

**At the interplace:
Giant, Tino Villanueva
and America's promise of diversity**

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Abstract

The two founding conceptions of the “sublime” are Burke’s and Kant’s. Drawing from Casey (and Buber), the article introduces a third concept of the “interplace”, an in-between, relational space of mutuality. Building on this notion, it is argued that Tino Villanueva’s collection *Scene from the Movie GIANT*, written in response to the climactic scene of the film *Giant*, enacts an intervention into the scene’s interpellating force and, in so doing, doubly embodies the interplace. Further, it is argued that the film’s two scenes stage allegorically an interplace of the white American patriarchy’s dilemmas of the 1950s. The scenes problematize America’s ability to change and follow through on the promise of reconciliation in diversity. The last section of the paper reviews a number of paradigmatic challenges America has been rehearsing in the past decades and argues that the current backlash against the transformative agenda constitutes a disappointment of the hopes expressed by *Giant* and Villanueva. The divisive rhetoric of today represents a retreat from the interplace of dialog.

Keywords

diversity, *Giant*, interplace, racism, sublime, Tino Villanueva

**Interplace (pomiędzy):
Giant, Tino Villanueva
i amerykańska obietnica różnorodności**

Abstrakt

Dwie założycielskie koncepcje pojęcia “sublime” pochodzą od Burke’a i Kanta. Czerpiąc z propozycji Casey’a (i Bubera), artykuł wprowadza trzecią koncepcję *interplace* jako przestrzeni dialogu w miejscu „pomiędzy”. Pojęcie to zastosowane jest do analizy zbioru poetyckiego *Scene from the Movie GIANT* Tino Villanuevy, który powstał w odpowiedzi na kulminacyjną scenę filmu *Gigant*. W dalszej części artykuł dowodzi, że dwie sceny filmu można traktować jako alegoryczne przedstawienie *interplace* dylematów białego amerykańskiego patriarchy w latach 50. XX wieku. Sceny te problematyzują zdolność Ameryki do zmiany i pojednania w różnorodności. W ostatniej części zarysowane są wyzwania paradygmatyczne, z jakimi zmagala się Ameryka w ostatnich dekadach, a zwrot ku konserwatyzmowi zinterpretowany jest jako zawiedzenie nadziei *Giganta* i Villanuevy. Rozłamowa retoryka współczesności stanowi ucieczkę od dialogicznego *interplace*.

Słowa kluczowe

Giant, *interplace*, rasizm, różnorodność, Tino Villanueva, wzniosłość

Discussing landscape representation, Edward Casey reviews the definitions of the sublime proposed by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. He reminds us that, for Burke, the natural outside, especially in its dimensions of height and depth, is “the literal [bearer] of the sublime” (Casey 2002: 48). For Kant, on the other hand, the sublimity “stems from within” (Casey 2002: 48), from our rational ideation. As Kant says, the out-size, extravagant natural phenomena only “lend” themselves “to the presentation of a sublimity discoverable in the mind” (Casey 2002: 48); nature only “excites” the sublime as an idea *in us* (Casey 2002: 52). Kant believes that it is by an act of

“subreption” (Casey 2002: 49) or self-deception that we attribute sublimity to nature “in place of [respect] for the idea of humanity in our own self – the Subject” (Casey 2002: 49). In other words, for Burke the sublime resides in a “physical site of *rerum natura*” whereas for Kant, it is located in a “psychical place, a *locus mentis*” (Casey 2002: 50).

Casey argues that both conceptions – Kant’s idea of our mental “pre-eminence above nature” (Casey 2002: 54) and Burke’s emphasis on the “omnipotence of nature” (Casey 2002: 54) – are locked in the either/or dualism and miss “a deeper accord wherein the sublime is rooted” (Casey 2002: 54). The accord he refers to is the “coeval commixture” (Casey 2002: 54) of mind and nature which is founded on “their mutual interaction, their intense interplay” (Casey 2002: 54) in the circum-ambience of the places of landscape. Casey explains that in the experience of nature, I do not only take in or sublimate a given physical scene so that it becomes my psychic space or “psychotopia” (Casey 2002: 51), but I also perform a “mental movement” (Casey 2002: 54) into nature; a movement in the form of ideas (including socially and culturally inflected ideas, i.e.: the ideas of the sublime) as well as “phantasms that cannot be reduced to merely reproductive icons” (Casey 2002: 54).¹ In doing so, I endow nature with meaning which exceeds the perceived scene just as the “natural world exceeds what reason and imagination construct independently of it” (Casey 2002: 54). Therefore “[t]rue sublimity”, Casey (2002: 54) concludes, is relational and happens across differences; like “the image or phantasm that conveys it [...] it must exist *some-where between* mind and nature” (my emphasis). In other words, Casey argues, the encounter with landscape occurs neither out there in the spectacular outside nor internally in me but always at the “interplace”, at that “place between places” (2002: 348). Martin Buber’s arguments about the relation-

