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6.4 The Post-Cinematic Venue: Towards an Infrastructuralist Poetics

BY BILLY STEVENSON

One of the key questions confronting a post-cinematic media ecology is—what constitutes a post-cinematic venue? More specifically, how has the traditional cinematic venue been remediated and reimagined in the wake of the seismic shifts in film production, consumption, and distribution that have occurred over the last decade? Traditionally, attachment to the cinematic venue was a symptom of cinephilia, if not quite the tradition of cinephilia that has been re-examined in the light of Christian Keathley’s groundbreaking monograph, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in The Trees*. Whereas Keathley posits a cinephilic history based on privileged moments in the film, moments that exceed their intended or nominal significance (20), there is an alternative cinephilic history that focuses more on the symbiosis and synergy between venue and screen, as well as the serendipities and pleasures of the venue as a spectacle in itself.

While it is neither the aim nor the ambit of this article to historicize these two different modes of cinephilia, it suffices to say that what might be described as venue-cinephilia tends to derive from Siegfried

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Kracauer's observations on the symbiosis of urban space and cinematic spectacle, while Keathley's brand of cinephilia, which might be described as moment-cinephilia, tends to derive more from Walter Benjamin's reflections on cinema's discordant relationship with the even more discordant experience of everyday urban life. Writing in *Theory of Film*, Kracauer describes venue-cinephilia by observing:

Films make us undergo similar experiences a thousand times. They alienate our environment in exposing it. One ever-recurrent film scene runs as follows: Two or more people are conversing with each other. In the middle of their talk the camera, as if entirely indifferent to it, slowly pans through the room, inviting us to watch the faces of the listeners and various furniture pieces in a detached spirit . . . As the camera pans, curtains become eloquent and eyes tell a story of their own . . . How often do we not come across shots of street corners, buildings, and landscapes with which we were acquainted all our life; we naturally recognize them and yet it is as if they were virgin impressions emerging from the abyss of nearness. (55)

Part of what renders this description so powerful is that it fuses—or at least leaves open the possibility of fusing—the viewer's drift across the screen with their drift across the architecture of the theater. If this "film scene" is "ever-recurring," that isn't simply because it occurs in every film but because it describes a process that can be *enacted* in every film—namely, the eye's drift from an onscreen conversation to the "furniture" of the movie theater, the "faces of the listeners" in the audience, the "curtains" around the screens and, finally, all the eyes in the audience that "tell a story of their own." In describing how this process translates into urban attachment more generally, Anke Gleber notes that "the art of taking a walk introduces an aesthetics of movement that, more than any other artistic form, reveals an affinity with the long, extended tracking shots of a camera whose movement approaches and embraces the visual emanations of the exterior world" (152). However, if the tracking-shot is to procedurally

inculcate *flânerie*, rather than merely absorb it, then the viewer needs to create their own tracking-shots within the cinema theater itself. It is the very willingness of the individual eye to approximate a camera in this way, to drift away from the screen and across the reticulations and nuances of the theater, that signals Kracauer's movement from Benjaminian *flânerie* to something closer to the venue-cinephilia I am describing.

In elaborating his ideas about moment-cinephilia, Keathley introduces the "cinephiliac anecdote" (140)—"cinephiliac" following Paul Willemsen (227)—as a new discursive and communicative tool. Cinephiliac anecdotes, Keathley argues, are the stories we tell, both to others and ourselves, about the cinematic moments that come back to haunt us again and again (130). For the most part, cinephiliac anecdotes are originary narratives, stories about when we first experienced these moments. Keathley argues that these narratives can reflect back upon wider historical and cinematic concerns if looked at in the right way. In the five exemplary anecdotes that he provides at the back of his book, he shows how this might be done, moving from some of his most precious experiences to more general theoretical concerns by way of an idiosyncratic combination of generalization and association. In doing so, he makes a claim for the cinephiliac anecdote as a new way of "doing" cinematic history, specifically as "points of entry, clues to another history flashing through the cracks of those histories we already know" (124). Rather than claiming that the cinephiliac anecdote offers a mere "alternative" history, Keathley suggests that it represents something like a materialist challenge to the very notion of history and historicism itself—an empirical "point of entry" that forces us to challenge and reconstitute the grand narratives and generalizations we've become accustomed to, instead of offering others in their place.

