Where is the Bawdy?
Falstaffian Politics in Gus Van Sant’s
My Own Private Idaho

Let us start, if possible, with a digression; with a look at a sort of filmic vanishing mediator between Shakespeare’s two parts of Henry IV and Gus Van Sant’s My Own Private Idaho (1991), which is the ostensible focus of this paper. Let us, then, start with Orson Welles’s Chimes at Midnight (1965).

Orson Welles begins his adaptation of Shakespeare’s Henry IV plays by showing Sir John Falstaff and Master Shallow (Fig. 1) walking through a wintery, snow-covered landscape into a, significantly, abandoned tavern, talking of “the days that [they] have seen.” “We have heard the chimes at midnight,” declares Falstaff with a nostalgic grin on his face as he and Shallow muse upon their days of philandering, when they “lay all night in the windmill in Saint George’s field” many years ago (Welles and 2 Henry IV, 3.2.185-207). Infused with a feeling of melancholy, yet with an ever-jovial Falstaff at its center, this short scene establishes Welles’s film as a kind of looking-back, a nostalgic perspective on the good old days of sex, food, drink, and bawdy humor, a time when “hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta” (Welles and 1 Henry IV, 1.2.6-10). Indeed, even though the subsequent narrative of Welles’s film eventually takes over (in terms of narrative time) this opening dialogue, placing it somewhere in the latter half of the events covered by the film, this scene also functions as a point extrinsic to the narrative, as a transcendental point from which Falstaff’s repudiation by the newly crowned Henry V and his subsequent death at the end of the film mark an end of an era and the dawning of a new, tainted, symbolic order.

By doing this, by establishing Falstaff as a voice of the utopian past speaking from a place outside of time, Welles draws from Shakespeare’s figure of Falstaff—a figure who, in Shakespeare’s plays, embodies the popular carnivalesque energy in both its politically utopian and conservative/reactionary dimensions—exclusively the Bakhtinian/utopian energy with which he imbues his creation in Chimes at Midnight. As Kathy M. Howlett writes,

The “aristocrat” in Welles espoused the values of “high culture” and repudiated the values of the marketplace. His response to market exigencies as an artist was the reactive protest of the isolated artist against a system that reduces art to formula and repetition. This attitude is reflected in Welles’s conception of Falstaff and his tavern,
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in which historical and socioeconomic realities are all but eliminated, and replaced with psychological and sexual issues. ... Welles [sees] Falstaff as an embodiment of that “lost Maytime” and dismisses the unsavory and compromised characteristics of Falstaff and his tavern world. ... For Welles the myth of the tavern was an image of recuperated utopian fantasy rather than historical reality. (170)

Even though Howlett’s judgment of Welles is a bit harsh here, she is essentially right. In *Chimes at Midnight*, Welles taps into what is today’s high—or “aristocratic”—art’s (and Shakespeare’s plays, especially his Histories, are today the epitome of literary high art) engagement with low culture in order to draw upon this culture’s utopian and liberating energies as embodied in the character of Falstaff. *But* contrary to Howlett’s argument, Welles does this as a political gesture not despite but directly as a result of his bracketing of historical and socioeconomic realities, *as a result of his act of forgetting*.

Howlett herself recognizes—if only inadvertently—this fundamentally political gesture by quoting Welles who states in relation to his Falstaff film: “Even if the good old days never existed, the fact that we can conceive of such a world is, in fact, an affirmation of the human spirit.” We, continues Welles, “must find a new period, [we] must invent [our] own England, [our] own epoch” (qtd. in Howlett 171). This utopian act of invention is, of course, a political gesture par excellence, a gesture that embodies the revolutionary energies of the 1960s that culminated in the student protests of 1968, which took place only three years after the release of Welles’s film and that Alain Badiou characterizes as a *political event* that established “the possibility of the creation of something completely new,” a “new space” within which our contemporary world still exists (“Interview”).

