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# **Emotional Driving: Cocooning in the Public Realm**

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## Emotional Driving: Cocooning in the Public Realm

It is like the silence that I knew in the sickrooms  
of my childhood, when I would lie in a fever,  
cocooned under a hot, moist mound of  
blankets...

John Banville, *The Sea*

### ABSTRACT

The concept of postmodernity has been debated intensely. This paper argues its useful, though limited applicability. We analyze it as a new socio-cultural complex, performing necessary socio-reproductive functions, a result of a transformation of the capitalist mode of production. We argue the rise of a new system of personal relations and involvement in spaces: a postmodern, narcissist psychological system. Our conceptual definition in terms of cocooning may explain changing notions of public space, shopping mall, home and automobile driving. Postmodern existence has become volatile. On the one hand there is a growing need for super-safe cocoons, allowing the narcissist his Panzer Ego. The design of automobiles, gated communities and enclosed shopping malls are interpreted as such. On the other hand there is the need to feel challenged *or* to defy, permitting someone, counterpunctually as it is, to feel his 'existence'.

### 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Automobiles transport their drivers in both senses of the verb. Cars move us from here to there - by accident perhaps even into eternity. They also transport us emotionally. However, there is a marked difference between modern and postmodern automobile driving experience.

Cocoon-like spaces of automobile display - auto fairs, showrooms, even whole 'cities' built for that purpose (Meyhöfer 2003; Kooijman and Sierksma 2005) - exhibit new car models to their potential clientele. Inside such spaces, vehicles and visitors acquire an existence quite

different from what they later become in traffic. Once having exited the showroom, the visitor returns to a reality of dusted windows, mudded tires, the search for a gas station or motel, necessary repairs and, not to forget, the actual driving amongst many such cars with its inevitable tail backing and traffic jams. Our analysis concerns postmodern transit – a new type of emotional relation between driver, automobile, traffic and the ‘home’.

There are still many cultural differences between the United States and Europe, however, our premise is their gradual fading. Postmodern narcissism increasingly characterizes both continents (§2+§3). This should not be read in moral terms – i.e. as ‘culture criticism’ of the ‘Americanization’ of Europe, of its ‘MacDonaldization’, or of ‘American TV rubbish’ (cf. G Ritzer 1996). Social theory is society’s own mode of learning through self-description; it must and it *cannot* be didactic and prescriptive (Luhmann 1998: 22). We analyze and explain the postmodern transformation of our material and mental culture. It affects our *common* system of socio-economic reproduction, which merely materialized earlier in the USA (mid fifties) than in Europe (seventies).

This paper argues that, under comparatively stable conditions of modernity, the psychological system still hinged on a more or less steady conscience; modern ‘narcissism’ was still a psychiatric phenomenon of deviance. Postmodernity, by contrast, generalizes narcissism into a trait of *normal* culture, crucially affecting everyday social intercourse.

Global society entails an evolving, non-linear, complex system of car-based travel, to be considered as autopoietic and self-expanding (cf. Luhmann 1990: 1-21). Its elements have been phrased in terms of ‘individual car consumption’ which ‘provides status’ – a ‘dominant culture’ involving ‘discourses on what constitutes a good life’ (Urry 2004: 25-6; Caldeira 1999: 84, 87; Caldeira 2001; Low 2003: 387, 391). However, ‘status’ and ‘a good life’ are modern notions, presupposing an ethics of hierarchy and conscience. Such modern ethics contrasts with a new, postmodern situational ethics (§3).

This car-based system of transportation is closely linked to the general spread of suburban life. The automobile itself becomes a cocooned environment - a module in a chain of modules: house, shopping mall, office, leisure facilities and 'safe' parking. Car transport links these spaces, and itself tends to become closed and controlled. The concept of spatial and social cocoons refers to typified, closed situations in which people separate themselves from what they consider 'different', and do not desire to communicate with or to influence outsiders.

We prefer the concept of cocoon to the notion of 'capsular society' or 'cellular architecture' (De Cauter 1998: 73). Such notions tend to explain the inhabitant's behavior as a *result* of the spatial environment and its cultural icons – an ideology of 'culturalism' or its special version of spatial determinism (Castells 1979, 2006), which one finds even in sociologically oriented architect-authors like Koolhaas. According to such determinism, architecture 'promotes', 'exploits', 'inspires' and 'supports forms of social intercourse'; 'the city can make better people through as yet unidentified methods' (Koolhaas 1977a/1977b: 322; Koolhaas 1995: 1262/3). More specifically one even invents 'a public space design guide' (Childs 2004).

The mistaken notion of 'a capsular society' also suggests the idea of resistance by 'ordinary unplanned spontaneity', which is merely 'repressed'. Instead of analyzing the postmodern deconstruction of the relative autonomy of the private and the public, as social phenomenon *to be explained*, such authors consider it a 'misunderstanding' to be removed (De Cauter 1998: 74; Boomkens 1998: 59).

In our analytical perspective, cocooning is the result of a new type of personality. The problem presenting itself is the *actual use* made of both legally 'public' streets and legally 'private', gated communities. In postmodern society, we shall argue, the *desire* to indiscriminately encounter and commune with strangers is diminishing *in both* areas. Such encounter was a defining aspect of modern public space – its precondition was a shared will or common value to know what others know and to know how it differs from one's own opinions and habits, living with strangers instead of living apart from them. To understand contemporary

car driving better, we need to understand the relationship between postmodern narcissism and the new use of our 'public' streets.

*Modern* houses and neighborhoods were not yet 'cocoons'. They served primarily as private refuge for recuperation, a safe haven shielding those coming home from the rough, outside, public, capitalist world. However, each new day the inhabitants *had to* return to that world, precisely to meet strangers and live the modern hectic life of encounter, debate and work. By contrast, in the last twenty years the postmodern phenomena of gated community and cocooning began to dominate society.

It is theoretically important to ask how people *behave* in and *use* spaces. Forms of social intercourse do *not* originate in spatial forms, but in changes of the social structure. The same applies to the driving of automobiles on 'public' streets and highways and to the occupation of 'private' vehicles. Designed roads and car interiors do not 'make' the driver – the drivers' socially conditioned psychological system determines their auto-behavior. Thus, we must ask what it is for a space to be 'public'.

First we elaborate the concepts of postmodernity (§2), narcissism (§3) and public space (§4); subsequently we analyze suburban life (§5), driving the streets in town (§6), shopping in malls (§7) and parking (§8).

## 2 POSTMODERN SOCIETY

The concepts 'modern*ity*' and 'postmodern*ity*' designate two different cultural complexes of three relatively autonomous histories: 1) the growing influence of mass media; 2) the deconstruction of personal identity; 'Modern*ism*' and 'postmodern*ism*' are reserved for ideological phenomena – plural intellectual and artistic reactions, as well as 'common' man's ideological formations reacting to these cultural complex structures of modernity and postmodernity. The concept of 'ideology' refers to a subject's beliefs, which exist in 'material actions, inserted into material practices governed by material rituals' (Althusser 1971: 169).