For such a materialist outlook, such a yearning to glimpse the roots of historical production, it is perhaps surprising that Keathley's anecdotes are themselves so minimally interested in the materiality of the film fragments they describe. No doubt, he gleans from his anecdotes certain

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reflections or observations on technological, material history—one, for example, revolves around VHS production—but there is no sense that he is attached to the cinematic venue in the same way that he is attached to the cinephiliac moment, or that the two could possibly be part of the same attachment, with the exception of an anecdote he recounts about his first experience of *Bonnie and Clyde*:

My first viewing of *Bonnie and Clyde* was on the film's re-release in the early 1970s. I was probably about nine years old—much too young to be seeing it. I had been taken to the film—along with four older siblings, all in their early teens—by my college-aged brother, Tim, and his friend, Cathy Reed. I had heard all about the film's final massacre scene, and with the above-described shootout functioning as a preview, I was getting anxious. During the shootout, Cathy noticed my discomfort and offered to wait with me in the lobby until the film was over. Relieved, I accepted. It was for things like her extraordinary kindness and empathy that Cathy was a favorite of ours. We were always excited to see her driving down the street towards our house, and hers was an easy car to spot. The front license plate ironically sported her initials: CAR. This screening of *Bonnie and Clyde* was the last time any of us would ever see Cathy. Two weeks later, she was dead from meningitis. (158)

From the outset, this anecdote has a more sensuous attention to the screening space and conditions under which the film was viewed than any of the other four. There is a very specific, detailed awareness of who was in the audience on the night of the film, heightened by the fact that Keathley was much younger than the people with whom he saw the film, as well as the intended audience itself. This disparity was clearly a large part of his experience of the film, both in anticipation and actuality, and it seems to have created as much awe for the audience as for the film itself. It is this disparity, this fusion of anticipation and experience, that leads on to the paradox at the heart of this particular cinephiliac anecdote: the

cinephiliac moment, the moment of cinephile attachment, is not in fact attached to the moment and venue of the anecdote itself:

I did not see *Bonnie and Clyde* again for several years—until I was a teenager and could watch the film on video. When I did see it, it was the moment of Clyde being hit by the shotgun blast that provoked a *frisson* of involuntary recognition . . . But when I saw the film that second time, was I really *remembering* the moment of Clyde hit by the shotgun blast from the first screening when I was nine? It was about this point in the film that Cathy took me out to the lobby. Was that image of Clyde the final one I saw; was it the last memorable image I had from the film? The only mental image I can recall from after that moment is one of Cathy sitting on a bench in the theater lobby: long, straight brown hair, gold-rimmed aviator-style glasses, tan overcoat. (158)

It is precisely this uncertainty about whether the moment in question is attached to a moment in the film or a moment that took place in the space surrounding the film that signifies a transition from a cinephiliac moment to the kind of moment I am interested in here. In essence, Keathley's anecdote refers to a segment of the film that he never really occupied at the time, perhaps explaining why his free-floating attachment gradually gravitates towards one of the components of the cinematic venue that is least conducive to occupation: the lobby. As the anecdote is structured, the lobby exists as a middle term in a metonymic chain that includes the cars in the film (the backdrop to the scene Keathley couldn't bear to watch), the spaces through which Cathy escorted Keathley, Cathy's own car and, finally, the number plate that "sport[ed] her initials: CAR." Both lobbies and cars provide spaces of comfort and danger: the cinema lobby is turned outwards to the street but also inwards to the world of the film that Keathley has just managed to escape. At the same time, both spaces are, by their transitory nature, impersonal. Yet, just as Cathy managed to personalize the impersonal, transitory space of the lobby, so her car registration plate fuses the generic designation of "car" with her own

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initials. The logic of the anecdote is that the lobby has become “LOBBY” in the same way that Cathy’s car became “CAR.”

