
Who's Afraid of the Virgin Wolf Man? Or, the Other Meaning of Auto-Eroticism

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Live dangerously. Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius.

—*Nietzsche*

Pretext

Websites, books and articles dedicated to the accounting of the drive-in industry are readily available. They dutifully record how the number of drive-ins exploded during the optimistic 1950s and declined in the 1960s and '70s, nearly dying-out altogether in the 1980s with the advent of home video machines, cable television and the like. They reveal how audience demographics changed over these decades. How World War II with its rationing of rubber, gasoline and other essentials to auto-mobility forced many drive-ins to close for the good of the collective. Other articles describe the efforts of some loyalists to the form trying to "keep hope alive" with a pseudo-revival at the turn of the millennium. Optimists anxiously chart progress with about 11 DIs reopening and fully four new ones built since 1995! They mark the rebirth with special showings featuring "classic cars" carrying equally, though not so classically, aging "Baby Boomers." More and more

literature and documentary text is appearing as a manifest ersatz nostalgia for the old "ozoners." Boomers miss them but they were precisely the people who abandoned them in the first place and for reasons selective memory censors.

Since several chapters in this volume have set out to recount the technological and political-economic history of the drive-in theater form along with its retroactively glorified "B-grade" contents, this chapter seeks to take a different path. In this chapter, I attempt a very cursory survey of the phenomenology of the drive-in theater experience, the necessary conditions for its birth and the romantic memories it has spawned in the wake of its decline. In this chapter, I focus on the folk phenomenon and its essentially local form, for in the instance of the drive-in theater the form competes with the content for significance, asserting locale as a meaningful part of personal geography. With the continual individuation of the American psyche, the great "people's palaces" that showcased the Depression



era cinema have become minimalized in size and décor. At the center of the entire shift is the emergence of what Jean Gebser has called hypertrophic egocentrism, perspectivism as an ironic ideal.¹ For both the grandiosity of the big outdoor screen and the reductionism of the palace to the strip mall “multiplex” owe everything to the superabundance of personal motorized transportation in the form of the automobile, which in turn presupposes an attitude of increasing individualism and at the same time neocolonial resource consumption on a scale never before seen in human history. While one may argue that all art is a wasteful luxury, the drive-in is a perfect example of kitsch art, a moment in time where the mob can afford extravagance, where high production values occasionally meet an adulterous medium, where the rubber meets the gravel.

Being Here

Museum space is a special, modern form of sacrality.² It is quintessentially modern in that it deploys objects in a form of space created primarily for display. Rarely can one touch. Modern space is space for looking. And with the ocular distance comes a cool reverence. Once put in a museum, a thing becomes “culture” sui generis, an object revered but no longer part of daily life. The magic of the museum is the attempt to get as close to authenticity as possible even if you can’t touch it. But it is also a sort of death sentence as it reduces a relationship to pure objectivity. Despite our idealistic attempts to flee this fleshy world of unwashed horde into the realm of transcendental truths, still presence has magic power. For instance, visitors of all ilk to the

British Museum spend hours staring into glass cases peering at “actual,” handwritten texts by Charles Dickens, Charles Darwin, James Joyce, Winston Churchill and so forth.

Once, while at the museum in London, I noticed a crowd of people gathered around one display case in particular, leaving hundreds of others practically unnoticed. Indeed, it was not the form of display, but the “contents” that were supposed to be the point of focus. And so it was that some content was particularly alluring at drawing a crowd. The cases that displayed English manuscripts by Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and other “greats” drew no attention except for me looking at something by Emily Brontë. What could be in the case that commanded such interest? When I finally got close enough to peek over someone’s shoulder, there below were handwritten poems and cartoons by the pop legend John Lennon.

Locale as a Particular Split-Infinity

For all our post-60s sophistication and college-educated abstractionism, do we not now recognize that as one “progresses,” one progresses away from things as well as toward others? And as we were taught that “movies” were an “art form” to be properly called “cinema,” what was left behind? Look how we have developed into homeless cosmopolitans (global citizens). The old human, that inferior anachronism, just had to die to make room for the evolved post-human. Superior in every way, the “New Man” dwells in the realm of scientific abstractions, formulaic truths and perfect forms.

In the pre-modern (yet extant) world, performance happens *now*. “Live” means real. But for Plato (the first true modern),

all representational art, in fact this entire mortal world, is merely a shadowy mimic of true forms. Of course the post-modernists protest. I have seen them quiver, despite their self-loathing, with the excitement of seeing the “real live” Jacques Derrida enter a conference room. He is not a trace or a graft after all even though some consider his work a type of intellectual fraud (graft of another sort). They rush to get *his* autograph on *his* books and then jealously protect *their* prizes like religious relics. Maybe it is the trace that authenticates the origin.

