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ISSUES AND AGENDAS

From IRCA to Orca: Apprehending the Other in 'Your San Antonio Experience'

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Abstract From the Alamo to Sea World, the San Antonio tourist experience reiterates an historical and ethnic narrative that positions the Anglo-American subject in relation to the Mexican as 'other'. Like the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, this strategy of definition and containment is inseparable from profound ambivalences about the possibility of effectively 'naturalizing' difference. In 'remembering the Alamo', the tourist is faced with the possibility of dis-integration and an inversion of the colonizer/colonized relationship.

Introduction

Some recent historical and anthropological writing has argued that the concept of history should be expanded to include analysis of the ways in which contemporary social formations inform representations of the past (Alonso 1986; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Popular Memory Group 1982). The past, as a kind of temporal 'other' thus becomes a key site for negotiating the identities of contemporary social subjects, whether individuals, ethnic groups, or nations. Similar trends in literary and psychoanalytic theory have contended that dominant representations of ethnic, class, and gender differences involve projects of self-constitution, rather than attempts to represent the 'truth' of the subordinate group itself (Buchler 1991; Gilman 1985; Bhabha 1983). My discussion of the presentation of history and cultural difference as it is registered at a series of San Antonio tourist attractions combines elements of both these approaches.[1]

The 1836 battle of the Alamo, in which all of the 189 defenders perished in an attempt to wrest the territory of Texas from the newly-independent Mexican nation, is the stuff of well-worn legend, perhaps best immortalized in the 1960 film epic starring John Wayne as David Crockett. As a central symbol of the vulnerability of Anglo-America to innundation by Mexicans, the Alamo has long figured prominently in U.S. national consciousness. My purpose in looking at tourism in San Antonio is to explore the ways in which the Alamo legend is

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reproduced within the group of attractions that make up what the brochures call 'your San Antonio experience'.

I begin with a discussion of U.S. immigration discourse, in order to locate the San Antonio material within a wider national context, one in which the 'Mexican'[2] is positioned as a threat to national integrity. Like immigration discourse, the tourist spectacle is a kind of text in which the relationship between the U.S. national 'self' and the Mexican as 'other' is inscribed. I argue that in the discourses of both immigration and tourism, the Mexican is the object of a triple apprehension. To 'apprehend' is defined as: 1) to expect with anxiety, 2) to grasp the meaning of, and 3) to take into custody (Stein 1975:66). This tension between difference as dangerous and potentially self-annihilating, and difference as containable, or easily 'naturalized', is played out in these distinct but related cultural moments.

Homi Bhabha writes of the 'ambivalence' of the colonial stereotype, arguing that the stereotype, as 'the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of a . . . fantasy and defense—the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture' (1983:27). He maintains that the colonial stereotype involves a vacillation between sameness, 'all men have the same skin/race/culture', and 'the anxiety associated with lack and difference' (Bhabha 1983:27).

Stemming from the threat to the integrity of the self which is posed by difference, the colonial stereotype attempts to contain, and thereby fix the representation of the other in order to control it. Bhabha argues that this process is always an ambivalent one. 'Despite the structural similarities with the play of need and desire in primal fantasies,' he writes,

> the colonial fantasy does not try to cover up that moment of separation. It is more ambivalent. On the one hand, it proposes a teleology—under certain conditions of colonial domination and control the native is progressively reformable. On the other, however, it effectively displays the 'separation', makes it more visible (Bhabha 1983:34).

This tension between a teleology of reform and a display of difference permeates dominant U.S. discourse about Mexicans both inside and outside of the border. Images of childlike innocence exist side by side with images of savagery and unbridled sexuality: *mariachis* with *narcosatanicos*.

Such ambivalence towards ethnic difference permeates U.S. political discourse, and is clearly displayed in state policies surrounding Mexican (and other non-European) immigration. This ambivalence is inscribed in the very title of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control

Act (IRCA), which rewrote the codes and rules defining potential 'citizens', 'resident aliens', etc. This legislation could perhaps more aptly have been called the 1986 *Immigrant* Reform and Control Act. On the one hand, immigrants are viewed as potential citizens, potential ingredients in the 'melting pot'—that is as reform-able. On the other hand they are cast as irredeemably other and threatening to the integrity of the body politic—that is, in need of control. The possibility of 'naturalization' that is held out by IRCA is continually undercut by a simultaneous obsession with counting and containment, with maintaining control over the border.