There is, then, *one* cultural complex of (post)-modernity; there are *more* ideological (post)-modernisms. Crucial in the development of postmodernity is a *deconstruction* of the critical and communicative capacity of the individual – *not* merely the *repression* of a supposedly universal human capacity, as Critical Theory argued. On our analysis, the causal nexus of this postmodern deficit is the decay of a once solid modern 'identity' as a result of the reconstruction of Western Ego.

A crucial factor in the rise of postmodernity is the withering of modern, close-knit family life. For children at an ever-earlier age, the family's functions are increasingly taken over by a variety of other institutions of authority. The Freudian, modern family turned on the affectionate tradition of values and value-related norms. Whatever its psycho-pathological side effects, parental management of the family assembled an efficient character in an individual with a conscience and an identity. This production extended over a considerable period of years.

Its deconstruction is due to a cluster of factors: the loosening of sexual morality in the wake of a generalized utilitarianism regarding the immediate satisfaction of needs; high divorce rates; both parents working as result of rising prices of real estate; the cartelization of pedagogic authority and consequently a decrease of basic trust of the child. Trust - as contrasted with confidence, which is based on prior experience (Seligman 1997: 16, 30; Luhmann 1988) - is *un*conditional trust in unknown others, on our analysis feeding on basic

trust acquired within a steady system of early upbringing. Also crucial is the fact that bringing up children does not have a 'symbolically generalised medium' of its own, i.e. it is not a system centred around one *single* medium of communication, like science ('truth') or economy ('money'). It has to succeed in working out its high degree of recurrent dependence on organized communication (Luhmann 1998: 407f). Added to this is the fact that the movement on the labour market become less depended on bringing-up and on education, a firm flexibly organizing the planning of its own personel (Luhmann 1998: 786f). Consequentially, and helped by its own inner fragmentation, family upbringing is loosing much of its former societal urgency.

In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Modernist architects could still design houses as theatres for a personal family life, fenced off against the anonymous, public life outside – the house as a 'mask' (Loos 1914: 129). That warm, 'hysterical' private unit of the bourgeois family (Lasch 1982) only survived a century. The increase of one-person-households in Western society (Inglehart 1997: 288-292) indicates that postmodern 'family' life has become fragmented.

At first, the combined forces of industrial and finance capital plus the domination of mass media produced a culture of *modern consumerism*, which fused a cult of 'immediate satisfaction' with the intensification of fashion (Schulze 1992; Luhmann 1998; Lasch 1982; Bauman 2000; Kumar 1997; SCP 2004). When, later, the modern utilitarian nexus between need, acquisition and satisfaction slackened, this modern consumerism transformed into postmodern *shoppism* – shopping *anything* from partners to jobs, from 'experiences' to goods. We shall argue that postmodern shoppism differs in essence from modern consumerism.

To 'experience' something, a person must increasingly become involved in a hyper reflexive process, which allows self-observation *while* experiencing. One is continuously forced to ask oneself whether 'the experience is pleasing'. Thus, postmodern men and women get involved in 'the project of a beautiful life' (Schulze 1992: 40, 44-6, 102). At stake is the dominance of aesthetics in everyday life. A relative indifference towards use value results from a dominance of

subjective feeling over the objective characteristics of goods (cf. also Low 2003: 390-1 about security issues). The shopper 'owns' rather than 'possesses' objects. Property is an abstract, juridical category. Possession, by contrast, is an existential capacity - a desire to use something in a personal manner, based on personal knowledge and capacity like the excellent rider on his horse, the first class fencer and his foil, the artisan and his utensils (Balibar 1972: 283-9).

Postmodern people, then, are fascinated by a boundless offer of commodities and by acquisition *as such*. Shoppism involves a primacy of things over the interest in meeting other people. Research shows that an 'emptiness of self' triggers a search for 'symbolic self-completion' in shopping; yet, after the purchase the buyer again feels empty (Belk 2000: 96; Golden 2000: 145).

An overdose of possible acquisitions and possible activities involves *the pragmatic paradox of forced choice* – shoppism forces to choose *without* offering a criterion for choice. This paradox results in hyper-reflexivity and 'soul searching', critically affecting what was once a modern person's personality 'in steady-state' (Sierksma 1991: 162-7; Watzlawick et al. 1967). Another factor, intensifying this paradox, is the introduction of a television set in each family member's room. The TV and internet media, their content *and* form, produce an ever growing stream of ever faster bits of meaningless information, increasingly consumed solitary, in ever greater quantities, by an ever growing mass of people at an ever earlier stage in life (McLuhan 1964: 39, 269, 276-278; Elchardus 2002; Castells 2004b). This internet-interface 'elective social networking' (Castells 2004a: 237) tends to reduce *and* transform face to face contact with immediate family members, comparatively raising the status of peers at an ever earlier age. Contact of youngsters with the 'outside' world, as a result of internet connection, is indeed greater in quantity, yet reinforcing adolescent norms, rather than parental values.

Also important is the all-pervasive projection of economic and juridical metaphors on almost any activity. People are 'working' on their 'selves', 'reworking' and 'investing' in their 'relations'. Everyday life activities tend to transform into man-machine interface situations,



dominated by gadgets and machinery. Life in gated communities is no exception; research of Blandy and Lister (2005) suggests that gated residents' rights and responsibilities are, by and large, confined to *legalities*, rather than extending to a commitment to enhance social networks either within the development or in the adjacent wider community. Postmodern conditions converted the modern *ideology* of 'technologism' into a proper *theory* of a society, now transformed into a 'techno-tope'. It also made, what once was a modern *ideology* of utilitarianism, with its emphasis on distrust as the fundament of all sociality, into an adequate *description* of present postmodern culture.

These clustered factors have one all-encompassing effect: the permanent *destabilization* of what was formerly the meta-level of modern supra-situational *values*. Postmodern society tends to reduce the regulation of all behavior to *situational* rules and norms, not any longer mutually linked through meta-values. This results in the loss of formerly institutionalized types of *pre-reflexive* modern identity, and gives rise to a postmodern *hyper-reflexive*, narcissistic psychological system (§3).

Whereas modernity was still characterized by the primacy of valued effectiveness over efficiency, postmodern culture witnesses the autonomization of success, efficiency and expediency. This trend implies hyper-specialization, professional sports being a prime example. Not so much *what* one does or says matters, but the *how* - whether one is 'successful' in it doesn't matter which activity. This increasingly makes of Habermas' 'domination-free dialogue', analyzed in terms of the primacy of valued behavior over rule efficiency (Habermas 1968) a theoretical anachronism.