Despite logic, watching taped or filmed performance somehow makes us, the viewers, seem less real too as compared with watching a live performance. Passivity, the modus of the couch potato, means to act like a vegetable passively following the Sun through phototropic reflexes without really seeing it. We switch on the television, not so much to see a specific show but to watch *it*. The act of being a potato is meaningful in and of itself. We bask in the glow of the tube, lackadaisically relaxing. We rarely turn it off even when “nothing’s on.” We just keep grazing, hunting and gathering. We switch away from performers in mid-verse, with impunity, because they aren’t really real anyway. Maybe we do this more and more in face-to-face interaction too. To appreciate dissociation, we must return to the beginning of drama when the ancient Greeks built lenses, amphitheaters with rows of passive observers focusing on a new kind of staged space with “actors.” Thus we have the birth of the “actor” and the “reactors.” When this happened, the magic and mythic holism of ritual was fragmented.³ The dance no longer included everyone. Some, in fact most, just watch now, even too ashamed to dance when asked. Thus we have the modern individual with her heightened self-consciousness isolating her from everything

and everyone else. This is why communications has taken on a millenarian status. "Communications," not informatics with its high speed data transmission, but talking and listening have become "central" only because we sense that we are failing at it. The dissociative gaps are expanding everywhere. In part, this is because of the modern sense of chronic urgency and hyper-individualism.⁴ In the drive-in, you have to wait until it's dark.

Why do we like the new solipsism? For one thing, we can hide while we watch and so the oft-mentioned sense of voyeurism in the modern technotronic gaze. Participants cannot be voyeurs. Removal, distanciation is a necessary condition for voyeurism to exist. This is so not just for the disinterested gaze but also for the momentary identification that can mythically and magically work. Moving from being a participant to an observer involves a shift from magic idolic communication to perspectival signalic communication, a process manifesting an increase in dimensional accrual and dissociation.⁵

In the taped version, the performer can't look back at us or hear our meager responses, our jeers, coughs and applause, and see us dozing and laughing and weeping. By contrast, in the case of live performance, even taking into account theatrical distance, the audience is yet an essential part of the happening. The actor can modify her presentation to fit the mood of the audience. But in a film, the actors go about their efforts oblivious to the fact that the seats are empty.

There is a profound difference between being at a live performance to which one is embodied, physically present and watching a memorial device (film, tape, hard disk, silicon chip, etc.). It's like comparing a painting reproduced in a book to standing in the presence of the "original." In the presence of the "real thing," the brush strokes, hacks, smudges, scrapes and

pokes, which constitute the "actual" places where the artist's personal touch is preserved, we are inexplicably excited. The original is worth far more money than the reproduction and it's not simply because it is rare, the "brightest" or oldest version. Thanks to mass reproduction, the image is available in various media sizes, and qualities. For instance, one can wear a Dali on a t-shirt or open a Cezanne on an umbrella. What is missing is the object as more than just an image, but as a thing-in-itself with a unique history. Locale is not merely a spatio-temporal coordinate. It is a place that is constituted of a unique set of relationships. To touch the canvas that Picasso touched is something special. To hold and read a marked-up script that Orson Welles held and scribbled on is special. We revel in the imperfection, the contingency, the uniqueness of a convergence of human relationships. While the new "constant," space, has no semantic dimension, place is thick with mood. But now an air of perfect cynicism, what Friedrich Nietzsche calls the "gloomy vapors" that surround universal "positive systems," a fragrance that inspires the sophisticated sniff that announces cosmopolitan sensibility, have spread and gained the status of expert knowledge.⁶ All places are the same for I am a "world citizen" who transcends all parochial limitations.⁷

The perfection of the modern illusion that distanced us from the world occurred with the invention of photography. That most modern of all inventions, chemical picture processing and the fruition of optics marks the culmination of the modern Enlightenment philosophes and their Neo-Platonic utopianism. We can now watch wars and famine from the comfort of our living rooms switching away to a game show or music video if the visage proves disturbing to our precious "equilibrium." Mathematics blossoms into

a new Pythagorean religion, the *mathesis universalis*. As Plato and Pythagorus had taught, virtue is in the virtual while the actual is nothing but shadows on cave walls, or across screens. But "act" is the root of "actual." With the ascendancy of the virtual as more real than the actual, first in religion and then in mathematics, this world of real men and women becomes a "shame."⁸ The virtually derived average is more "significant," more powerful (exhibiting more "epistemic force") than a single actual "subject." The ideal world is the self-reinforced world "generalized" globally, the realm of transcendental law. It is truth for the "positive" yet "objective" man of "disinterested knowledge." According to this ideology masquerading as absolute truth (or is it the other way around?), the good human, the best human:

Is only an instrument let us say a mirror—he is not an "end in himself." And the objective man is in fact a mirror: accustomed to submitting to whatever wants to be known, by "mirroring" — he waits until something comes along and then gently spreads himself out, so that not even the lightest footsteps and the fluttering of ghostly beings shall be lost on his surface and skin. Whatever still remains to him of his "own person" seems to him accidental, often capricious, more often disturbing: so completely has he become a passage and reflection of forms and events not his own.⁹

In his pure transcendental world of ideal (positive) objectivism, the self, with its disgraceful perspective and interpretive ambiguity is rightly reduced to nothing but a self-polishing mirror. But wait—there are blasphemers like the impressionists who keep roaring back demanding

that the embodied subjective fallible self, with all its animalistic defilements, be celebrated rather than despised. Rather than worshipping death, the pure realm of absolute referential perfection, which once achieved spells the blessed end of pain and striving, of living, many rebel in favor of this world of mere mortal failings and endless heterogeneity that defies generalizability. They note how the light constantly changes and the mood with it. We find meaning in those who champion this world that is unabashedly "mine," rather than the pure world of forms and formulations. They include from painting artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, Gustave Clillebotte, Claude Monet, Paul Gauguin, Pierre-Auguste Renoir; in philosophy Soren Kierkegaard and Nietzsche; and in literature the troubadours, Wolfgang Goethe, Marie Rainer Rilke, Dickens, Mark Twain, etc. Actually, already with Pieter Bruegel and Rembrandt we find a shift into mood and the intimate lives of the "common man."

Already gone are the idealized neo-classicisms and the obsession with religious and royal forms. The paint thickens and the brush strokes become more pronounced. Style emerges as a content all its own. Light and shading become unreally real in diaphaneity. They represent nothing but themselves in their own immediate givenness, which can be no more true or false than saying a cloud in the sky is true or false. Their indubitability, their self-evidentness, is in their being. While Rene Descartes became so abstractly confused as to doubt his own senses and his god, the mundane lifeworld paid his grand philosophical angst little heed. He presupposed its existence even while doubting it. So too, in its new confidence to stand alone from the tyranny of the referent as defined by the dominant culture, painting became an object in its own right, on its own terms, here and now, neither

true nor false but yet undeniable. Causing disturbance and disequilibrium is the goal of art. It strives to de-familiarize the "normative" view, to create difference and thus meaning from scratch performing the miracle of giving sight, helping us all to see again.

The modern world remains a place of tension between the degenerate beast and the heavenly spirit: the body and the mind. This is a false dichotomy created by one who worshipped purity, pure mathematics: perfect circles. The realm of the contingent and distorted subject remains "low." It is the realm of the base motive and instinct where passion threatens order and reason, de-coherence threatens the myth of identical things (for no two things are actually identical, a metaphysical faith necessary for the existence of numbers, the redundancy of 1, 2, 3...) Worldly sin defiles timeless paradise.

Thus we have the St. Simonians and Neo-Hegelians engineering a perfect irony, the "positive" order dictated by what Nietzsche calls "pessimistic philosophers."¹⁰ These "positivists" who fear all suffering, promise the "New Man" that escapes antique thinking, becoming the *ne plus ultra* of human development.¹¹ For them, life is a disease. Perfection is to be found in the transcendental system and its final solution, the end of the line, the end of time. With the final epiphany comes "equilibrium," zero movement: nihilism. Pure continuity spells the end of difference. Finally we have the ambiguous accomplishment of self-denial, what Nietzsche calls a "Buddhism for Europeans," the nirvanic end of suffering, the end of (life) rebirth; the glory of "no mind" going beyond the illusion of this world of opposites.¹² Instead of calling this body, this world an illusion and those who embrace it "ignorant," Nietzsche says a "tender yes" to this world of taste and odor, contingency and folly, ecstasy and

suffering. If you eliminate one, you've eliminated the other.

Such fear and trembling toward life is the origin of priestly penance and *ressentiment*; revenge against vitality and action. It marks a "disease of the will" manifested as a weariness at living and its inherent struggles.¹³ The ideal mirror-man can, and believes he *should* only react to what happens by. He should because that is his ideal, the destruction of himself as the source of all distortion, all possible interpretive creation. He must embrace fidelity and eliminate the "noise" of living. He should "adapt," which is purely a reactionary attitude. He should only react but even then, only enough to reflect.