The fact that an assertion of heterogeneity can exist side by side with a rhetorical and economic perpetuation of internal exclusions stems from a discrepancy between the national ideology of an accessible community of law, and an increasingly contradictory European ancestral notion of a community of blood. The presence of non-Anglo American people within the boundaries of the nation precludes the imagining of a homogeneous community; it complicates the ability of the nation to project difference outwards, in order to consolidate an autonomous, bounded sense of self. Movements to outlaw the use of languages other than English in government, education, and the workplace often ground fears about racial and ethnic difference in appeals to national unity.

Undocumented immigration of Mexicans and others is perceived as a threat both to the community of blood and to the community of law. Migrants from countries as diverse as Mexico, Haiti and Vietnam merge into a unified spectre of otherness, collectively cast as undesirable. In addition to the threat of racial heterogeneity that they bring, undocumented immigrants escape what Foucault calls the 'totalizing' and 'individualizing' power of the state to quantify and to control not only individuals, but racial and ethnic groups as well (1982: 213; cf. Corrigan and Sayer 1985).

A cardinal rule of the demographic profession is that there are only three ways by which a person can enter or leave a 'population': birth, death, or migration. Since the nineteenth century, births and deaths have been meticulously registered by the state. Migration is far more resistant to the operations of this 'microphysics of power' (Foucault 1979:26). During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ellis Island represented the power of the state to count, document, and even name immigrants entering the United States: a tightened, if inverted, sphincter of the 'body politic' (Foucault 1979:28). In contrast to this, the Mexican border threatens as a great uncontrollable orifice. The movement of migrants across this two thousand mile expanse exceeds the state's capacity for surveillance and creates a breach in an otherwise inviolate project of statistical self-knowledge. Cries of 'we're losing control of our borders' began to appear in U.S.

political discourse during the early 1970s. Flood images abounded, accompanying the production of wildly-inflated statistics about the number of undocumented Mexicans present within the country. Not coincidentally, this period also saw the first indications of a decline in the global hegemony of the United States, with the loss of the Vietnam War, the Iranian hostage situation, and increasing foreign competition in world markets. The national anxieties that led to the passage of IRCA in 1986 have only intensified since. The image of invulnerability that was temporarily restored by the 'success' of Operation Desert Storm was quickly shattered by the bomb blast that transformed the World Trade Center into the 'twin towers of terror'.

Gilman argues that 'Stereotypes arise when self-integration is threatened'. He maintains that a tendency to label the different as the pathological, is 'an efficient way of displacing the consciousness that the self, as a biological entity subject to the inexorable rules of aging and decay, ultimately cannot be controlled' (Gilman 1985:24). Just as the encounter with difference is associated with the dis-integration of the self, so the fear of innundation by Mexicans is associated in U.S. national discourses with the loss of national integrity, language, and cultural identity. Through IRCA, an attempt was made to transform the immigrant from an object of anxiety into an object to be documented and/or detained. New mechanisms designed to regulate and control the flow of cheap labor transformed the body of the migrant from a source of racial anxieties into an object of consumption.

While IRCA provided for the expansion of law enforcement techniques to arrest and process larger numbers of undocumented Mexicans, the representations of the internal 'Mexican' population that are produced for tourists in San Antonio likewise arrest and fetishize their images, rendering ethnic diversity benign and easily digestible. Yet just as attempts to control the national border are beset by fears of innundation and dis-integration, the touristic moment is likewise plagued by ambivalence. At the center of a city which claims to celebrate ethnic diversity, the Alamo stands as a metonymic trope of the national body, a constant reminder of the threat of innundation and death by the 'bad' other. The tension between pleasure and fear that is found at this and other tourist sites reveals the presence of profound anxieties about racial and ethnic difference. The continual heightening and resolution of this tension is central to the production of the Anglo-American tourist as a subject in control, victorious in the containment of threatening otherness.