### 3 NARCISSISM

Rereading Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* from 1946 (Benedict 1991), one is struck by the similarities between the prototypical Japanese shame culture and postmodern behavior. The genesis of postmodernity involves an almost revolutionary change of

Western *guilt* culture into a new version of *shame* culture. A shame dominated culture is characterized by a lack of a deep seated 'inner-directed', value-oriented conscience; in positive terms, by a person's 'outer-directed' orientation on situational norms (Sierksma 1991: 267-71; Demos 1996). Some authors have criticized the shame-culture and guilt-culture 'anti-thesis'. Cairns' summary analysis of the Benedict/Mead thesis may serve as a prototypical example of that argument (Cairns 1993). We shall return to this text as it exemplifies a misunderstanding of the issues involved.

Compliance to situational norms is in many instances practically dependant on the *actual* surveillance by relevant others of a person's *external* signs. Though a loner may also feel ashamed, if he imagines relevant others as present. *Relevant* others are those others, defined by a *specific* situation *as* relevant; they are considered to 'belong' to a situation. Each institutionalized, i.e. typical situation has its *own* set of specific norms, which does not relate to other sets, as was yet the case in modern society in which situational norms were covered by a meta-level, i.e. by an umbrella of 'universal', 'invaluable' values.

Of course, in both guilt and shame 'internalization of standards' plays its role. What is at stake in the theoretical analysis of shame and guilt, though, is the *type* of standard as wells as the *manner* in which the psychological system is organized in both cases, i.e. in relation to the modern or postmodern social system that functions as its 'environment'. Cairns and the research he quotes in his support completely fail to differentiate between values, norms, ends-in-view and expectations (Cairns 1993: 308ff). This crucial sociological distinction involves not so much a debate over yes-or-no internalization of 'standards', as a discussion of the range of application of these types of 'standards'. Values have a wider, more universal range of application; expectations and rules are situation-specific. This may explain the fact that in a society with a shame dominance two contrary types of behavior may count as 'good' – depending on the situation. Cairns and the other critics of so-called anti-thesis between shame and guilt culture also take as their supposition the 'Freudian' ego/super-ego as established, merely qualifying its

conditions (Cairns 1993: 20ff, 34). Our analysis, by contrast, centers on the phenomenon of narcissism and its structurally *defective* ego. The latter is considered as crucial for the rise of a *specific* postmodern culture with a shame dominance.

Western postmodern society, however, adds an awesome trait to the Japanese version. In Japan's history, situational norms have been supported by a stable functional separation of the various institutional spheres of life, yet precisely defining their limits, which does not allow for many interstitial i.e. non-situationally defined spaces, i.e. spaces in which *any* rule is absent. The transformation from modernity into postmodernity in Western societies leaves many 'uncertain' social spaces that involve risk, because one is insecure what goes and what does not. The relative autonomy of social institutions is fading in the West - all behavior has become a little bit sexual, a little bit political, a little bit playful, a little bit informative, a little bit work (Baudrillard 1990: 17; Habermas 1985: 393-394).

In many situations we observe this postmodern promiscuity of formerly different types of behavior - in the 'Dallas' quality of the girl at the supermarket counter, in the secretary running her little management outfit for the boss, as if partying twenty-four hours a day. Also compare the sports-like quality of the Japanese factory worker who seems to be 'in training' permanently, with the postmodern jogger at his 'work out'.

Following philosophical pragmatism, it is useful to differentiate between 'identity' and 'subjectivity'. Identity results from long term habits linked to steady social positions, which produce subconscious dispositions towards the 'world'. Identity, then, is *pre-reflexive*. *Only* when regular habit is frustrated, the organism is forced to *become* 'subjectively' reflexive. Subsequently, it focuses on the frustrating aspect of the world or of itself, which only at such moment *becomes* its 'object'. In an organism's *normal* pre-reflexive routine, 'subject' and 'object' do *not yet* exist. The *human* organism, however, can be said to have a normal 'reflexive

habit', holding reflection as it were 'in reserve', always somehow alert to *possible* changes (Dewey 1958: Ch. VI; James 1925: 100; Peirce 1955: 284, 296).

*Normal* situational 'stress' (Laborit, 1981) is so small as *not* to make the individual continually fully self-conscious. Under pre-modern and modern conditions, explicit self-consciousness or subjectivity was an *intermittent* result of special events in which self-evident habits cannot get their way. According to the pragmatist analysis, the human organism must be equipped with a steady identity to *afford* becoming subjectively self-conscious in such 'crises'. Only in that case can it contrast its 'shifting selves' with a 'nuclear self' (James 1925: 132-43). Only then can it afford *occasional* doubt about its own capacities and about the status of part of the world, subsequently adjusting the two, in order to re-achieve its 'steady state'.

Lack of such basic, nuclear identity would effect continuous insecurity, causing the human mind to become *hyper*-reflexive. As man's biological setup does not lend the psychological system the support of a full-fledged instinctual program of steady behavioral reactions (Gehlen 1966), an organism without a steady self and under continuous stress needs the *artificial* outside support of a 'Panzer Ego' (Theweleit 1980: 206-46).

Postmodern persons are frequently shifting from one situation to another, acting roles in different plays, each directed by their own set of rules, unrelated to the rules of other situations. The postmodern individual, the reconstruction of the modern psychological system, thrives on superficial activity monitored by others. It does not depend on self-monitoring by its own conscience. This new kind of narcissism paradoxically involves a *desired paranoia* – a self-willed panoptical surveillance of one's behavior and appearance, a desire to be screened and scanned by *relevant* others, as well as the will to screen and scan these others.

Such generalized voyeurism implies intolerance for insecurity and uncertainty, to be witnessed in shopping malls, gated communities and in the latest design of automobiles. Nowadays, one can even buy a guaranty for ordinary commodities. Both the friendly, though scrutinizing gaze of known, relevant others, and the unfriendly stare of irrelevant strangers

actually *constitute* a narcissist's 'existence', whose 'ego' is empty of an *inner* identity. The fleeting feeling of 'personality' must become structured *from the outside* - over and over again.

Our analysis of a new kind of postmodern shame-culture explained in terms of situationally relevant others, does not imply the notion of '(in)authenticity', which refers to a possible process of *de*-alienation and to so-called 'identity politics'; instead, our analysis implies a reconstructed relation between the social system and the psychological system (Luhmann 1990: Ch. 1), the search for 'identity' being merely an index of its absence. The further development of systems theory must answer more complicated questions; the Deleuzian hyperbole of resistance and 'schizo-analysis' seems irrelevant (Deleuze et al. 1972, 1980), as are other ideological exploits of the notion of 'identity politics' propagated by for instance Castells c.s. as 'the affirmation of a multiplicity of local selves', yet also labeled in marketing terms as '*customized* local experience' (Castells 2004a: 39, 30). We also refer back to our remark on the proponents of the notion of 'capsular society' and its elements of 'resistance'. In our perspective, narcissism tendentially becomes the normal condition of the psychological system coping with its changed system-environment-in-flux, which it cannot influence and which does not allow the self a steady character. However, various shame cultures like the Japanese also indicate the possibility of a new steady state of such nexus of flexible social *and* flexible psychic systems.