¹ Casey, drawing on Aristotle, points out that a “phantasm [...] has a perceptible form *common to* sensuous appearances and to the mind that apprehends them and is not based on likeness in the manner of strictly iconic images” (2002: 54).

ality of experience and about encounter as a “revelation” can help explain the interplace further. Buber holds that, in the words of Michael Zank, “no isolated I exists apart from relationship to an other”, “individuated elements realize themselves in relations, forming patterns that burst into life, grow, vanish, and revive” (Zank 2002). Those relations, which Buber calls “I-Thou”, are polymorphous and inter-subjective, and transform “each figure into an ultimate and mysterious center of value” (Zank 2002). To realize such a transformation is to experience the encounter as a moment of revelation of “presence” (*Gegenwart*): “In contrast to ‘object’ (*Gegenstand*), the presence revealed by revelation as encounter occupies the space ‘in between’ the subject and an other (a tree, a person, a work of art, God). This ‘in between’ space is defined as ‘mutual’ (*gegenseitig*)” (Zank 2002). As an example of this theory of mutuality consider Buber’s story “The Walking Stick and the Tree”:² “I pressed my walking stick against a trunk of an oak tree. Then I felt in twofold fashion my contact with being: here, where I held the stick, and there, where it touched the bark. Apparently only where I was, I nonetheless found myself there too where I found the tree” (2002 [1967]: 49). For Buber, the stick symbolizes the space of dialog. He explains that as he extends himself with the stick he “means”, intends, and calls the Other into being. At the same time, he also “delegate[s]” himself to the Other in “pure vibration” which “remains there” (2002 [1967]: 50). Buber concludes: “I encompass him to whom I turn” (2002 [1967]: 50). But, to build on this, it can also be argued that the Other is not purely subject to the encompassment by my agency. It responds to the stick’s pressure, it reciprocates with its own vibration and, in turn, delegates itself to me. Thus, the stick is a conductor; it symbolizes the arena of mutuality. The interplace is, thus, a channel, always in flux. The challenge to landscape representation would be then not to render a topographic verisimilitude but to cap-

² I want to thank Professor Katarzyna Jerzak for indicating to me the parallel between the concept of the interplace and Buber’s theory.

ture that moment of flux, of “presence” or *accord of mind and nature*, or, as Casey says, to concretize “the topopoetry” which, he aptly notes, “is at stake in all artistic representation” (2002: 55).

The notion of the interplace, thus, names a liminal zone of the encounter between ontologies. In this way, the interplace provides a useful model for thinking of art, not only of landscape art, as well as of other forms of doing/experience as the space of imbrication between the personal and the Other.

Chicano poet Tino Villanueva’s collection *Scene from the Movie GIANT* (1993) can arguably be taken to embody the notion of the interplace albeit in a different context. Here, the lyrical Eye revisits a moment from his adolescence when, at fourteen, he sat at a San Marcos, TX movie theater and watched *Giant*, a 1956 blockbuster set in Texas, adapted from Edna Ferber’s novel of the same name. Directed by George Stevens, the film’s stars were, among others, Rock Hudson as Bick Benedict, a patriarch Texan rancher, and Elisabeth Taylor as his Yankee wife Leslie Lynnton.³ In the movie’s climactic scene, Benedict clashes with Sarge, the owner of a roadside diner, who refuses to serve a Mexican family. The Benedicts’ son Jordy has recently married Juana, a Mexican woman, and Bick, whose hitherto world-view and labor practices accepted segregation as the norm, is now coming to terms with having a mixed-race grandson, Jordan IV. When Sarge, a giant of a man, attempts to eject the Mexican patrons by saying “Your money is no good here”, Bick intervenes. He first pleads with Sarge but when the latter scoffs at the idea of letting Mexicans eat at his place, the two white men break into a fist-fight.