'Your San Antonio Experience' may begin with a trip to El Mercado. Here, the visitor may consume margaritas and nachos, listen to strolling *mariachis*, or purchase *piñatas*, children's toys, and other crafts. Having been economically and physically displaced from

the central tourist and business area of the city, the 'native' population is kept at an arm's length, visible primarily in their roles as service workers, authenticating the imagined spaces of Anglo fantasy. At sites such as El Mercado and the River Walk, Mexican-ness is fetishized for touristic consumption. In these sites the gaze of the tourist is not returned, the boundaries of the self and the other are safely maintained. In contrast to a walk through the impoverished neighborhoods of San Antonio's west side into which internal racial and cultural difference has been ghettoized, this is a 'safe' site from which to view diversity. In addition to El Mercado and the River Walk, a typical San Antonio itinerary includes the Alamo, the IMAX film *Alamo: the Price of Freedom*, the Plaza Theatre of Wax, Ripley's Believe It or Not, and Sea World. Central to these tourist 'attractions' is the positioning of the consumer in relation to an imagined 'other'. At these sites, difference, and the anxiety associated with it, is reduced to the level of a fiction (Gilman 1985:27). And like immigration discourse—through which a particular commodity, labor power, is submerged in a practice putatively directed to controlling and regulating the movement and identity of 'other' bodies—the tourist experience involves a commercial exchange. One in which Anglo identity is not only on display, but for sale.

The historical site of the battle of the Alamo is positioned centrally both in national consciousness and in 'your San Antonio experience'. This 'Shrine of Texas Liberty', owned and cared for by the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, includes the mission church (filled with relics of the battle and its martyrs), the Long Barrack Museum, and a museum/gift shop. Central to the many representations of the historical event that are presented at the site is the image of 'waves' of Mexicans coming over the walls. The invading Mexicans gathered outside outnumber the Alamo's defenders, with whom 'you' the tourist, are invited to identify. This narrative positions 'you' as part of an oppressed, freedom-loving population, and the Mexicans as an invading, colonizing force. The defense of the walls of the mission comes to represent the defense of the nation, of 'freedom' against the onslaught of tyranny. As the battle progresses, 'you' progressively lose control of the boundaries of the fortress. Although no version of the Alamo legend is complete without a description of the surrender of Santa Ana at San Jacinto, this fragile and incomplete closure (indexed by the repeated admonition to 'remember the Alamo'), points to the need for continued vigilance against innundation and the subsequent inversion of racial hierarchies. Remembering the Alamo in this way cloaks aggressive Anglo-American expansionism in the innocence of self-defense. Alternative histories, such as Chicano narratives of occupation and colonization are rendered incomprehensible.

The film, *Alamo: The Price of Freedom*, is located in an upscale shopping mall near the Alamo. Here a premium is placed on achieving effects of realism. The tourist is invited to 'go back in time', to 'feel as if you are there'. The brochure asserts that 'The huge screen paired with [a] six-track magnetic stereo sound system will give viewers an exceptional sense of participation in the on-screen activity'. As an usher explains before the film begins: 'When the cannon fires, the theatre shakes'. This technologically-achieved verisimilitude attempts to close the historical gap separating 'you' from the action. Posters in the lobby advertise the film, saying 'fight with the men of the Alamo against all odds', and 'Cross the Line with Crockett, Travis, Bowie and Bonham'. The 'illusion of unmediated reality' (Alonso 1988:36) that this produces is essential to a nationalistic interpellation, which remembers the Alamo by inscribing historical memory onto the body of the viewer. The audience is invited to participate in the 'heroism', and ultimately in the death, of the Alamo defenders. Elaborate technological mediations produce the effect of a history which is less mediated, *more* real than that presented in museum displays and other contexts.

The sweeping shots of the Texas landscape that open the film are abruptly interrupted as the bright and highly stylized hat of Santa Ana comes into view. In contrast to the Mexican army, which is composed of de-individualized soldiers in strict military formation, the mostly Anglo-American defenders of the Alamo are presented as rugged individuals, frontiersmen who resist the rigid discipline of a traditional army. Where Santa Ana is dandyish, unable even to control his horse, the Alamo defenders, epitomized by the figure of David Crockett, are dressed in earth tones, many in leather. Their right to the territory of Texas is grounded in a privileged relationship to nature. Their right to independence is grounded in egalitarian qualities which are opposed to the 'totalitarian' discipline of the Mexican army. In this inversion of the colonizer/colonized positions, the Anglo settlers are cast as 'native' inhabitants of the territory, the Mexicans as an expanding imperial power.

