Anglo-Saxon Man**

The president possesses many traits that Richard Dyer identifies with whiteness—a narrow range of expressive capabilities, a connection with order, rationality, control and death.<sup>20</sup> Bill Pullman appears to be rehearsing for his role in *Zero Effect* (Jake Kasdan, 1998): he's an absence. His expressive range encompasses only bemused, quizzical, confused, smug, and mildly enraged. *ID4* is also filled with references to the president's liminal masculinity: his wife repeatedly calls him a liar; he threatens to sleep with a beautiful brunette; he's called a wimp and a child; and Oliver Nimziki and General Grey must egg him on to push the nuke button. After his inter-species mind-meld in the film's final quarter, however, he's ready to return to his former life as bomber pilot. President Whitmore keeps muttering, "Nuke the bastards. Nuke 'em." He shoves Nimziki as if in retribution for David's punching him in the nose earlier. Roughhousing and decisive military action make him a true man.

President Whitmore's WASP sidekicks speak to his not fully-manifested good and bad sides. General Grey is a one-trick-pony who repeatedly intones, "I'm with you, Mr. President." (He resembles Jasmine's dog, Boomer.) Nimziki, the head of the Security Council is a trigger-happy hawk, whose repertoire of lines includes "You've got to do it," and "You can't do this." Scientist Okun seems to represent intellect gone mad. In Area 51 they do not let him out much. At their first meeting, the president immediately recoils from him.<sup>21</sup> Okun, like the Marty Gilbert character, has trouble making good object choices. When the alien arrives, he runs out after it saying, "Oh. Oh. Oh. Is he still breathing? We've got to get him into ER as soon as possible."<sup>22</sup> When the white men view the aliens pickled in their vats in the freak show room, we see the similarities between the two groups. The aliens' enormous skulls and foreheads gleam with whiteness.

The lighting on the foreheads of the powerful white men shows that their brains possess the same radiance. Both the aliens and the white men possess a desire to control and destroy. (Rogin points out that the aliens represent the multinational corporations who use up our natural resources and move on, and the same might be said for these white men.<sup>23</sup>) The photography of great white men, as Dyer points out, has captured them historically as giant illuminated foreheads with swept back hair, and the directors consciously or unconsciously draw on this tradition.<sup>24</sup> The president and the alien will later share a Vulcan mind-meld—not bodies, just pure thought linked to pure thought.

### **The African-American Man**

Will Smith's Air Force fighter Steven Hiller is given some touching and race-affirming moments, but there is also a concerted attempt to present the African-American body as out of control. When we first meet Hiller, he is sleeping, and his first comments represent him as working class. When the dog jumps up on the bed, he complains, "If he wants to impress me, he should get a job and stop slobbering on my shoes." He trips over the children's toys, gets rebuked in the kitchen for getting too fresh, and goes into the bathroom and urinates loudly. (The sound is foregrounded in the audio mix.) There are a number of times in *Independence Day* when the racism is so subtly inflected, when the links among sound, image, and dialogue are so quick and elliptical, that one wonders whether they are intentional or carry any weight. The next three scenes are subtle, deliberate and telling. We see a wide shot of a bare-chested Hiller as he enters the bathroom and leans down to lift the toilet seat. The camera cuts, and we view him in a medium close-up from outside, through the bathroom windows; he, in turn, spies on his neighbours. Watching them as they bustle with their suitcases, he jokes about white flight after a black family moves in. The camera cuts back to the previous wide shot from inside the bathroom. The camera is framed from above Hiller's head to below his hip and an inch or so above the wrist. While completing urination, his shoulder and forearm bob. He says, "Guess they finally got tired of all these quakes...A little shake, and they runnin'." (The neighbours walk briskly, but do not run and jump.) Our eyes follow the line of Hiller's shoulder downward and our thoughts drift to what else might bob and weave as Hiller finishes up. The film almost compels us to return to Hiller's bodily functions. The last several shots may make Hiller more accessible, but at the risk of dissipating the character's interiority and *gravitas*.

In the second scene, Hiller and his comrades enjoy a quiet moment while watching television from big leather arm chairs in the base's lounge. The scene contains some hyper masculine insignia—the emblem of a gryphon over the doorway and a bomber on the back of Jimmy Wilder's (Harry Connick's) T-shirt. Hiller heads toward the locker room and Wilder tags behind. There are reasons why Wilder, as a fighter pilot, would be wearing a fanny pack and a longer object from his belt. These accoutrements also serve an evocative effect, however. Hiller turns and faces his locker, which is placed at eye level. Wilder cups his hands and places them below Hiller's buttocks. He says, "I like the one knee approach. I like the bootie to be right where I can have it because the bootie...." Hiller drops a small box containing a wedding ring, and Wilder picks up the box, opens it and, on bended knee, shows it to Hiller saying, "Steve, this is a wedding ring." Another man in uniform walks in on the couple, grabs a cake of white soap, raises his hands, palms outward, and leaves: a moment that serves, as Rogin points out, to riff on President Clinton's "Don't ask, don't tell."<sup>25</sup>

The next scene continues to trade on a fascination with the buttocks of African-Americans. It opens upon a strip joint where we see Jasmine performing. She is wearing a shiny red bra, feathered wrists, and g-string; the camera is framed three inches below her buttocks and slightly above her neck. The singer on the soundtrack's song coos, "Fly it, baby. Try it, baby," carrying forth the theme of military aviation and sexual experimentation. A cutaway to the bar shows a fully clothed man and a stripper with a g-string watching television on bar stools, with their backs to us. The stripper leans forward, and her bottom and lower back seem very available to onlookers. Jasmine enters a dressing room. We see her from her right side, and she's changed into very high heels, a

tiny top, and even though one can catch a flash of the border of the g-string, what looks like nothing below—no hose. It's quite a sight, and after she paces back and forth across the space three times, Tiffany grabs a poster and says "check it out." She then tries to cover up Jasmine's buttocks, while viewers may keep trying to catch glimpses of this naked body. She says "check it out," to draw Jasmine's attention to the placard, but we can't help thinking it refers to the woman's *derrière*. Through match shots, African-American buttocks have become a constant theme for 40 shots and 2 minutes. Since only black characters are treated in this way, the reader may wonder to whom the film is addressed.<sup>26</sup>

The representation of Hiller's body as strange and problematic reappears in subsequent scenes. After his one-on-one dogfight, Hiller parachutes from his fighter after heading through a narrow crevasse in the Grand Canyon. We find that he and the alien land not near the Grand Canyon but somewhere that looks like Death Valley. Hiller is tangled up in his parachute, kicking and flailing: the dark tangles look knobby and stringlike, and so they rhyme with the alien's writhing tentacles that we see emerging from the spacecraft's interior in upcoming shots. Hiller lets out a series of jive-inflected war whoops and hollers and heads over for the alien: "Son of a bitch. Ahhh! That's right. That's what you get! Ship all banged up. Who's the man? Wait till I get another play. I'm gonna line all you friends up right beside you. Where you at?"

Hiller has been trash talking ever since the dog fight in the Grand Canyon. We next see him drag the alien through Death Valley, and he states "You got me out here draggin' your heavy ass through the burnin' desert with your dreadlocks stickin' out of the back of my parachute. You gotta come down here with an attitude, actin' all big 'n'

bad, and what the hell is that smell?! Ahh! I coulda been at a barbecue. But, hey man, that's alright. Hey! Hey! Hey!"<sup>27</sup> The camera cuts from a wide shot of Hiller to a close-up of the alien's "limbs." (They look like ostrich legs.) Hiller begins his dreadlocks monologue: "Draggin' your heavy ass... with your dreadlocks." In the cinema or in the classroom, this is a moment when everyone laughs. (The other moment is when Marty Gilbert, a gay man, is flattened by the underside of a falling car.) The joke is that finally a black man has to shoulder the white man's burden—black males. Like the stereotypical black man, the alien is lazy, smelly, and unkempt.<sup>28</sup>

Steven Hiller tends to show up late. His other minor flaws include childishness (He removes his hands from the alien flight craft steering wheel, raising Levinson's level of anxiety), a volatile temper (he screams at the top of his lungs as he leaves the aliens' corridor, and yells at both Jasmine and the alien), and perhaps a touch of sexual cruelty (Like the President, he playfully threatens his wife with infidelity, suggesting he'll get on "a freaky thing" with his girlfriends). He appears relatively late in the film, and he is sketched more quickly than are the other male leads. Jasmine repeatedly reprimands him for his tardiness, and he has trouble advancing in the military ranks. Wilder further casts a shadow on his character when he jokingly calls him "a loser" and "a wuss." Battling the enemy helps the male leads grow out of their faults. After exiting the alien ship, Hiller says, "Elvis has left the building." Like the original security guard who broadcast the message over a walkie-talkie, he's done well to keep track of time.