What is this? It is the "*Ressentiment*" of creatures to whom the real reaction, that of the deed, is denied and who can indemnify themselves only through an imaginary revenge.¹⁴ And this revenge is "conscience"; loathing turned against the self. Guilt and self-hate are the sources of the ascetic ideal. The dissociated, unengaged vision forms platitudes of revenge, wasting life imagining all the bad things she would do to her enemies, especially herself if only she dared. The imaginal that forms the core of conscience, however, is a dishonest hate for it never discharges itself. It never dares to pronounce its true beliefs but instead curls itself into the obsequious smile for superordinates while displacing natural aggression onto the weak. Imagined vengeance consumes her life.

In the play *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon find themselves at a crossroads. To pass the time, they decide to call each other names. The game goes from bad to worse, from "Cretin" to "Abortion." But the final insult that is so heinous as to end the game is "critic." Objective analysis, the "innocent speech" of pure reflection turns out to be what Roland Barthes calls the

greatest myth of all.¹⁵ Only silence follows this utterance.

Friends in Low Places

There is something of the power of touch that is so strong that in the case of the stenciled hands painted on ancient cave walls, it is disturbing. Of course we want to lay our hands there too, to see if they "fit," to touch and identify with those Others across millennia. But in fact, we cannot escape the now ... or can we? In an eternal universe, there are an infinite number of yesterdays and an infinite number of tomorrows. Two infinities split by "me." I am not only the center of all the space I perceive but also of time. The now, which is where I always am, is a "standing streaming" moment caught between the past and the future.¹⁶ But because we cannot escape the now the past is now too, as is the future, as such. I am touching the cave painting now. Similarly, while standing amongst the overgrown ruins of a drive-in theater, I wonder what scenes have flickered across the empty screen, what contortions of vitality have parked there in the musk of dusk, all pointing toward the secular gods of Hollywood. I cannot escape my embodied world, my unique perspective. I imagine what I know. And so, I am the center of space/time, the *axis mundi*.

Live performance is a happening. It is now. In a drive-in "theater," the real action is with the audience. Theatrical distance is so great that the open sky does not allow us to forget whom, when or where we are. The cinema, no matter the size of the screen, is overwhelmed by the "great outdoors." The darkness is neither total nor artificial. It is real. And so, when driving home after the late-night double-feature, tired, deep in mental rhythms rarely experienced, with June bugs hitting the windshield, I think I saw a Wolf Man,

there, off to the side of the road, next to the railroad tracks. Didn't you see it too, bolt off into the gully? And so the local (not urban) suburban legend is suggested into my world, this local world. Maybe he was a Communist Wolf Man, or a Negro Wolf Man (aren't they all?). Or maybe his name was "Jack." Sophomoric will o' the wisps conflate with screen magic and a whole pop industry just for teens. But then the late '60s-early '70s happened with the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, popular pornography, environmental concerns, the Pill, and everyone "got educated." Suddenly the Wolf Man just wasn't scary any more because people started "thinking globally." Sex wasn't innocently terrifying any more; it was "safe," and "free."

Because the darkness is real night, we are not metaphysically jarred like Plato's hapless hero, "awakened" when we open the exit door at midday into the reality of the blazing sun. This is the point. Being at an "ozoner" is more than watching a movie: It was an attitude in an America before it lost its virginity and became "worldly." It was the Working Man's monumentalism to match the Soviet Sputnik that winked as it tumbled overhead. The drive-in does not constitute the best venue for appreciating filmic art. It is not so sanitary and sophisticated a sanctuary. It doesn't have such pretenses. Instead, the poor fidelity of message, the wired speaker box that garbles the sound track, the screen in need of a paint job—it all suggests the wilderness a traveler must traverse. It is the background to the real foreground. It offers the suggestion of a tale for the road, on the road worthy of a Twenty-First Century Canterbury character. What does it matter if the retelling of the filmic narrative mixes with the night's adventures and misadventures?

This is not a discourse that lends itself to referential authentication. It

does not merely repeat in a disinterested manner, sheer facts (things already done). Rather the telling and retelling is created and is creative “as it goes.” Stories of the drive-in theater are themselves worthy of a movie. Rudolf Otto might appreciate the mystery of the adolescent *deus machina*, the back corner, Ulysses in a deuce and a quarter with glass packs and some carefully concealed body putty for pimples and other blemishes; for the contingent is the cosmic blemish. The intrigue is not explained away, demythologized and understood by the telling and retelling. Quite the opposite, it is the telling that conjures the identification with the mysterious, the fascinating, and the scary. “How far did you go last night at the drive-in?” is the talk at the school lunch table for both girls and boys in the midst of their own sexual adventures.