In a sense, then, Welles—like Mikhail Bakhtin in his study of Rabelais—tries to look forward by looking back: he sees Falstaff as both a utopian ideal from a mythic past and a future-oriented remedy to the realities of market-driven culture Welles experienced first-hand in his work within the structure of the Hollywood Studios. One of the central features of this ideal is the role of the bawdy and the disreputable that was notable even in the Elizabethan era. As Neil Rhodes writes, “1 Henry IV is the first English play to find a major imaginative stimulus in the disreputable,” and within it Falstaff represents the grotesque aesthetic element that focuses on bodily functions and utilizes grotesque language and imagery in order to “emphasize [the] festive connotations of Carnival and Lent. ... [T]hrough such connotations that moralistic interpretations ... begin to appear irrelevant” (103). In other words, Falstaff can be seen as the embodiment of the grotesque-carnivalesque aesthetic that participates in the destruction “of the body’s organic unity” in order “to create a different, grotesque vision of worlds within worlds. ... [T]his vision is [always] the same: [it signals that] the body is not an integer” (Rhodes 110) that can be smoothly interpolated into the symbolic order represented in Shakespeare’s play and Welles’s film by King Henry’s wars, the wars that form the major plotline of both these works.

So, how does Van Sant’s film engage with this Falstaffian principle? As Andrew Barnaby points out, even though “Van Sant’s adaptation is a very deliberate effort to do something new with the source material—something culturally specific” (35), in order to fully understand what *My Own Private Idaho* does differently, we need...
to understand how it draws upon its source materials and how it positions itself in relation to both Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* plays and Welles’s *Chimes at Midnight*, echoes of which are equally present in Van Sant’s film. Let us digress slightly again, and take a somewhat roundabout way of answering this question of the Falstaffian principle in Van Sant’s film by looking at the opening scene of *My Own Private Idaho*.

After a shot of a dictionary definition of narcolepsy, we are transported to a desolate road in Idaho where we meet Mike, a narcoleptic, homeless male prostitute played by River Phoenix, wearing a shirt with the name “Bob” on it (Fig. 2). He looks at his cracked yet ticking watch and narrates, “I always know where I am by the way the road looks. Like I just know that I’ve been here before. I just know that I’ve been stuck here. ... There’s not another road anywhere that looks like this road, I mean exactly like this road. It’s one kind of place. ... Like someone’s face. Like a fucked-up face.” He then howls at a rabbit at the side of the road that—naturally—runs away. “Where do you think you’re running, man,” Mike yells after him, “We’re stuck here together, you shit.” At this metanarrative moment, yelling at the audience via the rabbit, strangely faced with the deeper consequences of what he has just said, Mike starts to twitch, gently falling down onto the road and into a narcoleptic sleep. The credits roll as the images of Mike in his mother’s lap and his childhood home flash before us, as well as shots of idyllic American plains, while a country-western song about a cowboy’s life (Eddy Arnold’s “Cattle Call”) plays in the background. Then, we are shown a shot of salmon swimming upstream, to their origin, their home, and credits end. The next scene—an abrupt switch—is of a shirtless Mike receiving fellatio from a fat old man, prostituting himself for ten or twenty dollars, during which we are also shown his childhood home falling from the sky and crashing down upon the empty Idaho road. Unlike the beginning of Welles’s film, then, the opening scenes of *My Own Private Idaho* stage—as the destruction of Mike’s childhood home signifies—the loss of the possibility of a utopian past, the loss of Wellesian/Falstaffian innocence and optimism, and the loss of a transcendental vantage point from which one can muse about the “present” moment.