Thus, it is a popular misunderstanding to interpret postmodern narcissism as 'self-absorption' (cf. Sennett 1977: 8). Instead of favoring an *already* existing, strong self, the narcissist continually searches for the completion of a *deficient* self. Lash' perception of the development of a narcissistic culture, somewhere in the American sixties and the European seventies/eighties, is important (Lash 1984; also Jameson 1983; 1984).

Postmodern narcissists are suffering from an intense confusion of self and world, i.e. uncertainty as to its own boundaries resulting in a basic feeling of powerlessness. Narcissists are non-assertive, slave-like - they tend to see the world as a mirror and as a screen on which to project the confused fears and desires that result from their incompleteness. Anti-assertive, they

may yet become aggressive (Lasch 1984: 19ff, 33ff, 57). One is reminded of the modern concept of 'authoritarian personality', fusing submission to superiors with aggressiveness towards lower placed, 'irrelevant' persons (Adorno et al. 1964). However, under conditions of postmodernity this hierarchical aspect is fading.

Postmodern narcissists do their utmost *not* to confront situationally relevant others with unruly behavior. In the office situation, for instance, one keeps strictly to rules that apply to an accurately defined set of work-relevant others; in the home situation it is the same. However, because the various sets of rules of different situations, making up someone's life, have nothing or very little to do with each other, *relevant* others belonging to one situation may be *irrelevant* in another situation.

By implication 'others', who do *not* fall within an as 'relevant' defined domain, tend to become , *irrelevant as such*. If in the presence of a defined set of specified relevant others they fail to comply with the situational rules, postmodern narcissists feel ashamed *only* towards them – *not* guilty towards *whomever* they may have hurt, as a modern person would have felt. Modern humanism still involved universal values applied by anyone to anyone, making everybody relevant in *some* respects. This attitude is waning, thus postmodern narcissists may consider certain rules to apply to *irrelevant* others, yet not to their own behavior – for instance traffic rules.

A methodological caveat is needed. Max Weber's 'ideal type' remains a relevant methodological tool. It is 'a pure type' of social system, 'a consistent unity of meaning' constructed for the understanding of *always* impure, actual behavior (Weber 1964: 4-8, 14-5; 1973: 266-90). Accordingly, we do *not* claim that 'guilt culture' is substituted by 'shame culture' instantly and completely. In postmodern societies shame only tends to *dominate* guilt - narcissism is its form. Between social segments of society there still is a variety in the intensity of this pattern of dominance, and variation in the intensity of situational shaming. Large segments of the

population in Western countries immigrated from shame cultures that fit well into the new order, while their presence has also a definite impact on the growth of shame culture in these countries.

The process involved will take up time and will intensify. In this respect, the present generation of youngsters is avant-garde as it were, compared with the older generation that still grew up under 'modern' conditions. Thus, 'ideal-typical' postmodernity may be defined in terms of the multiplication of ever narrowing, situationally relevant circles – an idiosyncrasy of socially 'gated' groupings.

The modern hectic of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century produced a comprehensive social 'reserve' with regard to others. However, it also motivated people to keenly observe and meet unknown strangers in order and learn different opinions and different habits as 'clues' to what was going on (Sennett 1977: 21; Simmel 1950; Caldeira 1999: 93).

Postmodern situational narcissism, by contrast, eliminates the distance kept to relevant others, while making the distance to all irrelevant others greater. The latter are 'risky' as such, thus reducing the relevance of their opinions. However, apart from the panoptical gaze of relevant others, the narcissist's incomplete self also needs a certain dose of enmity from these irrelevant others - a negative resistance which also constitutes a *temporary* completion of self.

This explains the contradictory, volatile quality of postmodern existence. On the one hand a growing need for super-safe cocoons, allowing the narcissist his Panzer Ego. The design of gated communities and enclosed shopping malls suits this postmodern psychological system (Atkinson and Flint 2004; Caldeira 2001; Low 2003b). On the other hand the need to feel challenged *or* to defy, permitting someone, counterpunctually as it were, to feel his 'existence'. We shall consider the example of car driving in paragraph 6.

For the narcissist all interstitial social space/time *between* safe cocoons must become either cocoon-like or *positively* irritating. Thus, universal survivalism characterizes postmodern society,

especially survival in what has become defined as 'public space' in its merely legal sense. Depending on the intensity of narcissism, unknown others either become increasingly irrelevant entities to be treated negatively, or potentially positive irritants to be confronted. Within this context of an experience of generalized risk an ideal-typical postmodern society must guarantee its civilians smooth transit from one situational cocoon into the next. Car driving is relevant here.

#### 4 POSTMODERN PUBLICITY

For our analysis of car and house as cocoons we must first specify the space that drivers traverse, i.e. to answer the question of the 'publicity' of streets and roads. Today most people consider roads to be part of the 'public domain', considered 'freely accessible' in a purely legal sense. However, the publicity of space is multi-layered. Its concept involves the following aspects: legal accessibility; an implicit code of social acceptability of certain behaviors; privacy; the encounter of differences; visibility; and guaranteed safety. In general, the *dominant* use defines a space at a certain time.

Two perspectives in sociology have largely determined two one-sided definitions of publicity (Wolfe 1997: 182-188). Habermas' analysis of 'a domination-free dialogue' tends to favor the legal-political aspect of publicity (Habermas 1968). Goffman's 'interactionism', by contrast, suggest that 'real' social reality is always off stage, behind closed doors – thus 'private' (Goffman 1959). Goffman concentrates on the visibility aspect, Habermas privileges the open encounter of differences. However, both leave out the analysis of the actual *use* of space, which can be *both* private and public, however varied the relation between these aspects. Whatever behavioral aspect is dominant in a given social construct of public space, other aspects of publicity *remain* relevant. A given construct may perhaps not explicitly define certain spaces as public, but their sociological analysis may point out that it implicitly functions as such. The



modern social construct of public space, for instance, defined 'the home' as 'private'. However, quite often 'public' discourse spontaneously emerged *within* this context of 'privacy'.

At certain times the sitting room in a 'private' house is used in a public manner, which makes it *also* a 'public space' - a meeting place for members of a family, who explicitly exchange different viewpoints on politics (e.g. what to vote) and social issues (e.g. how to behave outside the house). The arrival of the television usurped or at least reduced this public aspect of the 'private' home (Frampton 1979: 363). Television introduced commercial value into family life (Cohen 2003).

*Each* human space may function *both* publicly and privately – this has always been the case. Thus, the notion of 'semi-public space' is superfluous, as it ignores the possibility of a space privately owned, while at the same time, precisely *because* of this, functioning publicly. We may think of a political debate having consequences for the whole city, held in the backroom of a bar, hired for an evening by a local branch of a political party for the express use by its members only. That same room becomes a primarily private space when, the next day, it is used by a chess club for its tournament – the games having no consequences for others at all. It may, however, be freely accessible; others may enter and look on from the sideline. Nevertheless, this public aspect of communication will be limited, as a coded agreement defines what for such visitors is acceptable behavior – for instance: no talking.