The action is local. The action and the actors are in the cars, not just on the screen. The screen is an excuse and an opportunity to hide. In the dark, in the steel cocoon of the automobile, privacy is nearly complete because it is small and mobilized. It is mine! And intimately so. No others eat, sit, sleep, make love, *live*, in this seat. It's better than trying to hide in the back of a theater on a rental chair.

The drive-in is not a place for appreciating art in its most transcendent eminence. It lacks the purity of fidelity. It is grungy. It is a place of monetary economy but a surplus of passion. It is a landmark in its own right, unlike the multiplex mall cinema, which effaces itself in the process of mediating the filmic text. If you've been to one mall cinema, you've been to them all. Interaction is minimized. You can't even control the volume. And that is good because the film is the star there. But the drive-in is local. It is not universal. What happens there is utterly unpredictable, risky, daring. It is ironically, absolutely specific, always different. People plot maps

of the locations of drive-ins along famous by-ways like Route 66 and visit *them* for themselves, regardless of what's showing. Afficionados form clubs and websites nostalgically noting the flimsy association between America's most famous road, Route 66 with its Beat Generation halo and the fact that last year marked the sixty-sixth anniversary of the first “official” drive-in theater at Camden, New Jersey, June 6, 1933.

The drive-in is lowly technology with lowly patrons and lowly content and lowly food. They have lowly intentions on their minds. They even deface their suspensions to lower their cars not for the sake of engineering, not for a “lower center of gravity,” but for tantric purposes; the kundalini (mojo by another name) is raised when the car is lowered. It is comfortable and comforting, close to the earth and the compost heap of unofficial culture. It is for many home, the place where America, with its obsession with Hollywood and cars, can convergently go, thus answering a Nietzschean anthropologist's (Carlo Marx's) question, “Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?”¹⁷ The car is the destination, it is what we aspire to and work for. Beyond that we don't know. The smoldering heap is a mobius mass with endless twists and turns, a long and winding road indeed, snaky even. Like Harry Angstrom (“Rabbit”) who “wants to go south, down, down the map into orange groves and smoking rivers and barefoot women.”¹⁸ He heads desperately down. Down for the tropics, for the Gulf of Mexico only to be turned back by his domestication in the middle of the night to look for his old basketball coach in the hopes of some expert guidance, a road map of arrows and pivots to his disheveled life. But it, he, the world only unravels. The road map turns into a Kandinsky-like set of scares. And Lewis Carroll's Rabbit turns into a jabberwocky



on wheels, “whiffing through the tulgey wood.”¹⁹

It is the acceptable risk of the automobile that soothes his dissonant mind. After all he is a used car salesman, a modern pretender to reasoning, a grungy sophist. The car has locks and windows that can be closed tight, and it can be used to flee as well as explore. When the getaway car starts, a sigh of “Praise be” involuntarily escapes from deep inside.²⁰ Like the man who says he drove down to the local convenience shop for cigarettes one banal evening after supper, but for some impulse lurking so deeply within that it could not come up to the threshold of rationality for a gulp of sun burnt air (a “reason”), on the way “home” he turned right instead of left and never stopped. The car is the real “American Beauty.”

Drive-ins are acceptable momentary

“voyages” that *others share with us*. They share everything with us. Peer pressure comes from the inside out. We are one, a gang of co-conspirators. Unlike driving alone to work or the market, the drive-in trip is a “road trip,” a mobile party so that we escape together. Thus we have the best of both worlds, our “homeboys” leave home with us to make up new rules, new games. And what is home to the young wealthy American? The paternal source of domestic constraint. The road trip not only leaves place behind, but mores too. The parents’ house where “my room” is, is the moral place of rules and regulations. The car is the space/time machine that can get one away from the gaze of authority to “mess around,” “down in.” The car, being the epitome of individualism, stands for freedom.

The drive-in is like going to the art



gallery to admire the frames. The drive-in is more real for its lack of pretense. It makes less effort at upholding the illusions that feed realism, insisting by its very structure, that realism after all is only another genre of fiction. Even the "true" drive-in movie content, like the films of Ed Wood and Roger Corman, is more approachable. They are more local ... more like "home movies." When the effort that sustains realism is abandoned, we say, "get real." There is no mythic innocence in a drive-in. There is little pretense or transcendental standards to uphold. The kids get into their pajamas and wrestle with the pillows in the back seat while the next car over steams up, and one more over exudes the combative odors of pot and pizza struggling for atmospheric supremacy.