The film ends as it began, with sweeping shots of the natural environment, this time with pictures of the Alamo heroes superimposed over it. Benedict Anderson argues that the national imagination mitigates death and suffering 'by transforming fatality into continuity', by linking 'the dead and the yet unborn' (1983:18). An historical claim to the territory of Texas is established by linking the dead heroes to the present-day landscape. 'You' are thus linked to these deaths, this history, and this territory.

As a representation of 'national' history, *The Price of Freedom* must contend with the presence of Spanish-speaking 'tejanos' as part of the 'self', at the same time as it casts the Mexicans as the invading

enemy from without. Internal heteroglossia is acknowledged as a soldier, speaking Spanish, asserts 'I was born in the Alamo; I shall die in the Alamo'. Like immigration discourse, the film reveals the tensions inherent in any attempt to regulate the content of the national 'self'. Crucial to an understanding of this tension is the fact that the 'Mexican' is at once defined as 'other', that which lies beyond the border, and as an actual or potential member of the 'self', as a resident or citizen of the United States. The split character of the stereotype that Bhabha points to is perhaps best embodied in the figures of two brothers, one of whom is a soldier in Santa Ana's army, the other a defender of the Alamo.

Directly across the street from the Alamo, in the Plaza Theatre of Wax the tourist encounters yet another re–presentation of the battle, this time situated as the final element of the trilogy 'Hollywood, Horrors, History!' Upon entering the 'Hollywood' section, the visitor is immediately faced with a full-sized figure of Rudolph Valentino, the archetypal 'Latin lover'. The caption states that 'his exotic looks and panther-like grace began to attract a huge following of women for whom he seemed to suggest the very embodiment of sensuous magnetism'. The next display offers the blonde Faye Wray recoiling on a bed as the giant hand of King Kong enters through her window. Shortly thereafter stands the very personification of ambivalence, Dr. Jekyl and his monstrous alter-ego Mr. Hyde. Here the threats of exotic sexuality, untamed nature, and the 'other' within are contained and frozen in wax. This progression of stereotypic images concludes with figures of Louis 'Satchmo' Armstrong, Flip Wilson, and Sammy Davis Jr. The threat of the 'bad' other which the hypersexual 'Latin', the wild King Kong, and the uncontrollable Mr. Hyde represent is defused by these domesticated, and de–sexualized representatives of racial difference. Difference is rendered digestible through its transformation into an object of consumption—into entertainment.

In the red–lit stairway that leads to Dr. Blood's House of Horrors, an ominous voice warns the curious tourist not to touch the displays, because 'they just might touch you back'. The anxiety that this provokes is central to the relationship between repression and display that is played out in 'your San Antonio experience'. If the display of fixed, stereotypic images of the other involves a displacement of fears which are internal to the self, the return of the touch disallows that distancing. Touch contaminates. It reopens the reality of death and the dis–integration of the self.

With the return of the touch or the look, that which had been taken into custody is unleashed, becoming once again a source of anxiety. Bhabha argues that the return of the look shatters the security that is achieved by fixing the other as a projection of the self by revealing the presence of an excess, an other who refuses to stand in for that

which has been repressed (1983:33). The tourist, in this context, is denied a privileged access to the position of the looker. Throughout the display of blood-soaked corpses, skeletons, and vampires, sinister signs announce that 'you are being watched, your reactions are being recorded'. This touristic experience of 'horror' involves an opening up of the tension between the pleasure of the display, and the fear that the representation is fragile and cannot contain the threat of difference.

Reemerging from the 'Horror' realm, the visitor must pass through a short hallway before entering the main part of the 'History' display. On one side of this hall is Pancho Villa, on the other, the trio of Juárez, Zapata, and Hidalgo. At the entrance, under a sign reading 'Heroes of the Lone Star State', is Stephen F. Austin. 'Known as the "Father of Texas" ', the caption reads, 'Austin brought the first Anglo–American colonists to Texas in 1821'. The use of an idiom of kinship in this context establishes an Anglo–American genealogy for Texas, from which the Mexican leaders are excluded. This repression of ethnic and cultural difference and the alternative histories which they suggest establishes a particular kind of national identity. The 'History' display includes two scenes of the battle of the Alamo, another of a wounded Sam Houston accepting Santa Ana's surrender, and a fourth and last of the Civil War battle of Sabine Pass, where a force of 42 Texans with six cannons defeated a Union force of five hundred men and twenty vessels in what amounts to a latter–day inversion of the Alamo battle. Victorious at last, the visitor emerges into the glare of the gift shop.