In modern public space strangers met and exchanged views – strangers, that is, with a certain steady identity. In postmodernity people shy away from such positive encounter with unknown others. Postmodern narcissists seek out various forms and levels of cocooning. These '*social* envelopes' have more or less wide definitions of belonging: sects; tight-knit clubs; age oriented gatherings; addicts to a certain fashion in clothes of music; solitary workaholics behind their home laptop cocooning inside 'work'.

These kinds of social behavior may, of course, require a '*spatial* envelope', such as gated communities, nature reserves, special cafes with an exclusive attendance, gated auto routes

and, of course, cars. However, it would be premature to *a priori* consider roads or cars or houses as *either* 'public' *or* 'private', merely on the basis of their legal 'ownership'. Identification as private or public must in both cases depend on their mode of social practice.

In general, in 'public' spaces people are increasingly likely to socialize in small groups rather than in large groups (Castells 2004a: 219). Using the notion of 'space' metaphorically, and claiming that 'media have become the public space' (Castells 2004a: 30) this, of course, makes it useless for the purpose of analyzing road behavior or the characteristics of suburbia. Again, we prefer the notion of 'social envelope' or 'cocoon' which precisely emphasizes the de-spacing of much postmodern 'social' contact. One of the issues to be explained is whether there is a causal nexus between intensification of such cocoon-like, de-spaced communication between likes, often interface instead of face to face, on the one hand, and on the other the actual increase in aggressive behavior in real 'public' space, for instance on the road.

Complicating all this is the fact that the analytical use of the concepts of 'private' and 'public' often still presupposes the validity of the *modern* construct of their dialectic. However, postmodernity is in the process of 'de-sanctifying' the once 'simply given opposition between private space and public space' (Foucault 1967). Postmodern narcissism tends to reduce privacy *inside* the social cocoon; at the same time it minimalizes communicative contact with others *outside* its circle. Postmodern sheer *surveillance* of other man's behavior, whether 'live' or by web cam, is *not* the same as modern public *encounter*. Also, the actual negation of irrelevant others in public transit or on the street leads to the display of what in modern times was explicitly a-social, private communication – both in acting and in word (for instance the 'shameless' use of cell phones).

Inside the postmodern social cocoon, situational narcissism reduces the probability of discussion on public issues, i.e. matters relating to the *wider* social setting. Narcissism tends to reduce people's *capacity* to encounter strangers. Whereas on the one hand, situational narcissism produces a need for feelings of *strict* 'identity' and 'authenticity' in terms of roots,

ethnicity, profession or musical and clothing fashions, on the other hand this very same strictness, when detected in 'irrelevant' others, is considered ridiculous or hostile.

## 5 SUBURBAN SPACES

Within decades the world population will be living predominantly in 'cities' (Hall 1998). However, *suburban* life will increasingly dominate postmodern society, ever more household units residing in suburban surrounding of cities rather than inside them. At the same time a majority of buildings inside the city 'center' is acquiring office function. Postmodern Metropolis equals Suburbia - a clustering of suburban areas according to socio-economic vectors, instead of a 'town' radiating from what once was the dominant modern 'City Center'. Already in 1974 Castells noted the demise of 'the city center', which was becoming plural (Castells and Godard 1974). This phenomenon combined with a revolution in telecommunication, causing 'the axially of the urban layout' to fade (Virilio 1984: 543).

The first suburbs were the result of the first version of fast mass transport: the train. However, the invention and spread of the car gave the process momentum and a new intensity (Hayde 2003; Jackson 1987; Muller 1991; Wachs and Crawford 1992). Smaller towns, for instance, in the country side around New York were transformed as an unintended consequence of the New York highway system. It was designed by Robert Moses' for the recreation of metropolitan New Yorkers on Long Island's beaches. During the twenties, with the growth of private car ownership, highways became a general necessity. In the 1920's the amount of cars in the USA doubled to one per ten persons (Buckley 1992: 131). From then on, highways produced a new kind of suburban sprawl and jam-packed commuter roads everywhere – a new complex of housing types, transit systems and car use (Dewan 2005: 3).

Highways 'cut through the heart of neighborhoods' - more or less self-contained entities in the cities of 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its urban fabric was destroyed (Berman 1982: 291). The American reality contrasts with Behrens' 1914-modernist European utopia of the

urban thruway. 'Speed on the metropolitan roads' would lead to a grand aesthetics of urbanism, fusing 'time and space into the rhythmical beauty of our times'. Modern buildings would be designed as 'silhouettes' facilitating the speeding driver's perspective in line with his vehicle's movement (Behrens 1914: 8, 10).

US highways 'exploded' from inside the metropolitan grid 'immediately' and 'violently' *into* the country side, without any relation to it (Adorno 1951: §28). By contrast, in that first period of the car-age, most European highways simply *passed* the villages and cities that remained a world of their own. Since the 50's the USA highway web spread out from inside the Metropolis grid. Highways in the States became 'thruways' and 'expressways'. In this respect, as in so many others, the USA was *avant-garde*. European drivers had to wait for such postmodern blessings until the late 60's and 70's. Then the older European towns were violated from the outside.

Suburbanism on both continents resulted in a Western postmodern road system that weaves vast territories of separate homes, each with its own garage, into one great, endless macramé of roads without a clear beginning or an end. The separation of home, workplace and school became standard, nicely coinciding with a raise in the standard of living allowing each family two cars or even more. This complex process has brought an end to the 'science' of modern urbanism – if not the end of modern urbanism (Sierksma 2005). Although differences between the USA and Europe in quality and frequency of public transport do exist, the general tendency of postmodern society affirms Galbraith' precocious insight in the solid nexus between 'private opulence and public poverty'. There may be a strong tendency of both people and worksites spreading out over the suburban area (Sassen 2001: 256ff), yet even the suburban dweller needs a car to visit his suburban factory or office and increasingly uses it for fun (Beckers 2004: 12; SCP 1998: 699, 719, 727). Massive intra-suburban transit is the result. Interestingly enough, *The Network Society*, edited by Castells, does not even mention suburbia any more – it has become its general condition of existence (Castells 2004a). This, however,

must not make us lax in analyzing its spatio-social problematic, as Sassen rightly pointed out. Thus, the postmodern dominance of suburbia does not mean that everybody is suburban – for years to come the rest of the former city-center will be peopled by no car owning poor. Just like not-owning a credit card may lead to socio-economic exclusion, walking on the public street in certain city areas is becoming a sign of being a second rate citizen (Caldeira 1999: 93).