Villanueva builds the whole collection around that scene and his adolescent experience of it, when in the mute and feeble Mexican characters he recognized himself and his family – an experience which rendered him equally helpless, “caught”

³ The film is also remembered as the last work of James Dean as Jett Rink. Released posthumously, it earned Dean a nomination for the Best Actor Academy Award in 1957.

and “locked into a back-row seat [...] thin, flickering / [...] unthought-of” (1993: 2).

The collection can be taken to record at least two interplaces. The first is the child’s paralysis in the face of the alienating insult of the screen, the numbness effected by an outside force and thus comparable to the Burkean sublime or to Schopenhauer’s definition of the term as a “sight of a power beyond all comparison, superior to the individual, and threatening him with annihilation” (Sandywell 2011: 559). The only difference is that this emotion is caused not by a “terrifying” natural horizon; this is the American sublime of segregation and racist representations which, like any sublime, “escapes the everyday forms of language” (Sandywell 2011: 559). The interplace the teenage Villanueva experiences, the revelation or presence of the Other, is beyond his powers of comprehension; the weight of the film’s images, the “weightless nobodies” of the Mexican characters, “[a] no-thing, who could have been any of us” (1993: 24), crushes his youthful subjectivity. Thus, left “[w]ithout words, the child / [begins] to feel mortal, his mind breaking into awfulness” (1993: 20). He loses breath and voice, falls into “stammer” (1993: 9); his self disintegrates (1993: 17): “something begins to go from you [...] to / Wither on the floor” (1993: 19). His future, “the way to dream / Outside myself” (1993: 17), that Buberian dream of encounter in revelation (*Gegenwart*) and mutuality (*gegenseitig*), now seems prematurely foreclosed as he realizes that “Sarge, or someone / Like him, can banish you from this / Hamburger joint; from the rest of your / Life not yet entered; from this Holiday Theater and all sense of place” (1993: 18). The screen’s images consume him: “From inside, a small / Fire began to burn like deep doubt” (1993: 17) and his “soul, deep is offended” (1993: 19). An unfathomable “fallingrief of unpleasure” overcomes him, causing an overpowering, benumbed confusion: “You want to go mad or die, but turn morose instead” (1993: 19). The child sinks into insignificance: you “wish you / Could dissolve yourself [...] fade to black” (1993: 19). Thus, the young

viewer becomes a mere shadow, a “penumbra” (1993: 31), whose voice is “a great shout which never came”, reduced to “dumb misery” (1993: 32), a see-through existence of “muteness”, “emptied of meaning” (1993: 33), subject to consuming “nothingness burning through all thought” (1993: 34).

If this first interplace of the movie theater experience is the space of defeat which leaves the boy walking in “soft-hollowed steps” (1993: 33) to the Mexican neighborhood’s “border / feeling I was nothing” (1993: 34), the collection as a whole enacts a mental movement into the scene, that is, it offers itself as another interplace in which the subjectivity of the now mature poet enters into reciprocity of coeval commixture with the film. The adult poet’s experience, imagination and socio-cultural-linguistic expertise allow him now, years after the cinema’s trauma, to reclaim voice and agency. Villanueva, clearly mirroring Hamlet’s design and Shakespearean line, proclaims: “*the / poem’s the thing wherein I’ll etch the semblance / of the film*” (1993: 39).⁴ Villanueva says: “*what I took in that afternoon took root and a / quiet vehemence arose. It arose in language / [...] / Now I am because I write*” (1993: 40; my emphasis). In other words, he has sublimated the scene to the point that now he is able to re-assume the presence or *Gegenwart*, to seek talking back to it at that place of mutuality or *gegenseitig*. With the retelling of the experience, Villanueva writes himself, his younger self, and the Mexican characters of the screen back into existence, into “being human / (when the teller is the tale being told)” (1993: 42). Thus, for example, in “Text for a *Vaquero*: Flashback” he appends to the film the history and the “youthful air” (1993: 11) dreams of the Old Man Polo, the film’s nameless Mexican man whom Sarge grabs in “the false hell of the hamburger place” (1993: 12). In this sense, Villanueva attempts to decenter the giant of the film’s racist sublime. To this end, to destroy the

⁴ Shakespeare has Hamlet say the last line of Act II this way: “The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.” I want to thank Professor Jean Ward for pointing this out to me.

border instituted by the Technicolor screen which initially immobilized him, he appropriates, as Ann Marie Stock observes, the cinematic discourse (“Scene”, “Flashback”, “Stop-Action”, “Fade-Out-Fade-In”) and film techniques (frame-by-frame recollection, asynchronous sound). In the finale his voice transforms: he pollutes and hybridizes the hitherto dominant English language by introducing Spanish syntax and words, and, ultimately, in the last lines, he switches to Spanish altogether: “*O vida vivida y por venir* [Oh life lived and this to come]” (1993: 42). These are his final words, now that he has reclaimed his past and, in so doing, regained control over his destiny.