While Steven Hiller shows courage (he slugs the alien one) and a high degree of physical dexterity (his mastery of spaceships resembles adolescent boys' skills with video games), he is granted neither great cunning nor perceptiveness. The alien spaceship's

mechanics are so rudimentary that they can be described on a post-it note. Even so, David Levinson must show Hiller many of the craft's special features—reclining bucket seats, and so on. It may be progressive that the African-American and Jewish-American characters so greatly need one other, but at the same time this quality also suggests that each has a fundamental lack.

As mentioned earlier, *Independence Day* has both progressive and reactionary imagery concerning race. African-American men are generously sprinkled in the background as part of the *mise-en-scene*. The film also sports an African-American lead. However, as a way of taking away these men's power, the film depicts a cohort of African-American "Uncle Toms" who, through possessing the same types of faces and physiques, begin to suggest a type. Two White House staff gently shadow two military personnel who might be their *doppelgangers*—the first "welcome wagon" Air Force pilot who gets blown up under alien fire, and David Levinson's assistant, who mans a computer and brings Julius the Bible. Physically intimidating black characters become domesticated through easy exchanges with the leads. One example is when the buff guard tries to stop Will Smith from stealing a helicopter. Will Smith says "You don't want to get in trouble. Just tell them I hit you." The man lowers his gun and looks back at Smith with a sceptical expression. The mismatch between his massive body and his easy acquiescence reads as comical. The last lead African-American character is Hiller's son Dylan, who, like the president's daughter, is given several strange and psychologically loaded attributes, inappropriate for his age.<sup>29</sup>

### **African-American Women**

Besides Hiller's girlfriend, Jasmine, where are the African-American women? A rough count for sightings of African-American men in *Independence Day* is 150, excluding Hiller.<sup>30</sup> African-American men are continually worked into the *mise-en-scène*, and they do stand out—they are almost always young, tall, handsome, strong, and dark skinned.<sup>31</sup> However, besides white men and a few white women sprinkled in the background, almost no one else is present—no Latinos, Asian-, Arab-, Indian- or Native Americans. African-American female characters seem deliberately constructed as an absence.

In the film's first 120 minutes, no more than forty-five seconds of screen time are devoted to African-American women in supporting roles or as extras.<sup>32</sup> The New York City street scenes are integrated racially, but the footage looks so different from the rest of the film—with its cartoonish sets and actors—that the crowds seem reflected off rear screen.

African-American men stand in as a shorthand for diversity, but not a diversity that looks like reality. African-American men have done well in the military, but so have women and many other minorities, and the White House staff should reflect a greater ethnic mix. At its climax, the film will drive home the image of a black and white male couple, and the placement of attractive black men against white men prepares us for this partnership.

All of a sudden, at the film's close, there's an exponential leap in representation of African-American women.<sup>33</sup> Some of *Independence Day*'s uplifting quality comes from its ending, when the men continually congratulate each other: there's a tremendous amount of backslapping. Julius Levinson says he's proud of his son. David Levinson says

he loves Steven Hiller. The President tells David, “Not a bad job! Not bad at all!”<sup>34</sup> What do black women get? A bit more visibility.

Jasmine’s character fits the type that Michelle Wallace calls the “black superwoman.”<sup>35</sup> Hiller’s girlfriend does not have many lines, and so her identity must be constructed quickly through *mise-en-scène*. We notice through the decor of her house that she is black-identified—she has paintings of African-American musicians on the wall; earthy—a Mexican cookbook is prominently displayed; imaginative—she has a thing for dolphins; and holy and virtuous—imagery of black angels fills her home. Over Jasmine’s left shoulder, we glimpse a painting of an African-American female angel who resembles her; in her kitchen hangs a mobile of black straw angels. Jasmine also recalls the prostitute with a heart of gold who redeems herself through a selfless act. She performs some heroic acts, like saving herself, her son, and their dog from the tunnel of fire, driving an abandoned truck through the broken landscape, and rescuing the president’s wife. Yet her deeds are never acknowledged by any character in the film. (In an earlier version of the script, she fights off looters with a shotgun, and the president personally thanks her for rescuing his wife.) Yet the filmmakers attempt to have it both ways—potentially progressive and definitely not.

Jasmine’s job as a stripper may be there for pure exploitation—to insert a few more female body-shots. Her work situation is implausible. She tells the President’s wife that she must keep dancing to support her son, yet she lives in a gorgeous suburban home in El Toro—witness the landscaping—and Hiller drives a very flashy convertible. However, Hiller cannot advance his career or marry her unless she stops stripping. (Similarly, Connie and David cannot imagine a world in which Connie works and they

remain a couple.) The obsession with black bodies extends past Steven Hiller to her. One sees this obsession in a subtle match cut. Hiller rescues Jasmine in a helicopter and they embrace, forming a beautiful silhouette resembling afrocentric posters and statuary of the seventies. The image cuts to the next scene, the doors swing open, and the president comes through with his “brunette,” his daughter. They go to his wife’s death bed. The fecundity of African-Americans is contrasted with the sterility of whites.

### **Jewish-Americans**

As with many characters in *ID4*, Julius Levinson is given an array of attributes which are incoherent within themselves and dissonant within the culture. Julius speaks in an accent not appropriate for a Jewish-American of his age but rather something out of 1920s vaudeville. Religious Jews don’t just “talk to God”—at least they don’t make it up as they go along, and the Hebrew Bible that is handed to him goes from left to right like the Christian Bible. It is hard to give an award for *ID4*’s most offensive character, but the part of Julius is pretty extreme.

When he, Connie, and David are in the Oval Office, Julius cannot help looking for souvenir pens. (Connie seems up on his game, because, before she leaves, she tells Julius and David not to touch anything.) Julius opens the door of his townhouse with a shotgun, and starts calling his neighbours vultures. (His rant will continue as a refrain on the highway.) He constantly berates his son, saying some strikingly belittling things about his not getting a better job and not staying with his ex-wife. “Believe me. They’ve got people to handle this. If they wanted to call you, they would have called HBO.” Overly tending to his son, Julius even tells him he should not sit on the concrete because he will

catch a cold. Fulfilling the stereotype of a kvetching old man, he obsesses about his social security running out, and makes inappropriate and improbable verbal juxtapositions just like Marty Gilbert does (another Jewish character). “What the world needs now is love. John Lennon. Smart man. Terrible death.” He tells people not to mess around with “his David,” suggesting an inappropriately close relationship.

His son David Levinson is also portrayed as neurotic—fussily cleaning out the trash for aluminium cans and policing everyone about their use of Styrofoam cups. He is also a bit effeminate. Levinson rides a bicycle with his sweater wrapped at the hip instead of over his shoulders in more masculine fashion, and wears bracelets around his wrists and a beaded choker around his neck; he waters his potted plants with a small squirt bottle as soon as he reaches his office (his neurosis is highlighted through his cubicle’s *mise-en-scène*—a number of post-its, seven wide and three deep, trail from lamps, plants, and computer), and says unmanly things like “Wo, wo, wo, wo. Woops, woops, woops, woops,” while requiring the assistance of an airplane doggy-bag. Levinson is also quick-tempered. He throws a temper tantrum in front of his father in Area 51; smashes a liquor bottle down on a counter in an angry dispute with his ex-wife; and yells loudly in an attempt to drown out other voices around Air Force One.

However, the film suggests that his liminal masculinity and his temper are not the problem so much as his unyielding commitment to ecology, which separates him from those around him. The film’s response to this commitment is ambivalent. While he and Connie are arguing, the camera gradually reveals a poster stating “The best way is the safe way”—either an admonition to Connie, or a concurrence with Levinson’s position. Yet the directors also flaunt a significant amount of product placement.<sup>36</sup> The Coke can,

in particular, is both a bad object and a useful one: David keeps throwing the cans into recycle bins, but he also uses it to demonstrate how to dismantle the alien ship. After the alien encounter, as with all the male leads in *Independence Day*, his defects are cured. For Levinson, physical health and the preservation of the planet are no longer as important as his friends and material needs. Mellowed, he is happy to smoke cigars. We assume he will now fit more easily within consumer culture.