US parkways provided and still provide 'green' and 'leisure', their confusion being prevented by designed nature. Exiting the road at will is impossible; clear signs direct drivers to special exits where guided 'recreation in nature' is provided. Europeans visiting the States in the fifties were surprised by this routed cocooning of 'nature' inside a vast territory, so blessed with real, untouched nature (Frisch 1954: 207). In postmodernity this cocooning of nature has become specialized: special, fenced off 'tracks' of 'rugged nature' are designed for 'terrain' Sport Utility Vehicles, further discussed in §6 (4wheeldrive 2005).

Till the end of the fifties, houses with a veranda dominated US suburbia; family and neighborhood recreation was staged in front of the house, a separate garage still camouflaging the car. The garage was often disguised as a 'folly', in images of a Spanish' or a 'Tudor' tea-house. Garages and parkways, then, shared this picturesque design (Gebhard 1992).

However, as early as 1959 eye-witness Philip Roth could write on suburbia: 'Soon I was driving past long lawns which seemed to be twirling water on themselves, and past houses where no one sat on stoops, where lights were on but no windows open, for those inside, refusing to share the very texture of life with those of us outside, regulated with a dial the amounts of moisture that were allowed access to their skins' (Roth 1959: 8-9). At the same time, the autonomous unit of house and automobile was a new phenomenon.

American suburban 'localism' is not entirely similar to its European version (Cohen 2003: 229, 240). However, they share a narcissistic use of space and a socio-economical one-dimensionality. Suburbians do not commune socially anymore 'in the street'; they meet at 'private', selective garden parties where 'other' is absent. The rise of postmodern suburbia

meant a fast decline of once modern neighborhood feeling. The suburban street became 'public' in the merely legal sense of 'free access' – arteries for the flow of commuters going to work or shopping. Collective facilities, such as schools, shops and recreational buildings, are not located inside these suburbs.

The self-contained cocoon of the suburban house mirrors the cocooned environment of the mass produced car. Its type changed in the American forties and fifties, when the family-owned car was introduced as a mass consumption commodity. Between 1950 and 1980 US population increased by 50%; at the same time the country saw a 200% boost in privately owned cars (Jackson 1987: 256). Neighborhoods became increasingly mono-functional. The house changed its lay out: the garage door became front door; the family's recreation takes place in back gardens or inside the house itself. Instead of the practical space they once were, front gardens now became something just to look at.

A 1955 survey showed half of the interviewed families wanting their house 'free from traffic noise' with 'enough room outside the house for personal enjoyment'. Only 27% found it important to be living 'near houses of good friends'. A majority did not want neighbors to see into their house, or they were indifferent to them. Most interviewees did not like 'to see the street from inside their house' (Beyer et al. 1955: 139).

Suburban houses were transformed from a 'common base' into 'privatized sally-ports', from which to enter the road system. The streets also became privatized in terms of the use of privately owned vehicles. Postmoderns use their cars more intensively and are more isolated than people in 'modern times'. Since 1990 people feel the need to spend their 'free time' increasingly outside their house, making use of their cars more often (SCP 1998: 699, 719). For members of the fragmented household the car has become the last factor of 'social facilitation' (SCP 2004: 507). The car now has become a vehicle for the 'social gearing' of insulated situations.

The social superlative of cocooned car and cocooned house is the phenomenon of gated communities (Low 2003b). Most studies indicate survivalism as strong motive, however, the growing desire to live amongst like equals certainly is at stake. Interestingly enough the psychological feeling of safety resulting from gated living does not reduce the need for private safety measures (Low 2003a). And, taking Sassen's cue, the phenomenon of forced zones of safety are not reserved for the elite. One is reminded of the nocturnal no-go areas in the suburbs of Paris or Sao Paulo.

## 6 DRIVING THE STREETS

Suburban growth produced metropolitan congestion – the vehicle itself became an important cocoon. Cars were glued to the black tar surface; its driver's eyes glued to other cars, irritating images on the window screen. City roads and highways were increasingly emptied of their social, public quality and of scenic entertainment. The rapid decline of hitch-hiking since the seventies is a significant index. Drivers lost 'touch' with whatever moved around, whether nature or fellow man; they transformed into navigators of their machines. 'Media - the extensions of man' (McLuhan 1964).

Inside towns, as well as on the highways, both design and use of the streets changed. Shopping streets in the center lost their traffic function. Instead of working as late CIAM's 'core', as a pedestrian domain for 'spontaneous' contact with others (CIAM 1951: 282/5), they became the territory for shoppism (§2; Baker and Funaro 1951; Caldeira 1999; Gruen 1960, 1973; Hardwick 2003; Kooijman 1999).

This transformation involves a contradictory process. What became a new, postmodern *condition humaine*, at first seemed to be merely disappointment from a modern perspective. In the American sixties, Mumford even *advocated* suburban sprawl. Criticizing inner city congestion, he proposed pedestrian encounter as its medicine (Mumford 1963). The first shopping centers were supposed to provide a simulacrum of the 'good' city life - the *mall* as

'stage set' for shoppism. Victor Gruen, designer of the first Southdale Mall in 1956 in Edina Minneapolis, planned them as areas for impulsive and compulsive buying. In the end he considered such malls a failed experiment (Gruen 1978). In the eighties and nineties, covered malls were opened up to create a more 'lively' atmosphere. In fact, merely the exterior design changed while shoppism intensified. Ample use of electronic devices reinforced the mall's emphasis on security and surveillance.

At that time, neighborhood streets in the older towns became two-row 'parking lots' - small strips left for the driver, to exit the street to go shopping or to work. Once beautiful town gardens were destroyed and became parking lots for office crews that had invaded former homes. Both street and garden lost their social function as meeting place, thus complementing suburban growth.

Having entered the main streets, the driver is constantly forced to stop for traffic lights. Rather than *driving* one's car, cruising the inner town streets has become a matter of moving a few yards before stopping again. Both the desire to stop the machine without being able to, and the wish to move without a chance to do so, remain again and again unsatisfied. The pedestrian, the cyclist or another car all become a hindrance for the narcissist 'on the move', 'other' continually forcing attention away from the main object of either moving or stopping.

Not being able to escape these obstacles, car drivers feel objectified and out of control. Tolerance for delay and stoppage is diminishing; the variety of activities is increasing, leisure time is decreasing – increasingly, people feel hurried and stressed, especially those between 25 and 34 years of age (SCP 2004: 118, 114). As a result, postmodern public street space is dominated by aggressive, non-communicative privacies, the cocoon's driver regulated by traffic rules. There is little personal exchange – driving has become mere navigation and the response to sheer physical, irritating stimuli. Exchange is reduced to aggressive honking or obscene finger signs.



Paradoxically, this cyclical experience of permanent obstruction is felt as *public* frustration, but it may fuel a narcissist's feeling of private 'being'. Such resistance gives them the feeling that they 'exist'. Thus, the exasperating movement of the commuter and the shopper in town contribute to their fleeting presence of self. After such unpleasant voyage through an inimical metropolitan jungle, drivers arrive in their next cocoon – worksite, home, neighborhood, shopping mall – having 'gassed up' new energy.

