

Get Out of the Car: A Commentary

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Get Out of the Car is a response to my last movie, *Los Angeles Plays Itself*. I called *Los Angeles Plays Itself* a 'city symphony in reverse' in that it was composed of fragments from other films read against the grain to bring the background into the foreground. Visions of the city's geography and history implicit in these films were made manifest.

Although Los Angeles has appeared in more films than any other city, I believe that it has not been well served by these films. San Francisco, New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo have all left more indelible impressions. It happens that many film-makers working in Los Angeles don't appreciate the city, and very few of them understand much about it, but their failures in depicting it may have more profound causes.

In *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, I claimed that the city is not cinematogenic. 'It's just beyond the reach of an image.' Now I'm not so sure. In any case, I became gradually obsessed with making a proper Los Angeles city symphony film. I was aware of a few notable antecedents: *L.A.X.* by Fabrice Ziolkowski, *Mur Murs* by Agnès Varda, *Water and Power* by Pat O'Neill, *Los* by James Benning. These are all ambitious, feature-length films. My film is shorter (34 minutes), and it concentrates on small fragments of the cityscape: billboards, advertising signs, wall paintings, building facades.

Originally it was even narrower. It began as simply a study of weather-worn billboards around Los Angeles. The title was *Outdoor Advertising*. I've loved these billboards with their abstract and semi-abstract patterns since I was a teen-ager, and I would sometimes take photographs of them, but I resisted the idea of putting them in a film because 'it had been done,' notably in still photographs by Walker Evans and Aaron Siskind. An interest in decayed signs had become a commonplace in contemporary art.

But it happened that there was one quite beautiful ruined billboard quite near my house that went unrepaired for many months. I drove by it at least once a week, and its presence was becoming a reproach: 'You cowardly fool, I won't stay like this forever.' So on Sunday, February 22, 2009, with my friend Madison Brookshire, I filmed it with his 16mm Bolex. For some months, when somebody asked about the film I was working on, I could simply say it was a film designed to destroy my reputation as a film-maker.

There was another inspiration: seeing a program of recent videotapes by Kenneth Anger. His new movies were just records of things that interested him, documents pure and simple. He felt secure enough that he didn't have to set out each time to make a masterpiece of even 'an Anger film.' He had made the films that established his reputation, and he could say, 'I'm proud of them.' Now he could make anything he wanted and not worry about what anyone thought of them. Although Anger is older than I am and his obsessions—Mickey Mouse memorabilia, boys playing football, a wall covered with tributes to Elliott Smith—more idiosyncratic, I still felt I could follow his example.

In any case, like everyone else, I try to make movies I would like to see, and then hope there are others who share my sensibilities. The greater their number, the better, but fewer is also okay. For me, movies are, first of all, 'tools for conviviality,' to borrow a phrase from Ivan Illich, a means of sharing images and ideas to create a circle of friends, or virtual friends. The size of the circle is less important than the intensity of the bonds among them. For these aspirations, originality doesn't matter much.

From the beginning, there were two other motives for the project: the desire to work again in 16mm film and the desire to explore the city. Why 16mm? I had made two compilation movies in video, and the quality of the image makes me cringe when I watch them. Three short 16mm films I made in the mid-1960s had recently been restored by Mark Toscano at the Motion Picture Academy Film Archive. For years I had been hearing complaints about declining standards in laboratory work and projection that brought into question the viability of 16mm film as a medium for the production of moving images, but the new prints of these films were superior to the ones I had made in the 1960s and the projections I attended were flawless. It was a happy experience, which reawakened my interest in the possibilities of the film image.

For years also, I had witnessed the conversion to digital image making by many film-makers I admired: Jon Jost, Ernie Gehr, Jonas Mekas, Ken Jacobs, Vincent Grenier, Leslie Thornton, Su Friedrich, Fred Worden, Lewis Klahr, and most recently James Benning. The switch allowed them to compensate for the collapse of institutional support for film-making in the United States, and they became much more prolific than ever, but there was a decline not only in the image quality of their work, but also in its rigor, which nobody was crass enough to acknowledge. It would be like complaining because their earlier films weren't shot on 35mm. I also found myself annoyed by the messianic proclamations that often accompanied these conversions. The stronger the conversion, the weaker the work, it seems.