As the film progresses we are faced with a loose retelling of Shakespeare’s two parts of *Henry IV*, set mostly in 1990s Portland. Scott, a character played by Keanu Reeves, parallels Prince Hal; he waits to inherit a large sum of money and a place in the world of politics from his father, the mayor of Portland, while he spends his time slumming with the male prostitutes of the city. Bob Pigeon (played by William Richert), the most direct equivalent of Falstaff in Van Sant’s film, is a decrepit old man, an embodiment of a kind of “cultural desperation” (Barnaby 39), drained of Falstaff’s vitality and vigor. While he still performs the panoply of Falstaffian tropes and actions, his are bawdy words sapped of their carnivalesque energy, imbued with nothing but sterile and arid deviance. So, for example, Falstaff’s “hours,” which are
“cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks [that are] the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping houses, and the blessed sun himself [that is] a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta” (1 Henry IV, 1.2.6-10), become in Van Sant’s version “hours” that are “lines of coke, dials” that look like “the signs of gay bars” and “time itself” that is like “a fair hustler in black leather.” Van Sant’s Bob/Falstaff is here an “object to be thrown away” (Vienne-Guerrin 133). He is an object that—My Own Private Idaho’s “tavern scene” takes place in an abandoned, dilapidated building—Scott/Hal physically manipulates freely, making him “turn and turn in a strange dance” that transforms Shakespeare’s playful flyting scenes into scenes of “some kind of sexual-verbal wrestling” (Vienne-Guerrin 133). Scott’s strictly utilitarian appropriation of (especially homosexual) sex will, of course, later in the film, be fully exposed in a conversation he has with Mike, in which Mike expresses his love for Scott.  

Even though one may argue that this subject-position occupied by Bob, which celebrates drug- and gay-cultures, is inherently subversive of the dominant mode of hetero-normative capitalism, that it is a contemporary version of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, the film does not allow us this easy conclusion. Indeed, as—early in the audience’s encounter with Bob—Scott is pictured drinking Falstaff-brand beer (Fig. 3), we are shown how the kind of “folk” energy of this subject-position occupied by Bob is easily drawn into the sphere of capitalism that Scott represents.

Moreover, as Matthew Tinkcom notes, in My Own Private Idaho, Bob (Falstaff) is in many ways paralleled to Scott’s father (Henry IV): “The struggle over Scott by two older men in the film (his own father and the figure of Bob Pigeon) signals a desire to own his body for some kind of profit” (242, my emphasis). Here, Van Sant taps into the side of Falstaff that is subservient to the dominant cultural order represented by Prince Hal/Scott, a side that is, in Shakespeare’s plays, shown by Falstaff’s easy co-optation into the War Machine of Henry IV.

In contrast, in his version of Falstaff, Welles makes sure to show how Falstaff’s body and character exceed even this interpellation as a subject of war, as his Falstaff
literally spills over his body-armor (Fig. 4) and refuses to take war seriously, always trying to profit from it, consistently abiding by his Shakespearean equivalent's argument that honor is but "a word": "What is that word honor," he quips only half in jest, "Air—a trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died a Wednesday. ... Therefore I'll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon" (1 Henry IV, 5.1.133–39).

So, while Welles accents this side of Falstaff that refuses to take the values of the ruling classes seriously, Van Sant accents the side of Falstaff that toadies to Hal in order to profit from their relationship and is used by Hal in order to better serve his "kingdom." As Howlett writes, "In My Own Private Idaho the Falstaff character is every bit King Henry IV's parodied nightmare of a 'villainous abominable misleader of youth' ... without the compensating wit and charm that distinguishes Welles's performance. ... The film captures Falstaff's dark side; he is an angry and degenerate man, who is every bit as manipulative and predatory as the politician he eschews" (169).

So, aside from and in tandem with the tawdry Bob, what does the Falstaffian bawdy carnivalesque look like in My Own Private Idaho? Slightly more than an hour into his film, Van Sant stages a scene of seduction hinting at some deeper Oedipal significance in which a character, appropriately named Hans Klein (and magnificently played by Udo Kier), performs a "bawdy" male burlesque dance in a room of the aptly named "Family Tree JMotel" after showing the two protagonists—Mike and Scott—a picture of his mother. This scene of seduction ends in multiple tableaux of a sort of gay bacchanalia performed by the three characters (Fig. 5).

On the surface, then, the "bawdy" dance Klein had a "great time" performing on "many stages in Berlin" (Van Sant) and his seduction have many of the characteristics of the Bakhtinian grotesque, of a Dionysian celebration of the body that embraces "the life that ... affirms [physical pain and] suffering" (Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy 15), the life that "does not have to be justified," and that affirms "intoxication, laceration, Dionysian resurrection, suffering, anguish and disgust" (Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy 16-17).