*Independence Day* does give its male leads some admirable characteristics, and, on a positive note, Levinson possesses the intellectual curiosity and courage to investigate the aliens' signal as well as their spacecraft.

### **Homosexuality**

Marty Gilbert is more flaming than the characters in the film version of *La Cage aux Folles* (Edouard Molinaro, 1978) or the much tamer American version *The Bird Cage* (Mike Nichols, 1996). He runs on the balls of his feet with his arms before him, elbows limp and hands dangling at the wrists. His voice is a strange amalgam of gravel and the complete frequency spectrum from high to low. He has made the wrong object choices for loved ones—when the alien attack seems imminent, his first urge is to contact his mother, his maid, his brother, his psychiatrist, his lawyer, and then his mother again so she can contact his Aunt Esther. Unlike everyone else who runs to the bomb shelter, he hides under his metal desk with a phone as if he were rehearsing a 1950s “duck and cover” drill, but he’s so chunky he barely fits. Perhaps this is why it is supposed to be funny when, as aliens incinerate city buildings, he gets squashed under a car as in a cartoon. The desk should have done him in, in the first place.

Marty Gilbert's entrance at the cable station is prepared through the *mise-en-scène*. The scene opens with a man walking screen left, down a corridor into the distance away from us. He has Marty's build, and wears shorts that extend below his knees, a silly shirt, and goofy looking socks pulled up high. Screen right, as extras cross the frame and the camera moves toward the soda machine, a young man with a backwards baseball cap does a penguin walk, toes turned inward, and quickly straightens up.<sup>37</sup> Even before Marty enters the newsroom, we can tell something is askew. The set's back wall contains a television bank, and many of these screens roll footage of green, frog-like creatures. On one an amphibious creature *breaks off its own head*. A male cable station employee who stands next to Gilbert gestures and speaks in a way that clearly types him as gay, which further highlights Gilbert's sexual orientation.<sup>38</sup>

The next homosexual/homosocial representation is Jimmy Wilder. The choice of the musician Harry Connick Jr. to play the role gives the character a gay or effeminate association because Connick is a singer of older forms of pop and jazz. Wilder plays around a lot. He lays his head upon and cuddles up to Steven Hiller's shoulder and says that he's scared. There's the aforementioned marriage proposal. He is also tied to blacks because, as one of the black knights, he calls himself the raven, sings a few lines and imitates Jesse Jackson. "Kick the tyres and light the fires, big daddy." Steven Hiller is nervous about his behaviour and reminds him not to "do anything until the fat lady sings," as well as not to "get premature on him." Under alien fire, Wilder does too fancy a manoeuvre, takes his mask off, cannot breathe, and then blows up. His premature courtship/death act is underscored through imagery that is part of an extended motif of cigars. We first catch Julius smoking one at the beginning of the film. The men pass

cigars around before they “have their chance to fight” and “go whup E.T.’s ass.” Jimmy places one in his mouth as he and Hiller head for their planes; When Hiller cautions Jimmy not to get premature, his cigar dips. After Jimmy blows up, a pug-built, buzz-cut man with a big fat cigar jutting straight out of his mouth lowers his jaw; the cigar dangles precipitously and drops to the floor. Hiller only regains control of the erect cigar once he slugs the alien one.

Even Steven Hiller and David Levinson engage in romantic homosocial/homoerotic banter. Very quickly, after the men leave earth on their flight to the mothership, one calls the other “Girl,” and their repartee acquires a tentative, flirtatious feel. Of course, anal rape references hang over the entire movie—Russell Casse has been violated by the aliens and all of this going up the aliens’ orifices is payback time.<sup>39</sup>

### **Latinos, Africans and Arabs**

Of all of *Independence Day*’s men, Casse, the Randy Quaid character, is the biggest loser of them all, and perhaps this is why he can be sacrificed as the *kamikaze* pilot. He is too drunk and spaced out to spray the right field, and his son calls him stupid. Unlike Levinson’s and Hiller’s problems, Casse’s is so severe that he is repeatedly thrown in jail. His representation as part of a mixed race (Hispanic-European American) family reinforces media stereotypes about the Hispanic family. Since Casse is a father who is so often absent and drunk, the teenage older son must parent the two younger kids. The fourteen year old daughter risks losing her purity, so Miguel must yank her from the front seat of a car before her paramour convinces her that “she doesn’t want to remain a virgin on her last night on earth.”<sup>40</sup> The youngest child is sick and constantly watches

television. We first meet Miguel and his two younger siblings in a tiny, cluttered motor home (over the girl's left shoulder, a bumper sticker states "Don't date," – a reminder to her). A knock on the door produces a white-male hero-type who holds overflowing handfuls of wilted, dusty lettuce: "Look what your father did."<sup>41</sup> Lucas's comments reflect the anger that Southern California voters feel about agribusiness—a rage that ought to be directed toward corporate farming and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, but is more commonly displaced onto the labourers who work the fields.

Two or three brief shots contain ethnic representations that verge on the cartoonish. During the president's speech, before the final space battle, when he states that "Today is our Independence Day," a Latin-American man in the crowd wears camouflage and holds his rifle against his shoulder as if he were a Sandinista fighter.<sup>42</sup> Among the celebrants after the downing of the alien spaceship are Africans who run out from the bush, waving spears, almost completely naked except for some red paint. The aliens have so disrupted the basic functioning of humanity that even those who remain on the farthest outskirts of American culture know what has happened. The Africans look like something out of a 1920s Tarzan movie.

There are no Arab-Americans, only two Arabic soldiers in the desert, only one of whom speaks English. The other Middle-Easterners live in tents and ride camels. This may be too far-fetched an interpretation, but in interviews, directors Emmerich and Devlin have grouched that "the exciting villains, such as Arabs or Nazis" who once were available to the Hollywood film industry, no longer are, because viewers have become sensitised to racism.<sup>43</sup> In *ID4*, the pickled aliens from the laboratory scene, and the dark, thickly skinned alien from the desert scene might allude to our old nemeses. The desert

aliens' swaddled outer shell might subtly remind viewers of Arabs, in particular. Smith repeatedly kicks, taunts and pummels the alien, a frightening foreshadowing of American servicemen's treatment of enemy combatants in Iraq and Afghanistan. The film continually returns to questions of Iraq, Iran and the Gulf War.

### **The Monster**

Perhaps *ID4* can so blithely present stereotypical characters because, in the words of Russell Casse, "We have bigger fish to fry." Our attention remains split between characters and the threat from above. Not only explosions and the enormity of the ships, but also the mammoth sets and disorienting camera can make one cower. It is funny when Marty Gilbert says, "There's no shame in hiding," and crouches under the metal desk, but we should remember that the president knows that most Americans are scared, and Connie says she is, too. In one of *Independence Day's* penultimate scenes, the survivors in the Area 51 shelter hold hands and sit cross-legged on the floor, with their shoulders hunched over. The aliens' ships are figured as terrifying, but also awe-inspiring and loveable. The musical codes attached to the ships (but, of course, not to the aliens) are ones we often associate with the spiritual, the heavenly, and the beautiful (strings and a choir of female voices).<sup>44</sup> When the ships lock into place over cities, they emit cries like *Godzilla's* (which can sound sentimentally nostalgic for many listeners). Perhaps the aliens could be seen as avenging angels instead of evil incarnate. In *ID4*, every time there is a loosening of social mores, an older white male barks and the monster attacks.<sup>45</sup> Unlike many monster movies, *ID4's* aliens are unfathomable. Sometimes the aliens seem big, sometimes small, and sometimes medium-sized. Within the mothership itself, the

aliens take on a whole new look—like druids in hoodies. The scale of the spaceships is hard to make out as well. However, even though we cannot get a fix on the aliens, we can still make out their basic outlines. We have already seen the ways that the exoskeleton of the alien is figured as black, and the more cognitive, fragile interior as white. The directors have fused two threads of science fiction and horror in a novel way. The exoskeleton resembles dark monsters who ravage women and terrify townsfolk, either by creeping up on victims or leaving a wake of destruction. As an unyielding body, the monster's risk is sexual. The more fine-boned aliens preserved in tanks are pure brain. So the alien already reflects two types of creature: surgical procedures reveal many more. During surgery, the first layer that Dr. Okun pulls back points to something aquatic—the giant tentacles. The green slime suggests the aliens from *The X-Files*. The reflective eye that slides open is reminiscent of all of the fifty-foot insect movies. A big overhead shot suggests that our creature is Asian—notice the stern, placid, meditative, angular face and the twisted strands of beard. Rogin argues that Asians disappear very quickly from *ID4* because their presence would remind us of the United States' bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>46</sup> This is not quite accurate. There are a few momentary flashes of people who look as if they might be Asian.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the complete absence of Asians might cue us to take notice. Subtle traces help us to forget. The monster reveals even more surprises! Just like an Asian paper ball, with a thread that unwraps slowly to reveal more presents inside, we discover more alien manifestations. We hear pigs squealing, and mammoth-like stampings until the camera swings around to reveal two giant chicken legs, upon which stands a giant sea mollusc with attached ribbons blowing every which way from

out of its centre. (Is this what miscegenation begets—complete incoherence?) A shift in camera angle to the monster's front reveals the creature to be something like Baba Yaga. The alien resembles the Russian monster because its bulky top half opens up to reveal a shielded interior that houses a living entity—a miniature devil. The little devil looks like those from medieval paintings, with triangular heads and diamond-shaped ears. It looks like a goat. It also looks like General Nimziki!