Transit is increasingly an individual, not a social activity. Car-driving is the preferred manner of transportation. Postmodern car-drivers *prefer* to drive alone, allowing them 'to have enhanced feelings of control and management of their environment, mood, thoughts and space beyond the gaze of others' (Bull 2004: 248-249). The accompanying 'experience of excitement', a would-be feeling of freedom, seems associated more with cocooning comfort, than with speed, as regular traffic jam situations frequently confront the driver with back-tailing, flashing and cutting in. Drivers increasingly complain about road aggression (Faber 2000; SCP 2005: 220).

However, on the whole, traffic jams tend to bother the individual car-driver less and less (SCP 2005: 220-221). There are two types of postmodern highway drivers. One is susceptible to the norms and the surveillance of the highway situation, getting reassurance from information displays announcing the next traffic jam within short distance and its length. The other type – a minority – seeks for temporary escape from smooth transit, trying to escape surveillance, considering traffic rules to apply only to the other drivers and not to themselves. Popular TV programs follow extreme trespassers, showing aggressive behavior towards police officers and a tendency for denial. This minority feels the car's cocooning effect wane and seeks affirmation of self in aggressive driving behavior.

Postmodern cars are designed as safe cocoons, ideally suiting solitary mobility between other safe cocoons. In the early eighties its extreme version was produced: the Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV). Its belligerent exterior gives the impression of a machine moving everything out

of its way. Its average height is far above the sedan. A large vertical radiator covers a hidden bumper, emphasizing its aggressive virility; a 'cattle grill' is often added. Dark, shiny, even reflective paints are the rule, car-body and glass often being monochrome (Wright and Curtis 2005: 5). This 'car-animal' does not show its interior.

Till the 2005 gas crisis, 20% of all US sold new cars were of this type (Bradsher 2002); in Europe their market share was increasing. The SUV fits the narcissistic personality. The little research that exists shows it to be popular among people, especially male, with doubts about or even real trouble in their social and/or private life (Bradsher 2002: 93-123). The SUV, then, seems to camouflage their actual need for social bonds, helping its driver to cope with daily fears. Today's teenagers are intensely insecure – they cannot afford to buy a SUV yet, however, at auto salons they show a high preference for the type.

In the thirties, the thrill of speed featured in the first reports on driving modern mass produced cars on Europe's new highways (Heesen and Van Winden 1990: 39; Adcock 2005). For postmodern drivers, not so much actual *speed* is at stake, as the driver's emotional impression of *uninterrupted* movement. Since the American invention of automatic gears and power steering, sudden, even acceleration is the rule - cars drive smoothly as well as noiselessly. In SUV advertising speed is *not* the most significant point. Rather it presents its prowess as perfectly suitable for smooth transit in a city or a suburban environment (Brandon 2002). In the continual interruption of a traffic jam, the giant SUV allows its driver a feeling of smooth flow, as well as one of being screened off. This dims excessive irritation.

## 7 NEW PLAZAS

'Public' streets have been taken over by cars. More and more side walks of city streets are 'dead public space' (Sennett 1977: 12). In this respect, Corbusier's long distance call from the thirties, demanding the elimination of traditional side walk cafés from modern towns, has found a sympathetic ear.

The endeavor in the last few decades to resurrect 'urban space' is interesting. They are meant to seduce people from their cocoons and to encounter others. One prime advocate, Jon Jerde, claimed that a unique place is given form through an expressive and highly varied combination of forms (Kooijman 1999: 165-166). Koolhaas ridiculed these attempts as 'artificial respiration and resuscitation' producing empty 'plazas and markets' for 'dignified and decent forms of social intercourse'. He considered Jerde's movement 'frantic' and considers the traditional street definitively 'dead'. On his analysis the metropolis as such has a general *effect* of verticality, leaving no viable space for sociality at street level (Koolhaas 1977: 330; Koolhaas 1995: 1253).

Both the positive attempt *and* its criticism are yet again versions of architectural/spatial determinism. More interesting is whether such designed, artificial markets and plazas in fact attract people. They do – but there is doubt as to the form and function of the sociality involved. 'It seems, after all, as if New Urbanism (...) is not in the business of resolving urban problems, but offers instead a refuge and shelter from the city' (Rykwert 2000: 187).

In the last decade this creation of artificial 'public space' has become widespread. An indication is the website 'Project for Public Spaces', complete with the possibility to nominate one's favorite. The list hosts traditional as well as renovated market places. Other such sites host cities like Viroqua, advertising its 'rehabbed historic' buildings or places, 'complete with street lamps, benches and even a fountain'. The space is a 'genuine public market, anchored with seven brand new stores' (Main Street 2005). Such design is called 'place making'. It aims at 'reviving an urban neighborhood' and turning it from an 'unsafe' area into a place 'where people could feel comfortable having a conversation'. Such 'downtown public spaces' must, of course, 'be managed' (PPS 2005).

However, allowing for the possibility of managing safe shopping areas, the crucial question remains what *kind* of 'conversation' is taking place there. Is not the growing need for 'safety' itself an index of the survivalism of the postmodern, narcissistic psychological system? Even with

an objective improvement in safety, we yet register a growing feeling of anxiety (SCP 2004: 486). New and ever larger shopping malls are explicitly constructed to be 'safe'.

The godfather of the 'Project for Public Spaces', William H. Whyte, 'walked the city streets for more than 16 years, and... watched people and used time-lapse photography to chart the meandering of pedestrians'. According to him 'the social life in public spaces contributes fundamentally to the quality of life of individuals and society' (PPS 2005; Zukin 2005). However, Whyte's contribution dates from the 60's and the beginning of the 70's - the eve of the birth of postmodern culture.

'Observing human beings' nowadays gives a different picture. We did not walk 'the streets for sixteen years', however, participant observation at least suggests the primacy of a post-consumerist shoppism. Inside the cocoon of the mall light is manipulated and pedestrian circulation is routed to 'stage' the visitors' consumption of the space, to keep them focused on shopping. Large crowds file along commodities on display, touching, trying out, trying on. They are less interested in others, than absorbed in things as a substitute for their defective self. 'Other' in mall and 'shopping street' acquires the status of an object - to be navigated and maneuvered through. Crowdedness has become part of the 'experience' of shoppism (Buit 1973: 10). The very same crowd may very well afford that needed feeling of safety.

Like the suburban private home, in the US fifties shopping malls became enclosed. Transparent glass, formerly a center's mediator between inside and outside, disappeared. Cars still parked on enormous lots, however their design began to show an intense interest in walking distances between car and entrance, expressly associating this with the driver's security (Farrell 2003: 54). The mall turned 'main street USA', which had been primarily the car's territory, into a 'pedestrian paradise' (Hardwick 2003: 74). Only a few malls were successful as simulacrum of city life; from the seventies on the effect of 'copied city life' waned. Now elderly, at a time when the shops were not yet open, early morning walkers marched in and walked the mall's floors for 'exercise'.