In other words, the collection’s two interplaces problematize Kant’s depersonalized, unmarked claims about our ideational powers. Villanueva’s collection clearly exposes the fiction of the universal thinking subject and indicates that each subject is *marked* with nuances of age, as well as ethnic and linguistic background. In the first instance, the young protagonist does not simply fall for subreption but rather is genuinely overwhelmed by the sublime of the scene just as he desperately attempts to resist it, as if gasping for air. The problem is that he is innocent and trapped in his seat with no Buberian stick at hand, no words or ideas in him. The interplace between him and the film is the site of alienation, distress, loss, incomprehension, fragmentation. It is only as a mature poet that Villanueva will ask: “Can two fighters / bring out a third?” (1993: 27-28); only then will he become this third force and create what Stock has called a “revisionist cine-poetry”, a polymorphous, inter-subjective form to retroactively resist the scene’s spell, to move into it or, as Buber says, to “encompass” it and transform it on his own terms.

If Villanueva concentrates on the scene’s alienating effect on his own self and his larger Mexican American community, there is also another, more general, way to think of the fight scene at Sarge’s Place. I mentioned that Benedict is moved to react because he himself, now having a Mexican daughter-in-

law and a half-Mexican grandson, is transitioning across the border of his own preconceptions, from a strict segregationist to a more inclusive position. If that transition is reluctant at first, Sarge's rude behavior toward the Mexican patrons forces him to assume agency, to intervene into what previously would have been for his earlier self a "natural", normalized fact of Texas life. However, it seems that Benedict is thrust into the interplace to meet the racist sublime of patriarchal white America not because he genuinely cares about those Others but because his own honor – his brown grandson sitting next to him – is offended. In other words, as the film offers the scene as a response to the *Zeitgeist*, to issues of racial dictatorship America was no longer able to ignore in the mid-1950s, it also signals that it is the white conscience that is in question and the scene is basically an allegory of a feud in the house of white patriarchy. The accompaniment of "The Yellow Rose of Texas", Mitch Miller's 1955 hit version of an old minstrel song and a Confederate anthem, stands for the resiliency of the *ancien regime*. And the sign, "WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO REFUSE SERVICE TO ANYONE", which Sarge drops at the fallen Bick's chest, represents the legal framework (notice the frame of the sign) which underpins the cultural practices of segregation or, as Villanueva says, the "writ" which "legitimizes his [Sarge's] fists" (1993: 28).

Thus, two giants confront each other. Villanueva says: "they have become two minds / Settling a border dispute" (1993: 26). But I am tempted to think that Bick is fighting here his own, larger *alter-ego*. The giant we and the young Villanueva root for is big but still less imposing than the villain; Sarge, that more gigantic giant, "with too much muscle" (Villanueva 1993: 27) is literally undefeatable. A "wollop [...] up-vaults [Benedict] over the counter, / As over a line in a house divided at heart" writes Villanueva (1993: 27). Bick's defeat is a moral victory but also sends a foreboding message: the fight for equality has to take place within the White Man's mind. It will be vicious, dangerous, bloody, and will involve challenging the

whole cultural and legal apparatus, for Sarge, for now, stands victorious “in glory like a / Law that stands for other laws” (Villanueva 1993: 28).

That the titular Giant is in fact the White Man’s conscience is confirmed by the film’s finale. Bick recuperates with Leslie by his side, while their two grandsons, one blond, blue-eyed and the other brown, stand and watch them from a playpen nearby. Bick laments that his life has been a failure, to which Leslie replies: “I think you’re great. [...] all that glamour stuff you used to do to dazzle me [...] none of it ever made you quite as big a man to me as you were on the floor of Sarge’s hamburger joint. When you tumbled rearward and landed crashing into that pile of dirty dishes you were at last my hero”. The camera transitions to the playpen. Behind the cousins stand a white lamb and a black calf corresponding to their respective colors. A close up on the blue eyes; cut to a close up on the brown face. The end.