### **Class**

Looking like the most unbelievable characters in the whole film, as if they came directly from a 1940s cartoon strip, two homeless people, with putty plastered over their faces to suggest hairy moles and other unseemly protuberances, the white man wearing a little paper crown, the black man clutching a green bottle of whisky, step forward together from underneath a railroad overpass. This is the film's only imagery of very poor people.

A population a few economic rungs up has a bit more representation—the South-west working poor. The ways their homes are displayed in the *mise-en-scène* makes them seem like locusts roosting on the land.<sup>48</sup> *Independence Day* has no wealthy or corporate characters. This is the film's most striking lacuna. To show the wealthy or to show people with real corporate power would be to raise to the level of an issue that these people have already taken their tax cuts, moved to gated communities, and departed from the civil sphere. Only the lower and middle classes can be called upon for their courage and commitment to America.

## Formal Devices in the Service of Misanthropy

How does *Independence Day* manage to present its misanthropy on so many levels?

The film uses a large repertoire of technical means to make its characterisations more palatable. The characters themselves will first be examined, followed by an appraisal of realism, repetition and variation, tone, form, pacing, viewer identification and sexuality.

### i) Character

The actors in *Independence Day* embody stylised attributes that begin to appear allegorical. The stereotyped gestures make it seem as if the actors were wearing masks, from behind which they project their own dignity and wit. A species of “double-voiced” acting described by James Naremore,<sup>49</sup> *ID4*’s performance style was most likely perfected in an earlier, more racist cinema, and demand great skill—entailing, say, yelling, at the same time as a different emotional affect is projected—perhaps quiet laughter. The actor’s task is to engage the viewer without him or her noticing the absurdity of the premise.<sup>50</sup> Do we really believe that Julius Levinson would grab a gun and call his neighbours vultures? Such double-voicedness makes interpretation difficult—should we take the characters seriously or not, and at what level?

Perhaps most viewers see the movie as farce and leave aside the broad characterisations. Yet one wonders whether the subtly misanthropic touches (often brought out through the *mise-en-scène*) continue to carry weight. *ID4*’s implausible elements may make the broad characterisations more acceptable.

Humanity’s future is at stake, yet David refuses to discuss the alien invasion with the president, because of an earlier tiff he and the president had had over Connie.

Likewise, the aliens are smart enough to take out NORAD, and have crafted shields powerful enough to stop nuclear bombs, yet they are unprepared for a computer glitch. The president, Nimziki, and General Grey keep running hot and cold in favour of bombing or not bombing. At one minute one will say, “Call the bombers back,” at the second, another will say, “Send the bombs forward.” When the president and his entourage leave the White House for Air Force One, why can’t they get a hustle on? Some of *ID4*’s incongruities seem more logistical in nature: a Vietnam-vet pilot would not be able to fly today’s high-tech military planes without a significant amount of training. The president would not be permitted to fly an Air Force jet fighter and risk sacrificing his life. Jasmine, Dylan and Boomer should have died from burns or smoke inhalation in the tunnel of fire on 3 July, and so on. Such silliness unhinges the viewer’s watchful censor, producing a sense of giddiness.

*ID4*’s stereotypes are also constructed through a third formal technique: all of the characters and the monster in *ID4* are bound to one another through material objects such as clothing and décor; a fine web links all characters in a kind of subterranean, familial (perhaps incestuous) system. Jasmine, according to Steven Hiller, “has a thing for dolphins,” and David Levinson has dolphin insignias on his laptop screensaver. Dr. Okun, Julius and Nimziki have tie problems. David Levinson’s outfit includes loose, plaid Pendleton shirts, and in the last scenes, a number of characters start to wear these shirts, too. (Have they become “David” fans?) Jasmine and the President share a number of special links through decor. During the alien-created earthquake, Jasmine’s display table shakes, as does the President’s. (Their tables’ contents are similar.)<sup>51</sup> Both characters have paintings that foretell the crisis, and both have artwork that reflects world

culture. The alien, as mentioned above, is linked to all characters through imagery of race, gender, and sexuality. We also see connections between people and machines and among the machines. The equipment David uses to find Connie is a miniature version of the spaceships' flowery protuberance that opens out and descends before the aliens incinerate the cities. The transponder attached to the alien spacecraft's belly links the motifs of the cigar and the phallus. At the film's opening, before the aliens incinerate government and public monuments, they send what might be exploratory flares, which are depicted as white flash frames. During Steven and Jasmine's marriage ceremony, David's ring finger, as Connie reaches over to touch his hand, triggers the film's only other flash frame. The supreme alien's head resembles a death head, and the alien ship's front face recalls a vagina genitalia or crab. Our detonator bomb which uplinks the virus into the mothership bears a laughing Jolly Roger pirate's head with its jaw wagging up and down. The rictuses face off. Ours wins.

*ID4*'s fine web of rhyming functions achieve three effects: first, condensation and displacement turns *ID4* into a dream text where phobias run rampant, second, eccentricities or extremes of behaviour are perceived as "in the family," and, therefore, natural, and third, the viewer follows the rhyming links, thereby transferring his or her identification from character to character rather than locking onto any one point of view. Since the film never remains long with any one character, incomplete, stereotypical representations become possible.

## ii) Tone

The film rapidly shifts mood from the horrific, hysterical, and mean, to the cute or lyrical.



**Fig. 3. The Spaceship over New York**

*ID4* might win the award for the choppiest cutting and largest number of scenes. (The DVD lists 73 chapter headings

—the average film has 45.) Since the film’s mood is mercurial and characters are shown in transit, the viewer has a difficult time piecing out the carefully constructed characters. The film’s speed and disjunctiveness contribute to an effect of the numinous—against this busy mayhem, huge spaceships (tilted and directly above) provide a sense of grounding and yet evoke a visceral response of awe, fear, and anxiety. Tiffany claims that the ship is pretty, but it is supposed to be inassimilable.<sup>52</sup> Then there is horror: the millions of unacknowledged and unmourned dead cast a shadow over the film. Hysteria can be seen in the jumbled colours and sounds of fleeing crowds—people running, screams, exploding metals and glass—effects deployed to make viewers anxious.<sup>53</sup> Mean cuteness is reflected in the buffoonish gestures and funny walks given to characters, jokes made about African-American and gay bodies, and the ways that the audience’s perceived low intelligence is pandered to. *Independence Day*’s dialogue aims low: “Would you like to see the big tamale?” “Not until the fat lady sings.” “Nuke ‘em.” So

cynical were *ID4*'s makers that they have the news broadcaster announce over national television that “the capitals of England, India and Germany have been bombed.”

The film can also be lyrical: when Steven Hiller, dragging the alien, looks over his shoulder and sees a convoy of RVs approaching, the image resembles covered wagons crossing the West.<sup>54</sup> When Jasmine walks up to what once was El Toro and sees the planes buried in the sand, the planes' tails look like a fleet of ships. Although the score mostly seems like a pastiche of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) and *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), the soundtrack has moments of lyricism. One of the most bombastic cues accompanies Russell Casse's cropduster flight, but, after he touches down, the camera focuses on a Mexican family standing before their small house, and, for a moment, we hear the sounds of nature and farm animals. The relative silence is spooky and moving.