However, the truth of this "bawdy" performance lies in its ridiculousness, in the unintended and unconscious kitsch of Klein's seduction. While Scott laughs at it derisively, Mike nearly falls into another fit of narcolepsy brought on by the image of Klein's mother (the mother-figure inevitably does this to Mike) and by yet
another moment in the film, after the first moment depicted in the opening scene and discussed above, during which an apparently deeper, instinctual (Oedipal) truth starts to become revealed to Mike, a depth-truth that inevitably leads to Mike's narcoleptic fits.

The Falstaffian bawdy, in the world of *My Own Private Idaho*, becomes cheap, tawdry, and ridiculous, only vaguely hinting at some truth that is unobtainable and out of reach. Van Sant, therefore, refuses to accept the type of carnivalesque celebrated by Welles as effective within the world of 1990s America. Instead, Van Sant offers us Mike, a second Falstaff-avatar of the film (Davis 117) who, again, is meaningfully labeled “Bob” in the opening scenes, and who is a sort of metamorphosed and internally disfigured Falstaff, a character with “virtually no capacity for self-reflection” (Arthur and Liebler 27). “Indeed,” continue Paul Arthur and Naomi C. Liebler, “cinema has produced few protagonists quite so profoundly unconscious” (27). The opening scene of the film highlights just this profound unconsciousness of the protagonist, by focusing on Mike’s attention to surface and his absolute disregard of depth. “I always know where I am by the way the road looks,” he says, comparing the road to a “fucked-up face.” And the moment he starts to penetrate the depths of his condition—by addressing the rabbit/audience during the film’s early metanarrative moment—he blanks out, incapable of facing this moment’s consequences.

As a matter of fact, both Mike and the film as a whole are incapable of moving beyond the surface presentation of events. As Mike falls into a narcoleptic fit each time he is faced with the Oedipal relationship he has with women (as represented mainly by the flashbacks of his mother) or each time he starts to penetrate beyond the surface aspects of the world he lives in, so does the film hint at Oedipal issues a number of times, each time refusing to follow through on the titillating promise of the Oedipal, of depth-psychology. So, for example, Hans Klein echoes Freud's famous case study of Little Hans, during which Freud verified and expanded upon his theory of childhood sexuality, yet the film abandons this character soon after his “bawdy” performance, in the midst of spelling his last name to a police officer who stops him on a remote highway, in what Susan Wiseman describes as “the private, agoraphobic landscape of the B52s’ song” (200) that gave the film its title. Or, at another point, Mike confronts his brother, Dick, with an accusation that he, Dick, is his real, biological father. Significantly, after this confrontation, the film refuses to follow up on this plot-point and continues following Mike’s search for his mother without further reference to it.

The question that presents itself, then, becomes: “Who or what is Mike and how exactly does he embody the subversiveness of the Falstaffian principle?” In order to answer this question, we need to keep in mind that the Falstaffian bawdy-carnivalesque is rooted in a tradition of folk humor that Bakhtin discusses in detail in his book on Rabelais. As such, the carnivalesque is a historical mode of being that challenges hegemonic culture by keeping alive unofficial subjugated knowledges with deep historical roots (Bakhtin’s book was, of course, meant to accomplish the same thing in the Soviet context). Falstaff is, therefore, as an embodiment of this tradition in both Shakespeare’s plays and in Welles’s film, a deeply historical subject.
Conversely, Mike, the Falstaff of the 1990s United States of America, the Falstaff of what is quickly becoming the twenty-first century's global village, is a product of contemporary capitalism, and as such he is profoundly ahistorical and rootless. As Karl Marx noted already in 1848, capitalism has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. (475)

Mike is a child of the twentieth century baptized in these icy waters. He is an ahistorical subject of capitalist relations, and as such, he is a creature of surface to whom depth—whether in terms of Freudian psychology or any other kind of tradition—seems like an abyss into which he is constantly drawn but in the face of which he is incapable of staying conscious.