Earlier in *The Wind in the Trees*, Keathley draws on Charles Sanders Peirce to argue that the cinephiliac moment can also be understood as the process by which the indexicality, rather than the iconicity or symbolism, of film is foregrounded (27). Here, the same process occurs, but the attachment is to a component of the theatrical infrastructure as much as the film itself. A chain of negotiations and perusals between the screen and the broader theatrical environment means that one component of that environment – the lobby – comes to have an indexical as well as a symbolic significance for Keathley. It is no longer merely the space between other spaces, or the representation of the transactions and negotiations required to enter a movie house; it has become imprinted with his initials in the same way that Cathy’s number plate was imprinted with hers. Just as “that footprint that Robinson Crusoe found in the sand, and which has been stamped in the granite of fame, was an Index to him that some creature was on his island” (Peirce 252), so Keathley’s anecdote functions as an elevation of Cathy herself, rather than a particular cinematic moment, to an indexical significance: “Every time I watch the moment of Clyde getting shot in the arm, I feel Cathy is still alive, just as this violence reminds me of her death” (149). As in Kracauer’s writings on the cinematic lobby, Keathley’s refuge becomes “the setting for those who neither seek nor find the one who is always sought” (Kracauer, “Hotel” 175), as if to corporealize and inhabit the cinephiliac moment’s “space that does not refer beyond itself, the aesthetic condition corresponding to it constitut[ing] itself as its own limit” (177).

In that sense, Keathley’s anecdote may start off in a cinephilic register, but quickly starts to tell a different kind of story, less focused on his privileged reaction to a moment in the film—since he never actually experienced that moment—than on a symbiosis between the film and the venue within which he (nearly) experienced it. It is my contention, in this article, that these anecdotes are more and more common, more and more necessary,

for navigating a post-cinematic ecology in which, as Steven Shaviro has argued, “all activity is under surveillance from video cameras and microphones and in return video screens and speakers, moving images and synthesized sounds, are dispersed pretty much everywhere” (*Post-Cinematic* 6). As the material bases of distribution and exhibition become increasingly imperceptible, or post-perceptual, there is an increasing search for anecdotes that are somehow capable of articulating those conditions of imperceptibility, if not the material bases themselves.

In that sense, this new kind of anecdote is peculiarly attuned to what Timothy Morton describes as “dark ecology.” Dark ecology is an environmentalist stance that embraces the “leakiness of the world” (Morton, *Ecology* 159), an “ecological sensibility” that Jane Bennett has described as “posit[ing] neither a smooth harmony of parts nor a diversity unified by a common spirit” (xi). Morton opposes dark ecology to what he describes as the ecocritical fantasies of immersion and atmosphere. For Morton, the ecocritical subject’s drive to achieve immersion in nature draws on a tradition of reifying nature as ambience and atmosphere, or apprehending it, in Bruno Latour’s words, as “composed of . . . smooth, risk-free stratified objects in successive gradations from the cosmos to microbes” (26). Such a view, according to Morton, reiterates the ontological distinction between ecocritical subject and ecological object, even as it purports to challenge or collapse it:

Ecomimesis aims to rupture the aesthetic distance, to break down the subject-object dualism, to convince us that we belong to this world. But the end result is to reinforce the aesthetic distance, the very dimension in which the subject-object dualism persists. Since de-distancing has been reified, distance returns even more strongly, in surround-sound, with panoramic intensity. (*Ecology* 135)

What this new form of anecdote strives for, then, is some language for addressing the “dark media ecology” of post-cinema—the situation that

results from what Shane Denson describes as the “discorrelation” of images through post-cinema’s phenomenologically “irrational” cameras, a “leaky” ecological situation that precludes both the possibility of total immersion in the individual film as well as total abstraction of the individual film to so much ambience or atmosphere. Against the temptation to rapturous ecodiegetic immersion in the competing, mediating interfaces of this emergent ecology, such an anecdote might set out to map a media ecology without media, an ecology in which “there is not a single medium of interaction between things, but rather just as many media as there are objects” (Harman 95), in the same way that Morton’s dark ecology represents ecology without nature, “nature” being precisely the fantasy that is glimpsed and felt at this moment of atmospheric immersion. Drawing on Morton, Levi R. Bryant uses the term “wilderness ontology” to refer to this moment at which our ecological perspective shifts from that of “a sovereign of nonhuman beings” to that of being “amongst nonhuman beings” (“Wilderness” 20). Bryant argues that this “amongstness” signifies something that has dark . . . dimensions” (20), specifically those of the “dark object”—“a thing that produces no difference beyond the mere difference of existing” (“Dark”). While our current media ecology may not quite have become a media wilderness, its drive towards relegating the act of mediation to a mere “metaphysical possibility” certainly aspires to transform the objects and sites of mediation into dark objects “that are so thoroughly withdrawn that they do not affect anything else at all” (Bryant, “Dark”), or at least objects that are so withdrawn that they cannot be *perceived* to affect anything else at all. Reflecting on this peculiar “opacity of digital culture,” Lane DeNicola writes:

In contrast to dark matter, we are routinely able to observe dark culture, such as the forms I have explored here: the EULA, the codec, the API. Yet we have little in the way of an ordered understanding of its effects, its influence on how we construct meaning. What makes it “dark,” invisible to routine scrutiny, is not simply that it demands highly specialized fluencies (legal or

technical) or that it is cloaked by the constraints of sovereignty (copyright and other aspects of the regulatory apparatus accorded the state) but its intrinsic *immateriality*, its *complexity*, and its *liminal status* in mediating people, the state, and the built world. Though dark culture is undeniably artificial—of human construction—and can profoundly shape the envelope of our daily experience and interaction, it typically creeps into the awareness of the vast majority of us only rarely or indirectly. As the manifold technologies we employ to connect with one another and to mediate our environments continue to proliferate, the proportion of culture that is “dark” will only increase. (276)

If a “dark” or post-perceptual media ecology is one in which the sites of mediation become imperceptible, then the transition from post-cinematic to what Denson describes as post-perceptual ecologies might be expected to turn on the absorption of the cinematic screen into dark media matter, accompanied perhaps by a “return of the culturally repressed” in which “the current becoming-skin of the [touch] screen may be traced back to the nineteenth century and to early optical toys such as the flip book, where physical contact and manipulation was a prerequisite of the visual experience” (Schneider 55). If, as Gilles Deleuze argues, the transition from pre-WWII to post-WWII cinema witnessed a slackening of sensory-motor integration, then what we are witnessing here is a slackening of atmosphere and ambience, a slackening of the possibilities for immersion, that depends precisely on the re-integration of visuality into a refurbished and rehabilitated sensorium (59). Morton construes ambience as a paradoxical ecological object, but it is an equally paradoxical cinematic object, insofar as its kinesthetic primacy only ramifies when subordinated to visuality. This is not to argue that atmospheric, ambient films no longer exist, but that atmosphere is frequently understood in terms of retrospection and pastiche. In an interview for one of the most self-consciously historicized films of the last few years, Nicolas Winding Refn’s *Drive*, Ryan Gosling compares its highly stylized ambience with

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his upcoming remake of Michael Anderson's *Logan's Run* by grouping them as "films that are particularly well suited to this communal atmosphere of a theater" (Cornet). Hence, too, Shaviro's characterization of "contemporary contemplative cinema"—cinema that, in effect, gives you nothing *but* ambience—as a nostalgic retreat from a "film industry whose production processes have been entirely upended by digitalization, and where film itself has increasingly been displaced by newer media, and refashioned to find its place within the landscape of those newer media" ("Slow").

A dark media ecology therefore severs immersion and atmospherics, media and mediation, instead focusing on the supreme "leakiness" of dark culture. In a discussion of the treatment of global warming and environmental catastrophe in Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales*, Shaviro elaborates this distinctively post-cinematic project in terms of "a leaking away of time—its asymptotic approach to an end it never fully attains" (*Post-Cinematic* 87). Similarly, in *Connected*, he identifies this leakiness of surplus value with what it means to live in a society that networks and subsists upon the vast proliferation of post-cinematic screens: "We have moved out of time and into space. Anything you want is yours for the asking . . . A surplus has leaked out of the exchange process" (249). From that perspective, the privileged moment of atmospheric immersion and attachment that distinguishes Keathley's cinephiliac anecdote is perhaps less pertinent at this point in time than an anecdote that instead evokes the surplus leak, the perceptual porosity, between post-cinema and cinematic infrastructure, between cinema and post-cinematic infrastructure—in short, between cinema (whatever we mean by that now) and infrastructure. As such, this new kind of anecdote might be expected to be itself an eminently leaky form. Whereas the cinephilic anecdote can be written or recounted in its entirety—or at least enjoys a kind of Romantic wholeness in the elegance with which it evokes what remains inchoate—this new anecdote instead demands the leakage of what will shortly be elaborated as "produsage," in an instance of the

“affective labor” that Shaviro, following a concept advanced by Michael Hardt, identifies as “the quintessential mode of production” in a post-cinematic media ecology (*Post-Cinematic* 97). Where the cinephiliac anecdote had a specific, privileged object, this new kind of anecdote is instead directed at what Morton describes as “hyperobjects,” concepts or entities that are so massive, amorphous, or distributed that we can’t disentangle ourselves from our participation in them (*Hyperobjects* 2). I would like to suggest that the post-cinematic venue is something of a hyperobject in this sense, and that anecdotes about our experiences of this venue will necessarily be incomplete, participatory, and collaborative in nature.