The drive-in is the quintessential modern American answer to the Renaissance plaza. It is pseudo-public space. It is shared to be sure. Flipping on one's lights quickly draws not only moths but honking horns of irritated neighbors. But it is also private. This is my car, my steering wheel, my stuff. And you are "my girl" (or boy). We are not just going to see a movie. We are making history here, biography of the unspeakable sort. These are unforgettable moments to be cherished

unto death. Everything can happen only one first time.

What is localism in an age when globalism is roaring across the planet exterminating all sense of place? Localism is the lowly, the backward, the unsophisticated. It is where things get wet and sloppy, like a swamp. It is the source of life. Localism is the sense that a thing is cheap and accessible even to the

poorest of the poor. Privacy is mostly afforded to the wealthy who hide themselves in that other, "different," "gated" world, as F. Scott Fitzgerald made *Ol' Sport* say of *Gatsby*. However, privacy, access and control exist even for the lowly in the realm of the local. It is in the local that "every man is a king and every woman a queen," where everyone "counts," where community happens with all its thick molasses of relationships.

Here, genuine talk, the talk that has sustained the species for millennia, is paramount. Gossip is organic. It is relevant. It is about people I know and me. In today's world of global corporatism, where only one value, "efficiency," exists any more (and it too can be quantified)—in this world, gossip is a bane, a waste of time. Instead, the ideal is to merely download information without distortion, not to converse about "personal," relevant things. Instrumental communication has come to dominate the world of administration. Even language is drained of all inherent power and reduced to a purely arbitrary tool, a system of signals. The magic dimension of language, its "spelling," has been bled to death. Only statements that are logically coherent and/or empirically falsifiable are said to have any meaning.²¹



Under these rules, to say "I love you" is deemed to be a string of completely nonsensical noises. But a kiss is still a kiss and a sigh is still a sigh. In England dogs say "bow wow," in France "oua-oua," in Japan "wan-wan" and in Bantu "pyee" (but only after being kicked).²² Accent is local. Interest mutates into intrigue there. By minimizing communication itself to a string of zeros

and ones, the message is so simplified that fidelity is made complete. Anything that disrupts the syntax elicits an "error message." Deviance, local heterogeneity, difference is criminalized. Interpretation is outlawed verging on madness. Each message has only one possible correct meaning, and each problem has only one best solution. But in the organic world, where things are taken seriously and people "get personal," everyone rubs off on everyone else and they tend to be irrational and to stick together when an outside threat appears. This is why real communication is a form of intercourse. In a conversation that shares us, it is impossible to say where I stop and you begin. Risk is a constant and accommodation a dance.

The human mind is a geography of concentric spheres. The first sphere is the realm of the private self, which concerns itself with the embodied self, its itches, wounds, daily anomalies, changes and feels. Each day teenagers across cultures survey the map of their acne, the build of their physiques and the shape of their hair, pruning and primping, for despite the modern ideology that wants to postpone everything for work preparedness, for capitalist demands, the ancient mating call

still beacons. The next circle for the adolescent/young adult is not so well defined. It is an overlap of allegiances that marks the move toward greater independence. The usually conflicting forces at this level range from the ego to the family and the sub-tribe of contemporaries made up of best friends, friends, worst enemies and the supporting cast of marginal Others who continually move in and out of focus.

The most significant is the love interest. This is as local as local gets. As personal as personal gets. As serious as serious gets. Local is where personal concern and care dwell, where identity blurs and emotions blend. The self is a consequence of group membership. Friendship and animosity are most palpable. Beyond this, for the young adult, is a vast uncharted realm "where there be dragons" and conquests, endless potential. Exploration for the young adult means doing many things for the first time, which usually makes for an especially intense and meaningful period of life. It is the time of life before "the thrill of livin' is gone," as John Mellencamp sings. This time of life is a time that is so intimate that it challenges attempts at intergenerational understanding. It is a magical time when reputation is every-

thing and the public realm resides in the halls and bleachers of one's mind. Care, or *sorge* as Martin Heidegger would say,²³ is intense. It has not yet evaporated with the dissociation, boredom and distanciation that marks "maturity." The world of the teenager is an emotional churning. And being "in" is absolutely vital.

The local is the place where the struggle for status and control is taken seriously, where we think we can make a difference and we guard our self-interests. It is also the place where the animal needs to be able to relax, to repair to lick and share its wounds with others who are supposed to care and dress them without question. The local is thick with sympathy, hatred, joy, fear. Magic is at the surface of the skin. And by mutual implication the world and I share the same boundary, like two adjacent rooms sharing a common wall. The boundary of the world is my skin. We continually adjust to a common contour. Magic works as a fetish. Magic is not logical but powerful. It is touch, and it works best in the dark.