### **iii) Sectional Divisions, Motives and Other Formal Devices**

Some of *ID4*'s popularity stems from the fact that the makers took such great care to deploy the standard formal devices that make Hollywood films entrancing and powerful. A disequilibrium at the beginning of the film is set to right by the film's end. All the male leads transcend their limitations through courage and perseverance. The film has the appropriate parallel structures that lend formal coherence—the faux marriage proposal between Hiller and Jimmy Wilder and the later marriage of Hiller and Jasmine; Julius and David Levinson's madcap drive to reach the White House; and Hiller's and Levinson's flight into and out of the alien spaceship. (In the last two sequences, Levinson is a neurotic backseat driver.) Many of the scenes echo one another more gently. Most often,

the characters are viewed in transit, and frequently they attempt to escape from tunnels: a ball of fire overtakes a military plane, incinerating everyone in its path; a larger ball of fire races down the L.A. metro-rail; Area 51's passageway is a longer tunnel still.

The passageway that leads to the aliens' spaceship, which explodes, is the longest tunnel of all. Another set of images relates to these tunnels. The film features three flights that require a twisting manoeuvre at the end: Russell Casse's weaving through a border of trees, Steven Hiller's dogfight with the alien in the Grand Canyon, and David and Steven's escape from the alien spaceship. The film employs motivic devices, like the cigar, dolphin and telegraph.

*Independence Day* also features an elegant use of midpoint and bookends. Stuck on a post like a weather vane, a big metal sculpture looking like something out of Anselm Keifer—a helicopter propeller or the *ID4* logo—marks the film's midpoint. With regard to bookends, *ID4*'s opening contains a reference to the man on the moon with the American flag. One-quarter into the film, a miniature flag is planted in the centre of a suburban lawn, and at El Toro's military base, a magazine clipping of the original Apollo landing is taped to the inside of the door of Steven Hiller's locker. At the film's close, the image of the man on the moon is distributed across several shots. The last scene takes place in Death Valley, which resembles the lunar surface. President Whitmore lifts his daughter, who wears a red and white horizontally-striped dress, and behind her, white shrapnel falls out of a blue sky. Here is a composite of American flag, man and moon.

Yet, at the same time that the film has a carefully controlled formal structure, *ID4* deliberately creates obfuscation and incoherence, keeping the viewer off guard. The opening scenes are confusing in terms of time and who is speaking to whom. Some of the

film's disorienting qualities derive from the fact that the rapid scenes in the film's first third could be rendered in almost any order.<sup>55</sup> The path the alien ships take over Washington, D.C. does not make geographical sense, nor does the alien spaceship's placement over El Toro. The production team may have intentionally allowed some sloppy instances of continuity editing and sound mixing to create a home-made or unbalanced feel.<sup>56</sup> Such an approach might constitute an attempt to relieve the film of its obligation to realise well-formed characters.

#### **iv) Pacing**

Speed is *Independence Day's* greatest pleasure. The film's *jouissance* derives not from characters, but rather from the ways that the film gives the viewer a sense of physical mobility and prowess within a sea of incomprehensible mayhem. We race through a mind-numbing plethora of scenes, rapidly jumping from one disjunct location to another as we try to figure out where we are going or where we have been, and only the titling at the lower left of the screen provides a reliable clue to where we are. The most freely associative connections link the viewer from one scene to the next.<sup>57</sup> The camera quickly dollies into the set, actors hold onto or wave their iconic props (a rifle, a water squirt bottle, a toy truck), lighting tells us where to look, the characters speak in absolute clichés ("They're vultures. They're locusts. Nuke 'em. Nuke 'em all"), and then a little fillipy, will-o'-wisp saying ("Would you like to see the big tamale?" "What code?") throws the viewers forward into the next scene.

## v) Viewer Identification

*Independence Day* serves as a good test case for Constance Penley's argument surrounding film viewership, that film audiences do not have to identify with a particular gender, but can rather identify with anything, including scenery or the camera.<sup>58</sup> With an array of character and modes of behaviour laid out almost as in an instructional text, the film allows us to shift identification from character to character—for example, the out gay, closeted gay, homoerotic/homosocial straights—in order to discover the costs and benefits of subject positions we might consider adopting. At some points in *ID4*—as in many films that feature pyrotechnics and large set-pieces—camera, lighting and sets take over. Examining a few scenes will demonstrate the ways our identification can shift from characters to an identification with the camera and authorial control. If this shift takes place without our noticing it, we may feel more comfortable with the shallow depictions of character that have dominated the movie thus far. The scene in Area 51, where the President and his entourage first encounter the military's captured alien, provides the best example of how the camera engages us in a dialogue. Rogin suggests that the Fox Network, *ID4*'s underwriters, wanted to cross-market the film with their show *The X-Files*: this may partly explain the heightened deployment of sets and camera work here.<sup>59</sup>

The Area 51 segment features five chambers, with each subsequent chamber more elaborate than the previous one. Each turn creates a greater sense of instability, thereby increasing our dependency upon the director. Scene 1 is played straight. Huge sliding doors open into a huge box of an air hanger, and the camera cuts from wide to close-up as the president and crew walk by.

The second chamber, a red hallway with a mysterious graphic of an eye over a crescent, resembling a schematic for rams horns, and a keypunch, which, like the Arabian Nights, requires a secret password. “It’s locked, sir,” says an Air Force officer, while the president repeats, “Open the door.” Before us stand the vertical strips of metal from the glass doors, and as the president’s party moves down the ramp, the camera floats on toward the next chamber. It is unclear whether the camera moves straight or pans and tilts down slightly. This ambiguity suggests multiple points of view—the president’s, David’s and Connie’s, or perhaps some other-worldly presence, watching and waiting.

The third chamber. A long corridor seems to stretch for blocks. The tunnel of white light has one walkway down the middle; on both sides stand workers outfitted in biochemical containment suits next to workstations that for some reason lack table and chairs. The space is absurd. To make it to the bathroom would take forever. As the party passes the stations, the visual joke is that the work sites are low-tech rather than high-tech—here’s somebody cobbling a shoe, here’s your muffler repair man. The workers’ research equipment ties into the Morse code/telegraph/low technology motif. The first POVs to the right are ambiguous. Who looks? Is it Connie, who squints, or is it David Levinson, who removes his sunglasses? A reverse shot of the party shows the group, out of focus, moving slowly toward the camera as if they were thousands of miles away. Why? Who’s looking? Oh. We see Okun, and he’s trying to make a decision whether he should stand his ground or make a break for it in the opposite direction. The exchange between Okun and the President is more complicated than in the previous scene. The meeting is composed of over-the-shoulder shots, a dolly forward, and characters who walk into an in-focus depth of field. Yet this is not as spectacular as the next scene, which

will involve cranes and dollies as the men engage in repartee. We head for “the big tamale.”

At the end of the previous corridor, the motion comes to a dead stop at a corrugated aluminium door—to what, an underground parking lot? Once the door opens, we descend a ramp, a heavenly choir starts to sing, and we see a space as wondrous as the lost city of Atlantis. The space seems enormous, with three tiers of catwalks and flying buttresses, yet the reverse shot unveils even more grandeur—we see strange, ambiguous lettering: R27 and 227, and a blue-black ship that nestles in the centre, with steam pouring out from its sides. The steam has no purpose, it just looks good. The camera cranes down below, under and across the ship, to reach the President and his entourage. As Okun tries to follow the President while Whitmore clammers onto the ship, the camera dollies and cranes—it’s an elaborate *pas de deux*. The President’s complaint that millions are dead feels pro forma. We’re off to the “freak show.”

Once we reach the space, it seems as if we are the freaks crouching at the back of the lair. The room looks like a bank vault from *The Fountainhead* (King Vidor, 1949), or a teenage boy’s fantasy of a secret lab. The flooring is layered like the sunken living rooms of the fifties gone art deco. To the left stands a black wall, and to our right are window panes jutting out 15 degrees from their base that abut onto other laboratories; it is impossible to judge whether the space is hexagonal, square, triangular or circular. Okun goes up to the improbably lit, inky, luminous black wall. He flicks his wrist, the wall rises, and we see the freak show undressed. Three vats contain one alien apiece, and the requisite monster-alien, strange creature music begins, “click, click, click, click, click.”<sup>60</sup> (Insects open and shut their tiny little beaks.) Now, here’s the truly fancy camera

and set work. David Levinson comes up behind one vat to study it. The president takes



**Fig. 4. The aliens in their vats.**

another. The  
two men  
speak across  
vats. The  
president  
looks  
offscreen  
right into  
uncharted

territory, yet we sense that he's speaking to David Levinson who stands behind the vats that tilt toward the left. Levinson keeps fidgeting to maintain eye contact. How can this be possible? To underscore the ambiguities of figure placement and space, Dr. Okun inserts his head through the left side of the frame, tilts his ear, and asks, "What code?": this innermost space has us stumped. Thus far, the director has encouraged us to follow along and predict the relations among figures, camera and space. Now we must go along with the director, who has a more expanded sense of physical prowess, and greater self-assurance than we do.