I would like now to briefly sketch out three major directions that future investigation into this post-cinematic venue might take. In doing so, I would also like to gesture towards this new, post-cinematic approach to telling anecdotes about films. Firstly, we might turn our focus towards individual films. At the most literal level, this might involve looking at films that have explicitly thematized changes in spectatorship technology over the last decade or so. Often, these tend to be horror films, such as the *V/H/S* franchise, but they also fall into a comic or elegiac mode, such as Michel Gondry’s *Be Kind Rewind*. As Shane Denson has pointed out, serialized media are particularly effective for calibrating shifts in media attachment (see his comments in Denson et al., reprinted in this volume), so that a close study of extended series such as the *Halloween* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchises would be another useful mechanism for coming to terms with the present. Such a study might also help illuminate how suburbia, the foundational venue for all cinematic experience from the multiplex onward, might be reframed in the wake of post-cinematic media.

Along with films that explicitly thematize and analyze shifts in cinematic production, it may be instructive to consider films that are peculiarly prescient of their venue-lessness, films that are haunted by the fact that

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they can now be screened virtually anywhere. Films in this category, which include *The Canyons* and *The Bling Ring*, seem to set themselves the task of constituting themselves as their own venues, refusing to allow the audience to indulge in the consoling fantasy that the spaces they depict are different in kind from the spaces in which they are distributed and screened. It is no coincidence that both of the aforementioned films are explicitly about Los Angeles, since it is likely that this effort to envisage what amounts to the myth of total cinema coming to pass—a world in which films can be made and viewed anywhere—is likely to be most sensitively calibrated in the city most inextricable from the film industry itself. One of my current projects is to construct a post-cinematic history of Los Angeles as it converges production and distribution, locations and venues, into what Axel Bruns has described as “produsage,” a social and economic arrangement that “deconstructs larger overall tasks into a more granular set of problems, and therefore in the first place generates a series of individual, incomplete artefacts” (140).

In addition to this focus on actual films, or something resembling actual films, the second way to approach the post-cinematic venue is by way of venues themselves. Clearly, at some level, this partly involves venues as they are constituted or represented in films, especially in terms of the growing trend, in recent cinema, to both revisit the locations of earlier films and to foreground the process of location shooting itself, if only through the kind of extravagant, flamboyant revival of the establishing shot to be found in a film like *Drive*. To take just two examples of how indiscriminate and widespread this tendency is, both Michael Winterbottom’s film *The Trip to Italy* and the Fox expansion of the Coen Brothers’ *Fargo* into a ten-episode miniseries betray an inchoate yearning to return to the media ecology of an early cinematic era by way of the locations it has left behind. *The Trip to Italy* is especially elegiac, as Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon embark upon a pilgrimage to significant sites in the lives of Byron and Shelley, which gradually segues into a pilgrimage to significant sites in some of their favorite films. Just as you might feel

you can't truly read a Romantic poem without visiting the location where it was written, or at least the location it was written about, so Coogan and Brydon have a kind of cinephiliac epiphany at visiting the locations of their favorite films, to the point where it feels as if they are finally seeing those films for the first time. By contrast, *Fargo* adopts a slightly grimmer, more muted approach, returning to the infrastructure and architecture that formed the backdrop to the film, but with more of a sense of how much has changed in the interim—a change that drives the characters, atmosphere and suspense of what feels like a remediated narrative more than a straightforward adaptation, homage or continuation.