The Spirit in the Machine

At the drive-in, all movies have a green tint that gets stronger toward the top of the picture. The car, for an American teenager in the mid- and late twentieth century, is a magic machine that is mighty in its powers to confer status and independence. Its size is just right for the most local of stories to unfold within. Two is a crowd and three or more intimates makes a riot. It is a movable feast. The *first car* is rarely fancy, or expensive, yet never forgettable. Its power resides in its ability to whisk the child away from the nest, even if it must be borrowed from a parent or older sibling.

The fancy movies limp into the drive-in worn and tattered if at all, to be

projected onto the drive-in screen, that rural spectacle arising majestically from the midst of corn, soybean and wheat fields across the land of the automobile: a North American, mostly U.S. phenomenon like no other. Drive-ins constitute the real "field of dreams." Storms rage in the cars while lightning hits the screen. As noted above, fidelity is not the goal. Rather the goal is to break new ground, to rupture limits passing into whole new worlds. Everything is a gamble and with it comes the rush of discovery.

Rain and fog may intercede between the eye and the world "out there" that comes "in here" to the intimate space of my car. The sound system may be barely audible. Mosquitoes may force a Solomon-like choice between a mid-summer night's heat and open windows. Fresh air that cools with the deepening evening may turn into "country air" if the cows come home next door or a skunk happens into the theater. The steering wheel, center console, sun visors, tinting accent the information coming from the screen, fusing with it to create a unique film experience.

But the viewing experience is not evaluated by these measures of fidelity. Instead it is the infidelity that is at the core of the experience and the desire. For in my car, I am both free and encapsulated. Hidden in my metal nest where I can turn to my most intimate interests with only an occasional, semi-public and furtive glance from the car "next door" that may intrude. This is suburbia on wheels. Individualism, with all its empowering promise and all its fragmenting isolation, revels here. Perceptivism marks the landscape with crisscrossing roads, and marks the mindscape of orientation toward a fantasy world, row upon row facing the Mecca of yearning.

Lack of "class," which is a *sure sign* of class, and informality express the disin-

terest in accurate reproduction. Pickup trucks are parked backwards with folding lawn chairs in the beds. Children swarm in the twilight over teeter-totters and swing sets of dubious construction down in the pit of the screen where for other classes a symphony would accompany an opera or stage play. Because the cost may be one price per car, gangs arrive to see the double feature bargain with comrades stuffed in the trunk: local espionage and intrigue.

The machine vehicle is my very own declaration of independence, chamber of dreams and exploratory spaceship rolled into one. It is probably not fancy, but that is because it is my first car. Likewise the movies at the drive-in are not the fancy expensive ones that stay pure in the showrooms of sheltered space where proper society (a race of critics) takes its cushy seat. Instead, the drive-in weathers the storms happening in and out of the vehicles. The drive-in is intimate, local, down to earth, "Grade B." And whoever goes there is automatically transformed into a Grade B person. There are no new Mercedes-Benzes or Cadillacs here. So, while Leslie Caron, and Maurice Chevalier were singing their way through *Lili* (1953) and *Gigi* (1958), depictions of the veiled wonders of coming-of-age mixed with sanitized high class prostitution where the Parisian *bon vivant* stalks his courtesan, such movies remained the fodder for a different kind of "serious" date, a "sit up" date with a proper "sit down" dinner and an ambiance that was foreign to the real life of teen America. Throughout this era, sexuality was veiled beyond the double entendre. Was not Sheriff Matt Dillon's "lady friend" Kitty actually an aging prostitute turned pimp? And was not the patriarch on *Bonanza* a serial polygamist? In the end, the McCarthy era romantic comedies signifying the epitome of apolitical, and

therefore thoroughly political cinema, starring Doris Day and that paragon of heterosexual manhood Rock Hudson, proving that he really was a good actor after all.

But the drive-in is the theater of a reversal of priorities, and an honesty that presents itself with confidence. The common discourse makes a "heavy" date the truly serious one. When a "sit down" date, though expensive, just can't compare with a "lay down" date that has a seriousness of an entirely different magnitude.

When the families disappeared, the drive-in screen was taken over by the new and cheap sex and gore. Titillating "women convicts in chains" movies and blood-spurting amputees jiggled and lumbered across our retinas. Drive-ins were like drive-through fast food. If one wanted a nice "sit down" movie or meal, one had to get out of the car. But the drive-in audience didn't particularly expect or care to see "real cinema" anyway. The lowly technology would only spoil *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Doctor Zhivago*, and dull the "full effect" of movies like *Star Wars* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The sound systems rendered films like *West Side Story*, *Oliver*, *My Fair Lady* and *The Sound of Music* into something like dog whistles. We suspected that there was more there but just couldn't hear it.