#### **vi) Sexuality**

The last quarter of the film blurs identity boundaries and celebrates a triumphant, all-encompassing sexuality. When the film turns to such joyous and over-arching themes, it is difficult to remember the kinds of representation that we have witnessed thus far. The

directors may have needed to create a sense of shape for the extended scenes where David Levinson and Steven Hiller go up and enter the alien ship, pilots and aliens fight, and the men restore security back at home. Male romance and sexual desire add intensity to what would have been long sections of uninterrupted jousting.

Levinson and Sergeant Hiller's relationship begins with a manly dare. "Do you really think you can fly that thing? Do you really think you can do all the bullshit you said you could?"<sup>61</sup> They begin their journey with a long and delicate "hand holding of an erect cigar," one hand on top of the other (for six or seven seconds!) and it's almost as if one has to remind the other to remove his hands. As previously mentioned, the long, thin, detracting bomb transmitter under them (attached to the base of the alien spacecraft) conflates the thread of the cigar, phallus, and weapon. There are the tentative first rejoinders. One quickly calls the other "Girl." There is Smith's intimate disclosure, "I've been waiting all my life to fly something like this." Both men wear low-cut tanks, and we spy a lot of David's chest. Soft focus enhances the men's dreamy eyed appearance. We see the "gay closeted" activities of David and Steven, who, like little school boys, hide behind the seats, away from the alien/mother's gaze, and smoke cigars. The final line between David Levinson and Steven Hiller before they return to earth is "I love you."

Russell Casse's explosion of the spacecraft is highly sexualised. He says "I'm packing," and we see a phallic bomb in the frame's lower right corner, in golden hues. The President uses the military expression "let's plow the road;" Rogin might argue that the men make way for the dominant sperm.<sup>62</sup> All of the men deliver variations of the phrase "Come on, come on now" which, within the context of the film's opening, carries sexual connotations. The film keeps switching orifices. We can't tell which particular

cities and buildings are being blown up, or when the aliens are coming and when they are going. Casse says, “Alright you alien assholes. In the words of my generation, up yours,” and, “I’m back!” The aliens’ protuberance reaches down like an insect’s thorax, glows and becomes tumescent. The big bang floods the screen.

### ***Independence Day* and the ‘War on Terrorism’**

I began by suggesting that *Independence Day* has provided a script for the government, the media and ordinary citizens post-11 September. It is worth considering what cues we might have taken from *ID4*. There are many questions we should ask in relation to the present war. How many people have died—through bombings and starvation—and can we sanction this? How have we contributed to the present crisis, and what can we do to play a more informed and productive role in the future? Can we help South-west Asians overcome poverty and tyrannical regimes? Should we spend our resources on a military build-up? Can we reduce our dependency on fossil fuels? Should the government curtail civil liberties from those who possess full citizenship, partial citizenship, or none at all? Do we want to live in a state of siege? These issues, though they arise frequently, do not stay on the agenda, most likely because they would complicate our relation to the war as well as raise questions about our own agency. *Independence Day* offers only one possible response to a national crisis—military action. We do not need to know anything about the intruders, except that they are vulnerable like us, life forms who can be killed. Connie informs the president that the problem with his presidency is that there is too much compromise, and that the message gets lost. The President yearns for a return to the Gulf War, when “we knew what we had to do.” The film argues that singleness of purpose,

military might, technical savvy, and a sense of entitlement is all America needs to get through the crisis. In *ID4*, and in America's response to the current crisis, if we just keep pushing onward without taking a moment to reflect, we will have a happy ending.

*Independence Day* is about a happy war. Millions disappear, including people we know intimately, and yet the process looks like fun. When Republican Bob Dole's secretary, who endorsed the film, was asked about the millions who died, he exclaimed: "But, they're all liberals!"<sup>63</sup> Though the number of dead from the twin towers have been counted and recounted, other deaths remain vague. Both *ID4* and the military/government/media conglomerate shield the viewer from images of harm and death: the film and the current war seem to be reduced to a video game.

Both *ID4* and the U.S. government present a childlike image of war and technology. In the initial stages of the War on Terror, we saw aerial photographs of towns, and then softly depressed earth, as well as computer mock-ups of military hardware. Levinson explains the aliens' plans by drawing simple circles and lines on a notepad, "Line of sight, Mr. President," and plans our counter-attack on the alien mothership using a few polaroids, magic marker, and a clipboard. The instructions for piloting the aliens' ship are scribbled on a post-it note. George Bush's projection of an in-and-out invasion (six months with sweets and flowers) might have been influenced by *ID4*'s one-punch takedown of the aliens. The fantasy that a quickly written computer virus might halt an alien invasion seems close to Bush's project to create a magic circle, through prayer, that protects us from the "evil ones," and his belief that "Star Wars" will create a giant shield over America—a gargantuan diaphragm in the sky. Both *ID4*'s government and the current administration back huge military spending. As Julius

Levinson suggests, excessive military appropriations are, in truth, put to other uses. In Area 51, the President asks, “Where did they get the money to build all this?” Julius responds, “You don’t think they spend \$700 on a hammer, \$800 on a nail, do you?” Bush wants to increase military spending by \$45 billion.

Both *ID4* and America trade on only partially acknowledged government lies and cover-ups. Though the military/government/media conglomerate attempts to project the image of an objective and complete picture, it presents information in a partial and decontextualized form.<sup>64</sup> Bush paints Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden as the embodiment of absolute evil, not much different from the way the alien intruders are portrayed in *Independence Day*.

One truly disturbing similarity between America today and *Independence Day* lies in the treatment of those who remain outside of the system. Precise statistics are lacking, because the U.S. government refuses to release them, but at different times and in different locations, thousands have been held in substandard conditions without probable cause or access to the outside world. In addition, the U.S. government seems relatively unconcerned about the number of civilian casualties incurred from our invasion and occupation of Iraq. *Independence Day* is similarly tolerant of disappearing folk. In *Independence Day*, most large population centres are wiped out, and millions die, yet barely a trace of this carnage remains on the film’s cheerful surface. In *ID4* over a third of the key characters are killed. Producer Devlin and Director Emmerich bragged that *Independence Day*’s thrills derive from the fact that anyone, at any moment, could be killed. Yet, if we look closely, each of the individuals who die were positioned poorly with relation to white-male, hetero-centrist power. Marilyn Whitmore, Tiffany, Dr. Okun,

Jimmy Wilder, and Marty Gilbert are marginal characters, and each of them had been warned.<sup>65</sup> Like *ID4*'s minor characters, Arab and Arab-Americans are absent, marginal, or problematic.<sup>66</sup>

I do not wish to suggest that *Independence Day* is the cause of the 11 September attacks, nor that the film is America's sole script. A repertoire of apocalyptic imagery, as well as printed text, ways of talking and speaking, and so on, all contribute to our ways of thinking about and acting toward Middle-Easterners. Nevertheless, *Independence Day* is a good text to pull out and examine from the stream of popular culture. Quantitative studies of the media suggest that media images can greatly shape our perceptions of and actions toward other people. *Independence Day* insinuates the message that if you do not heed the warnings or follow the rules very closely, you will be wiped out. Americans are told that those who are on the border or outside the system are at risk, and the rest of us should relinquish our civil liberties because we have nothing to hide. Those who raise concerns about our government's policies are unpatriotic. *Independence Day* may help repackage 1950's McCarthyism and Cold War ideology.

As Bush's government continues the occupation in Iraq—either to conquer the evil abroad, to make natural and acceptable the evils at home, to gain more oil and power, or to exorcise their own personal demons—I hope we all take a few deep breaths.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Hollywood movies and TV shows with terror plots face uncertain future" (*The Associated Press State and Local Wire*, 12 September 2001).

<sup>2</sup> *ID4* was commonly used as a substitute title for *Independence Day*. It is redundant since the 4 in *ID4* presumably stands for 4 July.

<sup>3</sup> [www.filmsite.org/boxoffice.html](http://www.filmsite.org/boxoffice.html).