Unlike Scott, who fully and consciously embraces this world of surfaces, Mike is thrust into the subject position he occupies without a choice, without fully embracing it and fully identifying with it. It is this gap between his subject position and his complete identification with it, this gap that is actually inherent in the very subject position he occupies, that produces the narcoleptic fits that often leave him an easy target for capitalist predators such as Scott. Yet it is this rootless subject-position that is at the same time the source of Mike's potential Falstaffian subversiveness. Because of his place in the symbolic order and the fissure that is the constituent part of his subjectivity (what Slavoj Žižek, via Jacques Lacan, calls objet petit a, defined as the little piece of the Real "which should be excluded from the framework of reality ... [and] whose exclusion [at the same time] constitutes and sustains the frame of reality" [The Ticklish Subject xiv]) Mike belongs to what Žižek calls the "part of no-part" of the symbolic whole: he belongs to a "social group which, on account of their lacking a determinate place in the 'private' order of the social hierarchy, stands directly for universality" (First as Tragedy 99). As Žižek notes, the social symbolic order currently structured by global capitalism is an order of appearance, a domain that is normalized as post-political, as a society in which issues are not issues of politics proper but only of micro- or identity-politics. It is within this order that Mike belongs to the "part of no-part." He is the symptom of the symbolic order and it is "the leftist political gesture par excellence ... to question the concrete existing universal order on behalf of its symptom, of the part which, although inherent to the existing universal order, has no 'proper place' within it" (The Ticklish Subject 269). The proper political gesture is, therefore, to "pathetically assert ... (and identif[y] with) the point of inherent exception/ exclusion, the 'abject' of the concrete positive order, as the only point of true universality" (269).

The reason that the bawdy-carnivalesque no longer plays a part in this politics of the "abject" (despite the fact that the Falstaffian carnivalesque can be theorized as precisely this kind of politics of the abject) is because in the consumerist society within
which the main superego-injunction is "Enjoy!" "it is the predominant 'normal' way of life [itself] which ... becomes 'carnivalized' with constant self-revolutionizing, reversal, crises, and reinventions" (Žižek, In Defense 197). As Brian Massumi notes, in global capitalism,

The more varied, and even erratic, the better. Normalcy starts to lose its hold. The regularities start to loosen. This loosening of normalcy is part of capitalism's dynamic. It's not a simple liberation. It's capitalism's own form of power. It's no longer disciplinary institutional power that defines everything, it's capitalism's power to produce variety—because markets get saturated. Produce variety and you produce a niche market. The oddest of affective tendencies are okay—as long as they pay. Capitalism starts intensifying or diversifying affect, but only in order to extract surplus-value. ... There's been a certain kind of convergence between the dynamic of capitalist power and the dynamic of resistance. (197)

So precisely what kind of resistance does Mike offer from within the field determined by capitalist hegemony? In a scene in which he confesses his love for Scott in a cliché scene from cowboy movies, with two men resting next to a fire in the open prairies of America, Mike is able to momentarily subvert Scott's cynicism precisely because he has been cut off from the way sentimental expression has been historically overdetermined. "I love you and you don't pay me," he simply states to Scott's cynical musings on the nature of male-male relationships (i.e. "It's when you start doing things for free that you start to grow wings," says Scott earlier in the film). It is this kind of naïve position that forms the precondition for the formation of a subversive and revolutionary political subjectivity. Indeed, as Van Sant himself notes, Phoenix's performance in this scene augmented the initial script that "had Mike less gay and even less capable of being in love. River made the character more gay," Van Sant affirms. "I think that was a political act on his part" (Román 320, my emphasis).