The notion of the interplace helps us to understand the scene not quite literally. The last words belong to Bick and so, it can be argued, do the film’s last frames. It is not we, the viewers, who are looking at the toddlers, but rather what we see is the movement of Benedict, the white hero, into the scene of his family’s diversity. The finale enacts Bick’s entrance into the interplace between him and his grandsons. It signals both hope and reservations, as well as potential compromise. How if not as an allegory of doubt should we read the presence of two different species behind the children? The lamb, a symbol of “purity, innocence, meekness” (Cirlot 2001 [1971]: 176), stands behind the white boy. The black calf which hides behind Jordan IV is a future bull and may evoke very different connotations – fecundity, penetration, and death (Cirlot 2001 [1971]: 3-34). And, if the image is allegorical, what about the bars of the playpen’s fence? Does it stand for a border barring Otherness – children’s innocence as well as racial difference – from the patriarch’s nomos?

The film, thus, ends with uneasy questions about the future of racial relations in America. On the one hand, it indicates that the American family has changed and will inevitably hybridize. The image of two innocent children carries on the surface a promise of harmonious co-existence. And yet, at the same time, in its suggestive symbolism, the frames ponder the Giant's, the White Patriarchal Order's, genuine intention to afford them equal opportunity, to instill in them the moral code of plurality in difference. Is diversity's promise going to be compromised as the cousins grow? What education will the Giant afford them? The interplace of Bick's gaze poses a challenge to America's Giant: as it appeals to *His* conscience it also asks about *His* will to change, to deserve Leslie's definition of a hero who dazzles not with "fine riding and all that fancy roping, all that glamor stuff" but who, even if it takes winding up on the floor "in the middle of a salad", will be able to defend the principles of the New American Family and, in so doing, become, as Leslie says elatedly of the Benedicts, a "real big success!"

The years that followed the film's premiere illustrated how hard the challenge was; that, even though reforms would come, none of them came easy and none could ever be taken for granted. These reforms were pushed for and sacrificed for mostly by minorities, but it took important allies from among the ranks of the Giant to accomplish them. Many wanted to believe that the Giant embraced *His* better self. After all, even if progress towards them was managerial and not without flaws, diversity and multiculturalism became, or so we thought, the new norm in American official discourse; the metaphors which helped America navigate the post-Civil Rights years and provided important moral leverage for U.S. diplomacy.

As the demographics changed and minorities acquired a measure of visibility, many optimistically believed that the United States had finally internationalized and was on course to becoming, in Ishmael Reed's proclamation, "the first univer-

sal nation” (Gray 2011: 528), which, by accepting a diversity of epistemologies, would create a “new, inclusive [...] common culture” (Reed 1998: xxvi). In 1989 Chicano performance artist/writer, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, diagnosed that the U.S. was undergoing “borderization”: “Today, if there is a dominant culture, it is border culture” (Gómez-Peña 1993: 46). “The border is all we share / *La frontera es lo único que compartimos*” (Gómez-Peña 1993: 47), he wrote. In 1996 he announced the arrival of the “New World Border – a great trans- and intercontinental border zone, a place in which no centers remain”, where “hybridity is the dominant culture” (1996: 7), and the dominant sensibility is that of an exile. Border-crossings, he said, have become an everyday practice which, although posing new challenges and demanding skills in intercultural dialog, would inevitably lead to a “gringostroika”, a transculturation of the dominant cultural paradigms of the U.S.

This optimistic anticipation of the *perestroika* of the Giant reverberated in the arts and scholarly debates of the time. In Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (1993), the prophet of the model New American Family is a gay AIDS survivor. In *Multi-America* (1998), Robert Elliot Fox, of Polish Catholic ancestry, proposes that “*Mestizaje*, Creolization – is the future [...] [and] America never was ‘white’” (1998: 15). Lamenting the resiliency of normative whiteness, Fox demands a shift of consciousness to post-whiteness: “[W]hiteness must reproduce itself with each generation”, but that is precisely why, he says, “one can refuse to reproduce it. I can’t become black, but I can become post-white” (1998: 12) for, “[p]ost-white means pan-human” (1998: 11). American Studies scholars reflected similar concerns by proposing that their field should now be viewed as “part of a complex, transnational dialogue that breaks down [...] notions of exceptionalism and essentialism by drawing on disjunctions and similarities between cultures, challenging mythic unity with diversity and critique” (Campbell and Kean 2006 [1997]: 17). This “transnational turn” sought to redefine American identity paradigms by alternative models of belong-

ing, not restricted by race, nationhood, or bounded national territory. It sought to “relativise” and “re-examine the idea of nation and its romantic attachment to roots and essential, fixed identity, and supplement it with a sense of ‘routes’” (Campbell and Kean 2006 [1997]: 17-18). Janice Radway’s American Studies Association presidential address “What’s in the Name?” (1998), in which she invited a reconceptualization of the field in terms of, for example, postnationality, postcoloniality and hemispheric orientation, is but one illustration of such paradigm shifts (Pease 2010: 263-283).