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- <sup>4</sup> Rogin, Michael, *Independence Day, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Enola Gay* (London: BFI Modern Classics, 1998).
- <sup>5</sup> Andrew Duncan, "I Try to Cultivate Good Will to All" (*Radio Times*, Vol. CCXC, no 3786, 17 August 1996), 12. Amy Taubin, "Playing It Straight" (*Sight and Sound* 7.7). Rogin claims that "Of the top ten grossing motion pictures of 1996, *Independence Day* received by far the highest positive (66.7%) and lowest negative (4.7%) percentage of reviews." Rogin quotes Janet Maslin from the *New York Times*: "Anyone appalled that movie audiences can enjoy such widespread catastrophe can be assured that *Independence Day* is really about togetherness and catharsis" (Janet Maslin, "Space Aliens, Action and a Chance to Save the Planet," *New York Times* 2 July 1996, cited in Rogin, *Independence Day*, 11).
- <sup>6</sup> David Bordwell, "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film" (*Film Quarterly* 55.3), 16-28.
- <sup>7</sup> *ID4*'s high level of detail—for example, the almost obsessive strategic placement of props in the background—is common for the ways films are produced today.
- <sup>8</sup> A version of *ID4*'s script can be downloaded off the web at [www.script-o-rama.com/table3.shtml](http://www.script-o-rama.com/table3.shtml)
- <sup>9</sup> One might organize an analysis according to the techniques used to create these representations—for example, the disposition of extras and props in the background, or editing and matched shots, parallel structures and rhymes that cut across scenes, and momentary visual and aural jokes—or a sequential description of the film. However, by organizing the first half of the paper according to character type, I can show how deliberately each representation was built up and how one type of representation balances another.
- <sup>10</sup> At this moment, *Independence Day*, as an ensemble film, invites the viewer to identify with various characters, then in the film's second half, to lock in with the camera's directionality and point of view. I am using the VHS theatrical release of *Independence Day* as my primary text. The DVD version contains both the theatrical version and the later director's cut, which contains additional footage.
- <sup>11</sup> The viewer may place herself in the Freudian scenario and experience a sense of gladness at the unhappy fate of the Russians (an identification with the person who is doing the beating, here, the alien), a subsequent sense of fear as she imagines herself in the position of the child who is preyed upon, and then shame for her slowness to empathize.
- <sup>12</sup> Rogin, *Independence Day*, 16-20.
- <sup>13</sup> Americans believe they would not commit genocide. Our boys take out the aliens by using a computer virus and dismantling their primary weapons. We do not see millions of aliens killed. This is reminiscent of the military's use of decapitory strikes, where the U.S. takes out the enemy's C3I (command, control, communication and intelligence) capabilities. In *ID4*, when the Americans take away the alien computer, the aliens all die.
- <sup>14</sup> Rogin, *Independence Day*, 44.
- <sup>15</sup> Devlin's and Emmerich's original script was more progressive—the wife delays because she addresses the public on television concerning the alien attacks, and Connie writes the president's speeches.
- <sup>16</sup> Media coverage of the 11 September attacks focused on male firefighters and policemen, even though many women performed acts of bravery and lost their lives.
- <sup>17</sup> The idea of humans as a depleted resource is underscored when the President and General Grey comment that fighters are coming up short and that the Air Force recruits look so young. A radio personality announces that military personnel are going AWOL rather than risk their lives fighting the aliens.
- <sup>18</sup> A subsequent shot shows Whitmore in front of a fireplace; over the mantelpiece hangs a Cezannean painting within which a large, black form nestles among rumpled sheets on a bed. This painting can re-awaken our suspicions about the relation between father and daughter.
- <sup>19</sup> Rogin, *Independence Day*, 71.
- <sup>20</sup> Richard Dyer, *Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 141.
- <sup>21</sup> While Margaret Whitmore wears nicely tailored dresses, the president wears cheap shirts. (You can see his undershirt through the thin cotton.) This prepares us for him becoming "one of the people" and flying a plane.
- <sup>22</sup> Dr. Okun could be said to be the academic liberal who empathizes with the other to eventually become overtaken by it and used as its ventriloquist dummy. The moral of the story? Do not empathize with the other or treat it kindly.
- <sup>23</sup> Rogin, *Independence Day*, 38.

- <sup>24</sup> Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge 1997), 120-121.
- <sup>25</sup> Rogin, *Independence Day*, 65.
- <sup>26</sup> While *ID4*'s racial politics contain progressive moments—Jasmine is given the attributes of courage and humanity, and the dark side of white patriarchy is occasionally brought out—the film's energy derives in part from the opposition of black women's bodies to white men's brains.
- <sup>27</sup> Code switching is an anthropological term used to describe the ways that speakers move between more than one form of vernacular. Hiller and Jasmine alternate between black American English and standard American English, which may not be surprising. However, in *Independence Day*, Jasmine and Hiller only speak black talk when they are angry or emotional; when they are reflective, quiet, or intimate, they use standard English. Thus, in *Independence Day*, black English becomes a language of rage and loss of control.
- <sup>28</sup> All through the film, there is the problem of the aliens' smell. Joel Kovel traces the ways African-Americans, historically, have been linked with excrement. In *ID4*, a lot of toilet humor surrounds Steven Hiller, Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory*. Columbia University Press, 1984. This might appear to be a very far-fetched reading, but as Hiller drags the alien, the relationship could be interpreted as alien=African-American=excrement.
- <sup>29</sup> Solemn and mysterious, the little boy seems preternaturally adult. His seriousness may stem from the ways Jasmine's boyfriend Steven treats him. Obviously, Steven is very devoted to the little boy—his day bag is packed with fireworks for 4 July—but he also adopts an authoritarian stance toward him. Without much cause, he frisks the little boy in the kitchen. During the wedding scene, he tells the boy to make himself useful and spansks him, which makes the boy cry out. Dylan continually shoots his plastic gun at the sky, even though newscasters warn Los Angelenos not to shoot guns at the alien to avoid setting off an interstellar war. When Jasmine has a conversation with Margaret Whitmore, Dylan plays alone with a two-headed gryphon—the insignia of the military fighter pilots. We sense that our five year-old is not frightened by adversity, and since we are so short of skilled men, that he might be our only hope for the future.
- <sup>30</sup> I am counting every time that the appearance of an African-American character placed in the background might be judged (correctly or incorrectly) as a different character on first viewing. Continuity edits—when the camera cuts from one angle to the next, and the unities of space and time are preserved—are counted as a single sighting. However, if an African-American male appears in the background and the camera cuts away to something else—another scene or another type of activity—and the camera then returns to the previous scene in such a way that spatial or temporal orientation is transformed. I count each appearance of the background character as a separate instance.
- <sup>31</sup> Racial associations begin early in *ID4*. In the Oval Office, a series of separation shots reveal the White House staff coping with the first news of the alien spaceship's arrival. A middle aged European-American man rhymes with the bust of Ben Franklin behind him. The President stands before numerous flags, and Connie stands near a bucolic early American painting of a mansion or state house nestled on gently rolling hills. An African-American man stands before a statuette of a rhinoceros.
- <sup>32</sup> During the First Lady's death, we spot one black woman who is a doctor or a nurse. Though she wears a stethoscope, she stands among a clutch of people who receive a lecture from the head doctor. As part of the UFO welcoming committee, we see a brief cutaway to a woman of colour who may be African-American, and, standing next to Connie during the president's speech, we also view a very light-skinned, matronly, African-American staff woman whose one line to Connie is "shh."
- <sup>33</sup> What might be an African-American family appears. We see an older black man in the war room, who is at least in his fifties. The next shot reveals an obese African-American woman who holds Julius Levinson's left hand, and an African-American female teenager on his right. We see another young African-American girl as part of the general line-up of the welcoming crowd in Area 51—she seems very much a teen, with tennis shoes and shorts—and then, behind the President, a thirtyish African-American woman, who has not appeared previously.
- <sup>34</sup> *ID4* here suggests that white male heterocentric identity is hard on everyone, including those who are placed most at the centre, and who reap the most benefits from the system.
- <sup>35</sup> Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Verso, 1999).