More explicitly, Mike's naïveté combined with his attention to surface and disregard of depth testify to the fact that his subject-position is built on a foundation of antimemory (Deleuze and Guattari 294), a short-term memory that "includes forgetting as a process" (Deleuze and Guattari 16) in opposition to long-term memory that cannot disentangle itself from the fetters imposed upon it by the processes of what Badiou calls Western democratic materialism, a socio-political form that is rooted in the global capitalist economy. The capitalist subjectivity represented by Scott functions by means of long-term memory, which "always [has] a reterritorializ[ing] function" (Deleuze and Guattari 294) and relegates every moment to the axiomatic of moneyed exchange. Early in the film, Scott narrates from the cover of a magazine on a rack at a sex shop: "I never thought I could make it as a real model.... 'Cause I'm better at full-body poses. It's alright as long as the photographer doesn't come on to you and expect something for nothing. I'm trying to make a living. I like to have a professional attitude." He reiterates this message in the scene in which Mike expresses his love for him as the two sit by the fire: "I only have sex with a guy for money," he states, adding: "And two guys can't love each other."

Because it functions at the foundation of pure economic exchange, Scott's world is the world of democratic materialism in which "there are only bodies and languages"
192/Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*) 1): “the body is the only concrete instance for productive individuals aspiring to enjoyment” and all languages “recognize the universal juridical and normative equality of languages” (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*) 2). In other words, the “equality of difference” is guaranteed by the capitalist axiomatic because and as long as it does not interfere with this axiomatic. Scott can, hence, spend the majority of the film associating with homeless homosexual prostitutes—the symptoms of the capitalist symbolic order—and, at the end of the film, calmly and with a deeply ingrained sense of duty and righteousness, reject them in order to fill the position in this very symbolic order left empty by the death of his father: “I don’t know you, old man,” Scott says to Bob with his back turned to him near the end of the film; “There was a time when I had the need to learn from you, my former psychedelic teacher. And although I love you more dearly than my dead father, I have to turn away.”

Mike, on the other hand, remains a symptom through-and-through. His love for Scott and his politically subversive potential, rooted in the fissure at the base of his subjectivity and in the practice of antimemory, partake and arise out of the same process of truth, a “truth [that] is forgetful,” a truth that is the forgetting of forgetting, the radical interruption, caught up in the sequence of its effects. And this forgetting is not the simple forgetting of this or that, but the forgetting of time itself: the moment when we live as if time (this time) had never existed, or, in conformity with the profound maxim of Aristotle, as if we were immortal—for the common being of all time is death. This... is the real experience of (political) revolutions [and] (amorous) passions.... It is in this abolition of time that is engendered the eternity of truths. (Badiou, *Deleuze*) 65)

Of course, Mike’s naïve confession of love and attention to surface that are the preconditions for a politically subversive subjectivity within the capitalist symbolic order are simply a negative gesture, a form requiring positive content and a way to transcend itself as pure negation. In other words, they require a negation of negation, a kind of Wellesian act of communitarian imagination that can lead us beyond the now, an act that Mike, by the end of the film, reaches toward but does not necessarily accomplish.

The final scene of Van Sant’s film is thoroughly ambiguous. It shows Mike on the same road he stood on at the beginning of the film, saying, “This road will never end; it probably goes all around the world,” then falling into a narcoleptic fit in a “private, agoraphobic [Idaho] landscape” (Wiseman 200), having his shoes and bag stolen by two men, and then picked up by a stranger in a red automobile while “America the Beautiful” plays in the background. As we are shown the image of Mike’s childhood home (now magically reassembled) and as the words “have a nice day” flash across the screen, we are left wondering whether Mike and the stranger in the red car have managed to build a sympathetic community of two, or whether something more menacing has just taken place. Consequently, in order to force a politically affirmative conclusion upon this ambiguous ending, it is precisely here that the lessons of Welles’s (Bakhtinian) Falstaff become important. As Welles states, we “must find a new period, [we] must invent [our] own England, [our] own epoch” in order to transcend
the present moment in an act of forgetting that is at the same time a moment of projecting a community of symptoms into a better future.