However, there is also space for investigation into actual venues and actual spaces in which people continue to watch and distribute these films in a collective fashion. To date, there has been no systematic history of multiplex attachment, let alone how this might have changed in the wake of post-cinematic media. Moving outside that model, there is ample room for architectural and cinematic analysis of the avant-garde, post-cinematic screening spaces that have been devised by such firms as Büro Ole Scheeren, who are responsible for Mirage City Cinema, CCTV TVCC, the Kinetic Experience Cinema, the Crystal Media Centre, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and, perhaps most famously, the floating cinema at Nai Pi Lae lagoon on Kudu Island, in Thailand. In fact, Scheeren's own mission statement provides a veritable manifesto for a new post-cinematic venue, as well as an invitation to further description, analysis, and reflection:

A screen, nestled somewhere between the rocks. And the audience . . . floating . . . hovering above the sea, somewhere in the middle of this incredible space of the lagoon, focused on the moving images across the water: a sense of temporality, randomness, almost like driftwood. Or maybe something more architectural: modular pieces, loosely assembled, like a group of little islands that congregate to form an auditorium. (“Archipelago”)

At the other end of the spectrum, the post-cinematic venue might also be understood to comprise all those provisional, makeshift screening arrangements that collapse cinema into the infrastructure surrounding it, such as the recent rise of guerilla screenings in which films are projected more or less spontaneously onto components of urban infrastructure glimpsed in transit—bridge pillars and warehouses in particular—to create what Mitchell Schwarzer describes as “zoomscapes,” vistas that “encourage us to imagine just what is beyond the frame, the parts of buildings that might come into view or remain unseen” (23). Interestingly, both these extremes—high-end boutique venues and improvisational indie venues—have done something to revive and globalize the drive-in theater, as well as its peculiar porosity between the screen and the world:

The drive-in movie theater may be a uniquely North American institution, but the icon of the wide-open American landscape recently experienced its most heroic revival in Thailand, leaping forth from its humble, grounded origins and into the clear blue waters of Nai Pi Lae lagoon on Kudu Island. (Chan)

Finally, there is a third option for investigating the post-cinematic venue, which is neither a study of films nor a study of venues per se so much as a mode of attachment that I am tentatively describing as infrastructuralism. If the cinematic venue has been dispersed or “relocated” pretty much everywhere (see Casetti, in this volume), to the point where the very idea of specifically cinematic infrastructure ramifies less and less, then venue-cinephilia might be expected to remediate itself by way of a quasi-cinematic attachment to infrastructure itself. One of the most powerful allegories of infrastructuralism in this respect is Steven Knight’s 2013 film *Locke*, which revolves around a construction manager, John Locke, played by Tom Hardy, who spends an evening negotiating between his wife, his mistress, and his employers, who are furious after he quits his job on the eve of the biggest concrete pour in European history. The catch is that the entire film takes place in a car—Locke’s car—as he communicates with every single character by phone. However, what is perhaps even

more surprising is that the most dramatic moments are reserved for his conversations with his former employers, rather than his wife and mistress, and tend to build around incredulous reflections on just how momentous and unprecedented this concrete pour is going to be. Meanwhile, the car itself feels more and more porous, as Locke's phone, GPS, and various vantage points start to merge into an undifferentiated assemblage of mobility, light, and sight that makes it impossible to believe that there ever was anything as concrete as concrete. Not only does this capture a peculiarly post-cinematic yearning for infrastructural reassurance, but it offers hard infrastructure specifically as an elegiac approximation for an analog world that is well and truly behind us.

If post-cinema represents something like total cinema, then Steven Knight's use of the car as a venue within which to stage this negotiation also suggests that post-cinema has somehow revived and remediated the phenomenological correlative between cinema and driving. Anne Friedberg describes this as "*automobility*"—a "combination of urban mobility and automotive visuality" that she identifies as peculiarly intertwined with the "*virtual* mobilities of cinematic and televisual spectatorship" in Los Angeles (184, emphasis in original). For Friedberg, automobility represents a post-cinematic or total-cinematic potentiality distributed across the Los Angeles cityscape, peculiarly accessible whenever windscreens and cinema screens collide or collaborate (186). Conversely, insofar as the Los Angeles cityscape has indeed come to fulfil that potentiality, then it is only by dispersing automobility to such an extent that it is no longer dependent on access either to a windscreen or a cinema screen. Instead, as in *Locke*, the windscreen and cinema screen have been bundled into a kind of free-floating perceptual apparatus, or perceptual vehicle. Infrastructuralism, as I understand it, often involves bearing witness to this species of automobility, and its failure to distinguish between cinematic and non-cinematic infrastructure, between the attachment that we might have to a highway in a film, and the attachment we might have to the same highway in real life (or an imagined film).[\[1\]](#)