- <sup>36</sup> See the strategically placed Fruitopia vending machines standing against a wall in the cable service station, the Quaker Oats rice cakes left on top of Troy Casse's television set, and the numerous Coca-Cola cans in the same minifridge.
- <sup>37</sup> The filmmakers employ choreographed funny walks throughout the film—e.g., the Asian male technician at SETI, Dr. Okun's toe-tripping gait as he goes up to reveal the freak show, as well as Marty Gilbert's.
- <sup>38</sup> The background detail works both within and across scenes. The green bugs on the video bank and the bluish green light cast on the walls and furniture of the cable station provide a strong contrast to the faded browns of the South-west desert in the next scene, and the bugs could suggest those that threaten Lucas's lettuce if Russell Casse doesn't get to the right field.
- <sup>39</sup> As Rogin argues, "Russell is not the only victim of alien sexual abuse, for sexual violation figures prominently in reports of extraterrestrial abduction. Although most abductees are women, men also emphasize the 'rape-like character of the trauma', the 'penetration by thin, metallic, penis-like instruments'" (Rogin, *Independence Day*), 68. Jodi Dean, "Coming Out as an Alien: Feminists, UFOs, and the 'Oprah Effect'" in Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry, eds, *'Bad Girls' 'Good Girls': Women, Sex, and Power in the Nineties* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 92.
- <sup>40</sup> A strange detail: the young woman and her date listen to a rarefied form of college-oriented alternative music, not the obvious choice for a young, South-western Hispanic couple, but making them more accessible to white viewers?
- <sup>41</sup> The directors mirror characters throughout *ID4*. For example, notice that the facial features of the point guard who lets Hiller through the entry gate to Area 51 matches that of the alien—at least as much as is humanly possible. Marty Gilbert has a twin when David Levinson informs the cable station staff about the alien signal's fluctuating patterns. Lucas's buffness is accentuated by a figure in the background. A mirror image of Lucas in short white tank top and blue jeans stands before a fence with his back turned toward us.
- <sup>42</sup> This might seem as if it was a progressive moment, but it feels like a bald appropriation—plus he might be a Contra.
- <sup>43</sup> Duncan, "I Try to Cultivate Good Will to All," 12.
- <sup>44</sup> Humans and aliens have distinct sonic associations. The humans listen to alternative pop music, honky-tonk, early Beatles, blues-based rock 'n' roll, and acoustic folk. The aliens utter all types of mechanical and animal sounds—anything from vibrating metal, to cicadas, to cows. The nondiagetic music linked to humans and aliens draw on stereotypical cues for good and evil—the humans have a diatonic theme in dotted rhythm which suggests the military. (There are snare drum rolls and a fife—here connoting the Minute Men—and trumpets and French horns—our noble military.) The aliens' music features a tune in a minor key with a stepwise melody, and another cue that contains arpeggiated diminished chords. (The aliens' ship slinks and glides, and the accompanying glissandi are reminiscent of horror movie music) However, the alien and human music sometimes overlap. When humans advance on the alien, the humans' music is not that different from that of the aliens, and the choir that sometimes accompanies the aliens makes them sound spiritual and heavenly. Since the musical cues are so generic, they often serve more to remind us of older films than to depict character. Good and evil music, and good and evil players, flatten into one cartoonish surface.
- <sup>45</sup> After the film's opening with the slightly naughty scene at SETI, General Grey growls "Does anyone know anything about this?" When Alisha and her young boyfriend are found in the car in the southwest, Russell Casse comes running out and says "Thanks, partner. We've got to get as far away from these things as we can."
- <sup>46</sup> Rogin, *Independence Day*, 51.
- <sup>47</sup> We see one Asian as a television reporter on a news cast (but the footage is staticky), a pilot and a doctor who might be Asian. For a split second, the camera reveals a female technician, but she's quickly covered by Levinson as he demonstrates the space ship's shield in Area 51.
- <sup>48</sup> A subtle conflation: the aliens resemble South-west migrant workers. After his meeting with the alien, the President claims that the aliens are like locusts who want to exterminate us; when Russell Casse pulls his RV aside at the border of a valley, he directs his son Miguel to "Look at all that." The scattered RVs cluttered across the desert resemble a large-scale insect infestation.
- <sup>49</sup> James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1990).

- <sup>50</sup> Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 1989).
- <sup>51</sup> A photo display of close-ups of family members placed on the president's side table resembles that of Jasmine's. While the president's contains family photos, photos of himself shaking hands with the Pope and with the Dalai Lama, a metal model of a ship, and a bust of Abraham Lincoln (the aliens' shadow has just eclipsed the Lincoln Memorial), Jasmine's display contains family photos, a vase of cloth flowers and dolphin statuettes.
- <sup>52</sup> The film's primary theme is this: huge and powerful alien spaceships and aliens overwhelm miniature-American-us. While the alien spacecraft is roughly the size of a major metropolitan city, the opening shot of the American flag planted on the moon looks as if it were of the same size, shape and texture as that of a worn postage stamp. Americans are depicted as naive, bumbling, average Joes. Though they are not too sophisticated, their hearts and minds are in the right place and they are, therefore, entitled to only the best. *Independence Day* reaffirms Attorney General Ashcroft's belief that "Unique among the nations, America recognised the source of our character as being godly and eternal, not being civic and temporal.... We have no King but Jesus," as quoted from his speech at Bob Jones University in 1999 in Jeffrey Toobin, "Ashcroft's Ascent" (*The New Yorker*, April 15, 2002), 50-63.
- <sup>53</sup> The film employs other techniques of mayhem, including the unrelenting visual cross-cutting between scenes, and the unprogressive ways that, according to Rogin, the film conflates "bodily desire, illness and anxiety" (Rogin, *Independence Day*), 29.
- <sup>54</sup> Amy Taubin, "Playing It Straight: R.E.M. Meets a Post-Rodney King World in *Independence Day*" (*Sight and Sound* 1996), 6-8. When the convoy of RVs approaches, there is a visual rhyme—Casse's RV drags its little red plane while Hiller drags his little red swaddled alien.
- <sup>55</sup> Only in retrospect might the viewer work out that the SETI exteriors are incorrect: if the phone calls occur within a few minutes of each other, and Marilyn Whitmore truthfully reports the time in Los Angeles as 2:45 in the morning, the desert landscape should be dark.
- <sup>56</sup> When our white leading men in Air Force One's cockpit set up the bombing attack, a second-level general grabs the phone and does two 360° turns before he hands General Grey the phone. (He should have been strangled by the phone cord.) General Grey reaches for the phone with his left hand, and the cut to the close-up reveals him grasping the phone with his right hand. Since this scene contains two glaring errors rather than one, I believe the directors aimed for a sense of instability. When Air Force One flies over the South-west, the plane momentarily freezes and the sound drops out—we have pure silence and a plane frozen in mid-air. It's possible that the editors had difficulties with the AVID output, but more likely, the sloppiness was a desired effect.
- <sup>57</sup> One example is when Marty says he wants to call his "mutha," and we then cut to a South-west bar. Marty's working class twang links the two scenes.
- <sup>58</sup> Constance Penley, *The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 94.
- <sup>59</sup> Rogin, *Independence Day*, 73-74.
- <sup>60</sup> The sounds recall those from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981).
- <sup>61</sup> Hiller continues *ID4*'s references to faeces by placing his hand over his nose and saying "Woohh."
- <sup>62</sup> Rogin, *Independence Day*, 59.
- <sup>63</sup> Dole proclaimed, "Bring your family, too... You'll be proud of it. Diversity. America. Leadership" ("Politics: The Movie: Dole sees U.S. Conquer Evil, Good Film, He Says," *New York Times*, 30 July 1996).
- <sup>64</sup> See Herb Schiller *The Mind Managers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 24-29.
- <sup>65</sup> The president's wife desires her own career, Tiffany is a rambunctious, white-trash, working stripper, Dr. Okun is mad, Jimmy Wilder acts gay, and Marty Gilbert is gay. Each of these characters was told not to stray. The president asked his wife to come home, and she didn't. Jasmine made Tiffany promise not to go to the alien welcoming party because she had a bad feeling about the event, but Tiffany went anyway. Marty Gilbert should have gone down to the bomb shelter with the rest of the staff, yet he foolishly chose to hide under a desk and make a number of useless phone calls instead. Sergeant Hiller warned Jimmy Wilder not to get premature on him, but he did a too fancy flight manoeuvre and ripped off his mask. While no character forewarns Dr. Okun, "They don't let him out very often," and he did run out of Area 51 when the alien arrived. The alien strangles him.

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<sup>66</sup> Americans might also feel that Arabs and Arab-Americans were warned. While corporate advertisers have forsaken Arab-Americans, televangelists like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson have warned them to take heed.