Many didn't need romance on the screen because the real action was in the car itself. As Freud would no doubt have predicted, the combination of screams with zippers would sell. So we had monsters with sex appeal like Christopher Lee's Dracula, and busty victims snagging their negligees on branches while running from very male fiends. Were these actually, or virtually thinly veiled rape scenes? In the drive-in, everything is reversible. No matter the metaphysical implications, such images combined into low-level S&M,

acting as detonators for the powder keg of teenage hormones. In the cars, reality and fantasy intermingled.

Postscript

As suburbia expanded and land values continued to rise, and the audience became more and more sophisticated, the drive-in passed out of vogue, replaced by the multi-screened, "surround sound" mega-movie theaters offering expensive flavored coffees in malls. Gory video games and Internet porno belie the tame nature of the wild streak of the 1950s and 1960s. The ornery grin of James Dean and the sexual power of Marilyn Monroe seem light years removed from the angst of Kurt Cobain and the Goth movement. But in fact their tragic real lives inform today's youth identity. Today, many high schoolers follow a cultural trend introduced by the stylish horror pics produced by Hammer Films. Today, high schoolers need not go to the drive-in to see a pierced vampire because "there are three in my second period English class." They have found an ersatz identification with images from the ozone, like putting one's hand up to the cave wall or peering at a Lennon cartoon. Somewhere in the immediacy of the moment, the split infinity, throbs a shared humanity, a very personal connection.

NOTES

1. See Jean Gebser's *The Ever-Present Origin*. Translation by Noel Barstad, with Alis Mickunas. Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 1985.
2. See Richiko Ikeda and Eric Kramer's "Enola Gay: The Transformation of an Airplane into an Icon and the Ownership of History." *Keio Communication Review*. Issue 20, 1998: 49-73.

3. See Eric Kramer's *Modern/Postmodern: Off the Beaten Path of Antimodernism*. Westport CT: Praeger, 1997.

4. See Gebser's *The Ever-Present Origin*; also see Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1934; and Paul Virilio's *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*. London: Auto-media, 1986.

5. See Kramer's *Modern/Postmodern*.

6. See Book 5, Section 347 of Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*. New York: Vintage, 1974. Also, see Eric Kramer's "Cultural Fusion and the Defense of Difference" in *Socio-Cultural Conflict Between African and Korean Americans*. Ed. by Asante and Min. Landham MD: University Press of America, 2000: 181-227.

7. Gudykunst, William and Young Yun Kim. *Communicating with Strangers*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1997: 364.

8. See Book 5, Section 359 of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*.

9. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. New York: Penguin, 1972: Section 207.

10 See Book One, Section 48 and Book Five, Section 347 of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*.

11 See Jean Gebser's *The Ever-Present Origin*.

12. See Nietzsche's *Preface to On the Genealogy of Mortals*. New York: Vintage, 1967; the first essay, Section 5 of *On the Genealogy of Mortals*; Book 2, Sections 99 and 134 of *The Gay Science*; *Postscript to Nietzsche's The Case of Wagner*. New York: Vintage, 1967.

13. See the Third Essay in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Mortals* and Book 5, Section 347 of *The Gay Science*.

14. Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Mortals*, Section 10.

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20. Updike, p. 21.

21. See Karl Popper's *Popper Selections*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.

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Contents

Introduction 1

DRIVING IN

1. Who's Afraid of the Virgin Wolf Man? Or, the Other Meaning
of Auto-Eroticism 9
—Eric Mark Kramer
2. Drive-In Horror Across the Outback: Surf, Sand and Sisters
in 1970s Australia 25
—Graeme Harper

SITUATING THE HORROR

3. Naked! Screaming! Terror! The Rhetoric of Hype and Drive-In
Movie Trailers 41
—J. Rocky Colavito
4. A Drive-In Horror by Default, or, The Premiere of *The Hideous
Sun Demon* 53
—Gary D. Rhodes
5. Ideology and Style in the Double Feature *I Married a Monster from
Outer Space* and *Curse of the Demon* 67
—Michael Lee
6. The Legacy of *Last House on the Left* 79
—Steven Jay Schneider

BOILING HOT AND COLD: THE PRESSURES OF WAR

7. Apocalypse Here and Now: Making Sense of *The Texas Chain Saw
Massacre* 97
—Mark Bould
8. In the Science Fiction Name of National Security: *Cat Women
of the Moon* 113
—Tony Williams

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and
David Durston

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