Of course, such debates met dogged opposition. Pat Buchanan, who twice sought Republican presidential nomination in the 1990s, exhorted whites to “‘take back our country’, suggesting that it has already been lost, to multiculturalists, perhaps” (Williams 1998: 463). The slogan resurfaced in the Tea Party movement. Realizing the challenges ahead, John A. Williams, another contributor to *Multi-America*, argued that multiculturalism was the country’s “last best hope” (1998: 465).

The two cousins from *Giant* have now lived for sixty plus years. Their time has been marked by the interplace from the beginning. But at what point in their lives did the fence that initially barred them from their grandpa turn into a wall between them? When did they look at each other with a stranger’s eyes? When was the first time that Jordy fell mute with the incomprehensibility of a racial insult? What did his cousin, the blue-eyed heir of the Giant, do about it? Did the cousins stick together “exercising intracommunal support in all things” (Williams 1998: 465), knowing that “[w]e live therefore we cross” (Gómez-Peña 1996: 138)? Or did the American sublime, that interpellating, “immovable force” (Williams 1998: 462) of racism destroy them?

On June 16, 2015, Donald Trump announced his run for the Republican nomination by erecting an imaginary wall at the heart of this American family: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. [...] They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists”. In a later inter-

view he hungered for a nativist security state: “You have people come in [...] from all over, that are killers and rapists and they’re coming to this country” (Scott 2015). His slogan “Make America Great Again” was a thinly veiled reprise of Buchanan’s call and what Bill Clinton rightly diagnosed as “a racist dog whistle to white Southerners” (Chasmar 2016). Trump’s win and continuing praise from his base is an indicator of the Giant’s fatigue with social and symbolic transformations. It is, to use Williams, a “backhanded slap of white Americans” (1998: 465) meted out to little Jordy, his mature self of today, Villanueva, and their extended families. It is also a slap in Leslie’s face to the promise she sees in her husband’s “glorious” fight, the promise of the American Giant’s ability to transform. Leslie’s optimism about the moral redemption of the American family clashes today against the surge of what Williams identifies as “the practice and theory that every society possess a collective goat to blame when things are going badly”. The figure of the terrifying Other (Mexican, Muslim, immigrant) seems to be ever in demand in America. Perhaps this is so because in a truly egalitarian society the key assumptions of whiteness would have to be addressed and the collective scapegoats would be “difficult to discern” (Williams 1998: 463) one from another. This scares Trump and his constituents.

The figure of the terrifying Other from Trump’s program can be compared to the idea of the Burkean sublime. The figure of a border wall, on the other hand, mobilizes an imaginary of resistance not unlike that which Kant calls “*Widerstein*” or our capacity to realize “a dominion which reason exercises over sensibility” (Kant in Casey 2002: 48). If, learning from Ferber, Stevens, Villanueva, Bick, Leslie, Old Man Polo and others, the mid-twentieth century America dared to begin to dream of the social space as a dialogic interplace, the conservative agenda culminating in the Trump-era abandons the encounter, slides back into the either/or trenches and, in so doing, disappoints Leslie’s prophecy of the familial “real big success!”, bracketing it as a sheer fantasy.

This retreat does not make America “Great”. It reduces it to a bully in a playpen who, once he tastes the fruits of undeserved privilege, turns cruelly against his closest cousin. If genealogically *Giant* stands as the prophecy of white America’s ability to change, Trump America’s impulses may be read as an attempt to intervene in the message of the classic film, to forestall the moral validation of the Giant’s transformation in the last scenes. This America longs to turn back the clock to return to the sublime interplace of Sarge’s Place and restage the film’s resolution. It asks: what if it was the law and order of Sarge and not our empathy in a “house divided at heart” that dictated morals? A “wollop [...] up-vaults” Bick. Zoom in on the cold “writ”:

WE RESERVE
THE RIGHT
TO REFUSE SERVICE
TO ANYONE

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