At the next stop on the itinerary, Ripley's Believe It or Not, images of ethnic difference and bodily transgression are offered up for touristic consumption. In the 'Primitive Grotto', which contains replicas of artefacts collected by Mr. Ripley during his many tours of the globe, a video, showing culinary practices from around the world, plays continuously. Featured are an unidentified African tribe roasting tarantulas, and the Yanomamo making soup out of the bones of their dead relatives—'Smorgasbord, South American style'. These 'strange' practices of non-Western peoples, along with headhunting and cannibalism, are placed side by side with other 'freaks' of nature, such as a man who swallows mice, and another who smokes through his eyeballs. Also included are photographs and descriptions of various biological anomalies and accidental impalements, as well as replicas of grisly torture devices from throughout the ages.

As he or she passes through the display, the visitor is repeatedly given the opportunity to accept or reject difference—to 'believe it or not'. Nonetheless, the possible self negation that the former could entail has already been precluded by the arrested, fetishized form of representation in which it is contained. In the process of watching these 'others' eat spiders, the self is positioned as a subject who is not

strange, and above all, in control of his or her bodily boundaries.[3] Safely contained within the display, the anxiety and 'danger' provoked by these images become sources of pleasure, and even of humor.

Although it is physically removed from the main cluster of attractions, no San Antonio tourist trek would be complete without a visit to Sea World. The centerpiece of this 250-acre aquatic theme park is Shamu®, the 'killer' whale. The very embodiment of threatening nature, Shamu® is contained within the walls of a tank, and made to perform tricks on command. Here the visitor can walk down to the side of the tank, stand before a wall of water twenty feet high, and peer into the depths without fear of innundation (a 'splash zone' is clearly marked for the more cautious visitor). During the show, there is a palpable tension as a trainer gets into the tank. As if to emphasize the extent to which this powerful force of nature has been contained, he slips his entire arm into the whale's mouth several times. The threat of castration that is associated with engulfment by the other is repeatedly courted and then averted. The world displayed for tourist consumption is a world under control, in which the threat of difference is contained and presented as entertainment.

In this constructed space, in which one can safely look eye to eye with this dangerous species-other, I was reminded of the water imagery which permeates the rhetoric of national boundaries: the attempts to 'stem the tide' of undocumented people, to regulate the 'flow' of immigrants. I recalled a billboard next to the highway in Austin, which invited passing motorists to 'Visit Sí World: Vacation in Los Dos Laredos'. I was also reminded of the valiant defenders of the Alamo, fighting a losing battle against the 'wave' of Mexicans as it innundated the fortress.

Like immigration discourse, the tourist spectacle is a text in which the relationship between the U.S. national 'self' and the Mexican as 'other' is articulated. Where the River Walk and El Mercado ostensibly celebrate ethnic diversity within the United States, the Alamo stands as a limit to this inclusionary rhetoric. Located at the center of this poor, and predominately Spanish-speaking city, the Alamo is an icon of profound anxieties about the ability of the U.S. to maintain national integrity in the face of contemporary racial and cultural diversity. At the Alamo site, as well as in the 'attractions' that have grown up around it, deep ambivalences about the meaning of the self in relation to the other are revealed and negotiated. The mythic story of the defense of the walls of the mission against insurmountable odds is reiterated as a warning against the loss of identity which the encounter with difference threatens. While the threat is symbolically recontained within these fictional spaces, 'remember the Alamo' is the epigraph that haunts the experience, warning of the continual danger of losing control of our borders.

Notes

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented to a panel on Dialogues of Difference at the 89th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, Dec. 1, 1990.

[2] I will use the term 'Mexican' to refer to persons from Mexico as well as the Spanish-speaking population of San Antonio, since the two groups are conceptually equated in the dominant discourses that I discuss.

[3] Significantly, on the occasion of a visit to Texas during the 1930s, Ripley was made an honorary member of the Texas Rangers.

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