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Notes

1 This new symbolic order is in Welles's film hinted at even before Prince Hal becomes King Henry V. Early in the film, in what Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin calls “the flying scenes” that take place mostly in Falstaff’s tavern-world, Welles transforms Shakespeare’s play’s “skirmishes of wit” (121) between Falstaff and Prince Hal into a register of “the fascination/repulsion relationship [between Falstaff and Hal] that the film constantly suggests” (128–29). Traditionally, according to Vienne-Guerrin, these skirmishes are seen as being a part of an “innocuous” ritual that takes place in the “playful context of the tavern scenes” and should therefore “not create any ‘linguistic injury’” (122). In fact, not only should they not create any linguistic injury, but these playful skirmishes are also kinds of “love scenes based on a non-aggression pact and on a form of collaboration” (123), a “kind of teasing” and “an expression of group solidarity” (Allan and Burridge, qtd. in Vienne-Guerrin 123). However, in Welles’s film, these scenes embody an “instability that is inherent in these exchanges of abuse and in their reception” (130). Indeed, Welles’s rewriting and transposition of what Vienne-Guerrin terms the “no abuse” episode of 2 Henry IV clearly anticipates Falstaff’s final repudiation by Hal: “The ‘no abuse’ episode as it is rewritten by Welles prolongs this interrupted flyting episode.... By staging this episode from Part Two, Welles shows that Falstaff is now literally knocked out.... In the play, Falstaff says that he has not abused Hal, that he did not mean to abuse him. In Welles’s film, Falstaff asks Hal not to abuse him, as if he were too old for the game, as if he no longer could bear the flyting combat that had left him dumb in the play-acting scene” (131).

2 For a description of the progressive/utopian pole of the carnivalesque, see Bakhtin’s Rabelais, and for a description of its reactionary pole, see Rocco Coronato’s Jonson versus Bakhtin or Peter Stallybrass and Allon White’s The Politics and Poetics of Transgression.

3 See, for example, Clinton Heylin’s Despite the System: Orson Welles versus the Hollywood Studios, or Jonathan Rosenbaum’s Discovering Orson Welles.

4 The lyrics of the part of Eddy Arnold’s “Cattle Call” played over the opening credits of the film:

(Yodeling).
The cattle are prowlin’,
The coyotes are howlin’
Way out where the doggies bawl.
Where spurs are a-jinglin’,
Our cowboy is singing
This lonesome cattle call:
(Yodeling).
He rides in the sun
’Till the day’s work is done
And he rounds up the cattle each fall.
(Yodeling).
For a discussion of byting in Shakespeare's plays and in Welles's and Van Sant's films, see Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin's "Flying on Screen."

To Mike's sincere expression of love, Scott will answer simply: "I only have sex with a guy for money. And two guys can't love each other." See page 191 for further discussion of this scene.

Here are the lyrics of B52s' "Private Idaho," which gave the film its title.

You're living in your own private Idaho;
Living in your own private Idaho.
Underground like a wild potato.
Don't go on the patio.
Beware of the pool;
Blue bottomless pool.
It leads you straight
Right through the gate
That opens on the pool.
You're living in your own private Idaho.
You're living in your own private Idaho.

Keep off the path, beware the gate,
Watch out for signs that say "hidden driveways."
Don't let the chlorine in your eyes
Blind you to the awful surprise
That's waiting for you at
The bottom of the bottomless blue—blue—blue pool.

You're living in your own private Idaho.
You're out of control, the rivers that roll,
You fell into the water and down to Idaho.
Get out of that state,
Get out of that state you're in.
You better beware.
You're living in your own private Idaho.
You're living in your own private Idaho.

Keep off the patio,
Keep off the path.
The lawn may be green
But you better not be seen
Walking through the gate that leads you down,
Down to a pool fraught with danger;
It's a pool full of strangers.

You're living in your own private Idaho,
Where do I go from here to a better state than this?
Well, don't be blind to the big surprise
Swimming round and round like the deadly hand
Of a radium clock ... at the bottom ... of the pool.

Get out of that state,
Get out of that state.
You're living in your own private Idaho,
Living in your own private ... Idaho.
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Scott, nurtured in the world of money and privilege, says, for example, of gay sex: "It's when you start doing things for free that you start to grow wings" to which Mike responds with an uncomprehending "Huh?"

**Works Cited**


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196/Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*


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