## 8 SMOOTH DRIVING AND PAINLESS PARKING

Apart from being on-the-move smoothly and comfortably, easy, safe and predictable transfer from house to car and from car to shopping mall has become more and more important. The garage has become the main transfer space of several building types, just as it became the front door of the suburban house. Once in town, drivers feel confronted with the existential problem of finding *Lebensraum* - parking space, that is. From the fifties onwards, ease and distance of walking to the destination became important issues in the design of both parking lots and parking garages. Inside as well as outside, then, the once covered mall of the fifties finally became a mono-functional, self-sufficient, safe cocoon.

The so-called 'American way of life' is both centered on cars and on the availability of unrestricted parking space for shopping. Since the 40's, US State and Federal highway policy aims at spacious parking places, resulting in a *substitution* of private car transportation for public transit (Highway act 1916; Parking 1941; Baker and Funaro 1958: 4). At first, Europe's approach was less one-dimensional. From 1955 on, parking space just followed automobility; from 1974 till 1996 public and private transit became complementary, restricting the nuisance of car mobility. Since then private and public transit are treated as parallel systems (Ministerie van V&W 2004; CROW 2004a).

Shopping centers mention distance as a key element of their 'service'. Design manuals associate distance and social safety, involving issues of light, transparency, absence of columns on parking floors and the presence of TV-cameras at entrances, staircases, elevators and pay-automats. The issue of social safety seems to be even more important today than ten years ago. In 1996 it was just one of the items; today it is item number one (CROW 1996, 2003a; NEN, 2443, 2000; Louter and Van Savooijen 2005: 49). America and Europe, though, differ in their parking norms. USA parking still consumes twice as much space, and the required walking distance between car and destination being twice the European average – 300m: 170m. For

leisure destinations as well as during the actual (fun)shopping, longer walking distances are tolerated (Baker and Funaro, 1958; Jakle and Sculle 2005: 197, 204; CROW 2003a, 2003b: 16; ULI 1965).

However, Europe is catching up; the differences between both continents are fading. In 2020 another two million cars will drive the Dutch roads, an increase of more than 30% percent. Today, on both sides of the ocean zoning regulations prescribe the availability of parking-on-site; auto-mobility influences program and design of houses and shopping centers (Baker and Funaro 1958: 29, 45, 103; Hayden 2003: 158-162; Jakle and Sculle 2005: 193, 247; CROW 2004a).

Referring to the 'poor image' of parking buildings, specialists emphasize the need for improvement (Jakle and Sculle 2005; Louter and Van Savooyen 2005). New built parking garages are more 'homey': clean, safe, well lit, with larger spaces and parking 'hosts'. Dutch *Q-Park* promotes 'painless parking' in Holland, Belgium, Germany, the UK and Ireland. Their Q-Park Key activates an electronic toll device with a tolling account, opening the gates and allowing the driver to skip anonymous payment procedures ([www.q-park.com](http://www.q-park.com)).

The issue of 'true' social encounter in parking spaces has been raised. Americans need more personal space, thus parking places are so spacious that there is no interference with other drivers (Jakle and Sculle 2005: 238, 192, 201). The postmodern European probably also favors these new homey, spacious self service parking facilities, thus keeping social distance to unknown others maximal. Neither valet parking nor automated parking guarantees such smooth, undisturbed parking.

## 9 CONCLUSIONS

In their *Angst* vision the *Situationists* of the sixties feared the 'mass society'; traffic would dominate the town, 'isolating' people from one another. On their analysis, 'alienation' would be

bought off by a 'spectacle society', inducing people to show off achieved 'status' (Internationale Situationiste 1961: 16-19; Sachs 1984: 181).

Their fear has been realized, in an unexpected manner though. The narcissist's 'spectacle' has little to do with showing off 'status' and everything with the support a temporary self. The notion of 'alienation' presupposed a *modern*, strong Ego to overcome it. Instead, the *postmodern* incomplete and insecure self *needs* such periodical 'alienation' as necessary resistance, temporarily completing it into 'existence'.

Interestingly enough, the 2005 edition of the Amsterdam AutoRAI periodical survey did *not*, as it used to do, ask questions relating to 'status'. It was not considered a relevant motive any longer; now safety and comfort scored high (Van Putten 2005: 29). This observation receives more weight, when supported by the analysis of postmodern shoppism, patterned according to 'lifestyle'.

The modernist sociologist Bourdieu analyzed the stratification in the judgment of taste, claiming that social 'strata' still shared *common* notions of high- and lowbrow art. He applied this analysis also to contemporary, postmodern conditions (Bourdieu 1984). However, practitioners of postmodern lifestyles consider their various possibilities as 'different' *per se*. Each lifestyle considers *any* other lifestyle as ridiculous, inferior - as irrelevant; each lifestyle has its own *intra*-specific, thus incommensurable criteria of taste and prestige (Schulze 1992: 256, 551).

A lifestyle, then, constitutes a self-contained, self-referential niche, a social cocoon in which not a collectively shared aesthetics of critical attention for *trans*-situational, 'true' value is at stake, but a 'sectarian' aesthetics, which emphasizes the capacity of being critically alert to superficial details of appearance. It concerns conformity with strict situational rules, merely shared by situationally relevant others exclusively.

A 'lifestyle' is a socially organized behavioral pattern. Although experienced as 'freedom', it constitutes a strict armor, buffering the narcissist's weak ego. From the seventies on, houses,

neighborhoods, cars and shopping malls all became involved in 'life styling', linked to their separate social segments (Cohen 2003; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Shields 1992).

The career of the Sports Utility Vehicle fits into this postmodern phase of auto-mobility - an era of 'sub-cultural' difference and post-Fordism. A plurality of lifestyles demands a plethora of car *types*: compact, subcompact, muscle car, sports car, van, minivan, MPV - and SUV. 'Retro-design' - the fitting of old-fashioned icons in new car types - also fits into postmodern shoppism. Each new type does not 'target' a broad income group any longer, as was the case in the modern past, but a specific niche - a *non*-class lifestyle characterized by a cluster of non-economic features like age, gender and family status (Gartman 2004: 185).

Buying and driving a car in postmodern days have less to do with showing off status, but more with connecting to one's 'chosen' lifestyle. Lifestyle involves the fit between one's self and a proper exterior, for instance the form of a car. More generally, one has registered a withering away of *brand* loyalty in *all* sectors of the economy - from interior decorating to the choice of food (Genat 1999: 37, 63, 65; Van der Peet 2004). So-called 'brands' related to modern social class and status. Loyalty to a car-brand is also giving away to what may be termed auto loyalty - the narcissistic, cocooned 'safe' relation between a car type of *whatever* brand and a life-styled self (Kooijman and Sierksma 2005). Attaching itself to lifestyle, the postmodern narcissist develops loyalty to a limited self in need of exterior support and finds it in a variety of cocoons.



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