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As much as *Locke* might stand as a manifesto for infrastructuralist poetics, then, I hesitate to describe it as an infrastructuralist artifact in itself, just because it is so recognizably a film, albeit a film with post-cinematic proclivities. To find an actual instance of infrastructuralism, we need to look elsewhere, most immediately online, among the various fan forums and communities that have become such an object of study in recent years. Among these communities, there has been a recent trend towards revisiting the sites and locations of earlier films. In many cases, a fan community will actually constellate around a single location. This can be seen, for example, in the fan response to the 1997 slasher film *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. Like so many of the films in the 90s slasher revival, *Summer* uses a quite porous, vertiginous sense of space to approximate the killer's omniscient presence. One of the most dramatic moments comes when Julie James, played by Jennifer Love Hewitt, addresses this presence directly for the first time. Unlike *Scream* or *Urban Legend*, *Summer* doesn't have a great deal of communication, direct or indirect, between the killer and his victims: for the most part he just scrawls the famous catchphrase before taking them out one by one. It is quite a dramatic gesture, then, when Julie spins round and round, at a small intersection, and cries out to the killer to make himself known. A great deal of fandom has been generated by this moment—and devoted specifically to this location, which like so much of the film is set against a plush, hyperreal version of the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

This mode of fandom is particularly prominent on YouTube, and perhaps finds its fullest expression in a medley of videos by K&Jhorror, a pair of cinephiles who travel around the United States in search of horror film locations. As far as their tribute to *Summer* is concerned, K&Jhorror proceed more or less chronologically, seeking out the locations in the order in which we encounter them in the film, in a gesture they describe as “recreation” ([KandJHorror.com](#)). However, this isn't a recreation of the film scene in the conventional sense, since there's nothing in the way of narrative or dialogue, apart from a few casual references and quotations.

Nor is it a recreation in the more obsessive sense of YouTube fandom, since there's very little interest in replicating the shots and sequences of the original. Instead, K&Jhorror provide something closer to testimony, evidence (or insistence) that these locations, structures, and vistas still exist. At the same time, their digital cameras, which tend to be jerkily handheld or mounted on the dashboard, register how much has changed since these locations were last filmed. Where 90s slasher films generated horror from the sense of some new informational horizon just around the corner, perceptible only by way of the perennial killer's command of communicative nodes and networks, K&Jhorror return to these slasher locations as if to measure how much that horizon has receded, and how much of cinema it might have left, inadvertently, in its wake. Watching their fan films makes you realize the extent to which 90s slasher films were part of some great last gasp of the cinematic, an invocation of hypersaturated celluloid against an imminent post-cinematic world, as they set out to extract some quantum of the cinematic from sites where cinema once lingered or settled, in a kind of Romantic remediation, an appeal to the mnemonic, restorative properties of place.

However, as the combination of handheld and dashboard cameras might suggest, the dissociation of cinematic and post-cinematic apprehension that Julie was starting to experience at that fatal intersection doesn't tend to be reversed, or even halted, by these fan gestures. Instead, it is consummated—and it is in this sense only that K&Jhorror's fan films work as recreations, albeit recreations that are in a sense *more complete* than the original film, insofar as they continue its partial devolution into post-cinematic disorientation. In the original intersection scene, Julie is prompted to address the killer's presence by discovering a dead body covered in crabs in the trunk of her car. It is hard to see how the killer could have put the body there—it is one of the palpably implausible moments in the film—but even more difficult to see how the killer is able to remove the body and the crabs, and clean up the sand and the detritus, in the short time it takes Julie to run for help, immediately after she has

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called out to him. In narrative, cinematic, and spatio-temporal terms, it is frankly impossible. Yet that very impossibility is what makes it clear that the killer has not only heard Julie but has responded to her claim to show himself in his true light. From this point on, we start to glimpse the killer more and more, but that is only because the true revelation has already occurred—the revelation of his profound automobility, his capacity to transform Julie’s car into a perceptual tool that becomes more or less continuous with the mechanisms that drive our own incredulity and cinematic engagement. In other words, it is at this moment that the killer manages to constitute himself as both agent and venue of our gaze, an automobilizing venue-experience that exceeds the film.

This sense of testimony, of bearing witness to an infrastructural apprehension that is somehow cinematic, as well as the modulation of location scouting as a retrospective act, are explored further in the popular blog *Scouting New York*. Run by Nick Carr, a location scout working in New York, the blog’s posts take the form of extended photographic essays, or montage sequences, that alternately retrace the locations of quintessential New York films and report on infrastructural peculiarities, eccentricities, and narratives encountered in the course of scouting. In Carr’s eyes, “locations” themselves only exist somewhere between all the films that have been (or might have been) shot there and all the films that might someday be shot there (or imagined to be shot there). As a result, each space brims with a cinematic attachment and import that is nevertheless distinct from any one specific film—an attachment that I would like to suggest is both distinctively post-cinematic and distinctively infrastructuralist. Two posts are particularly useful in this respect. In the first, a record of the magisterial approach from the Bronx to Brooklyn via Jerome Avenue, Carr provides quite a simple, straightforward instance of the visual rhetoric of the site—a photo-essay structured according to the rhythms of driving and windshield viewing that sets out an infrastructural and topographical vista that *should* have been in a film, or *might as well* have been in a film, so cinematically does it unfold in front of us (“Where

New York Begins”). The second is one of many instances in which Carr traces out the architecture and infrastructure of a movie theater buried in a subsequent structure—in this case a pharmacy—while obeying the same visual rhetoric of the first post, as if sketching out the successive shots in a projected film (“Hidden in a Rite Aid”). Taken in combination, these blog posts suggest an approach to urban infrastructure that is inextricably cinematic, albeit divorced from any actual experience of the cinematic, let alone any specific film, as well as inextricably bound up with driving, albeit divorced from the actual physical experience of driving. I would like to suggest that this gestures towards the technologies of Google Street View and Google Maps as new loci of infrastructuralist attachment, and to suggest that we turn our attention towards their intersection with what we still call film as a productive and provocative way to think about how the post-cinematic venue might be constituted.

I would also like to argue, more generally, that we need a new way of thinking about the stories we tell about film, and even the way we talk about film itself—something that is addressed by the variety of methodological approaches set out in this book, and by the book itself. At the moment, it often feels as if there is a pull back in the other direction, a yearning for the “cinematic” that collapses all too easily into a yearning for the “canonical,” or at least goes some way towards explaining the resurgence of canonical preoccupations in millennial film criticism. But even these efforts to transform cinematic spectatorship from a hyperobject back into a mere object are already enthralled by this bewildering dispersal of cinematic experience, this new world order in which the very distinctions between “film” and “place” seem to be on the verge of collapsing. One of the most marked canonical gestures in the last fifteen years—or in the whole of film criticism, really—has been Paul Schrader’s effort, in his capacities as director, writer, and academic, to come up with a definitive, even summative, film canon. Of course, the project failed, and of course Schrader reflected on it with his typical wit and astuteness. One part of his reflection, though, keeps coming back to haunt me—his explanation

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of what really committed him to the canonical project in the first place, what made him feel how urgently the “cinematic” itself needed to be sedimented and canonized if it wasn’t to disperse completely. It’s an anecdote Schrader seems to have told so many times that, by the time he disclosed it to the press, it had become an anecdote about telling the anecdote, or about how often he found himself returning to it in lieu of his actual canonical project itself:

In March 2003, I was having dinner in London with Faber and Faber’s editor of film books, Walter Donohue, and several others when the conversation turned to the current state of film criticism and lack of knowledge of film history in general. I remarked on a former assistant who, when told to look up Montgomery Clift, returned some minutes later asking, “Where is that?” I replied that I thought it was in the Hollywood Hills, and he returned to his search engine. (34)

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Notes

[1] It would be useful to consider this free-floating, jettisoned automobility as a way of thinking about post-cinematic music, or post-soundtrack

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music. In recent years, a strand of music has emerged that attempts to evoke the experience of post-cinematic, digital media by way of how absolutely it has engulfed what we might have once thought of as the privileged, hermetic space of the automobile. In this respect, the various projects of Johnny Jewel are particularly instructive, especially the way in which Chromatics' score for *Drive* gives way to Symmetry's *Themes For An Imaginary Film*. John Maus and Ariel Pink's *Haunted Graffiti* take this project even further—drawing on the transitional and incidental music of 80s cinema in particular, they conjure up a world in which post-cinematic media hasn't merely incorporated the automobile, but has managed to incorporate every adjacent cinematic experience, every anticipation or recollection of a multiplex while driving through suburban streets on a cold dark night.