How is it possible that working in a slightly different medium could produce such a giddy sense of liberation? Since they had mastered 16mm film-making, they didn't need instant replay to judge the images they had created. Of course, digital image making is cheaper. We like to make things as cheaply as possible, but sometimes this desire is worth resisting. Films are not properly valued, but if we can go on making them, perhaps they will be. I guess I could afford to work in 16mm because I work slowly. I enjoy making films because it is a process of research and discovery (and I hate finishing them because something that's alive turns into something dead).

The outlook as I write this in the summer of 2010 is very different than it was at the beginning of 2009 when I began shooting the film. The slow motion digital revolution is finally upon us, and God saw that it was good. High definition digital imaging can now achieve higher resolution than 16mm or 35mm film formats, and the necessary projectors will be in place soon. Is there no longer any difference between the film image and the digital image? Still there are grains and there are pixels, and I prefer grains. A film image is warm (thanks to the play of the grains), and a digital image is cold no matter how fine the resolution.

My desire to explore the city was occasioned by the response to *Los Angeles Plays Itself*. When it began screening around the world, I suddenly found myself regarded as an authority on Los Angeles. This kind of treatment had the effect of underlining my ignorance. Like most people who live here, I follow the same few paths all the time so I know a few neighborhoods, a few streets. Since I drive most of the time and then mostly on the freeways, the areas I pass through daily or weekly is just driveover country.

In *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, I claimed that only those who drive and ride the bus know Los Angeles. But they too follow the same paths every day. Now I would say that only politicians and policemen know the city, because it is their job. I still can't claim to know the city, but I know it a little better than I did before starting out on this work.

As I explored the city, of course I found other things that fascinated me as much as the billboards, and I began to film them as well. Gradually the scope of the film broadened. This expansion suited me since it allowed me to claim that now I was imitating everybody, but most of all myself. The film could become a 'city symphony,' a term I like because it sounds old fashioned, even 'old school,' as somebody we met on the street during filming said of the camera we used, a 16mm spring motor Bolex.

I only put in things I like (with one exception, which I will come back to later), beautiful or funny things that most people would overlook, things that I would probably overlook if I hadn't been searching for them. It happened that many of these things were also outdoor advertisements, from custom-made neon signs to whimsical sculptures to mural-like paintings that cover the walls of restaurants, grocery stores, and auto repair shops.

Some are a bit enigmatic. What is a papier-mâché horse doing on the roof of a motel? Why is a giant hot dog sculpture with white bricks as pickle relish sitting on top of a Thai Town Express restaurant? And the grotesque sculpture of a monkey dressed up as a baker outside Nicho's Pizza on Florence Avenue? 'You got to do something to compete with Domino's and Pizza Hut,' the owner explained. But I think he just likes animal figures. On top of his insurance offices next door, he has a giant helium elephant, which we were tempted to film.

But what about an elaborate neon sign outlining a round face in half-profile with a yellow clothespin attached to the nose and three blue teardrops below the right eye? It's the logo of Twohey's, a restaurant founded in 1943 along Route 66. Twohey's featured dish is the Stinko Burger, which is nothing more than a hamburger with sliced pickles and onions. Proprietor Jack Twohey overheard a woman exclaim, 'Oh, stinko,' when one was served to a customer sitting next to her, and he decided to take advantage of her remark.

The *muñeco* or muffler man might appear equally enigmatic, but it is part of a long tradition. At first I thought *muñecos* were Mexican imports, but I learned from *Muffler Men* by Timothy Corrigan Correl and Patrick Arthur Polk that they are indigenous throughout the United States, from Washington to Florida. At first, they were strictly utilitarian, replacing the flagmen on the street who tried to lure customers into the muffler shop. When a worker had some spare time, he would weld

together a used muffler for the torso, some pipe for the limbs, and a catalytic converter for the head to form a fanciful human figure. Now they have become an established form of folk art, but they are more often stolen for scrap metal than for their artistic value. The *muñeco* we show is fairly ordinary, nothing special, but the workers at Universo 3000 were so pleased by our curiosity about their work that I had to include it in the film.

Murals, on the other hand, did come from Mexico, and they are central to Chicano culture. Some Anglos seem to think they are the sum of Chicano culture. Maybe that's why I had been suspicious of them. Agnès Varda's *Mur Murs* converted me. However, there are only a few shots of public murals in *Get Out of the Car*. I preferred to film the more humble paintings commissioned by small shop owners to adorn the exterior walls of their businesses. The artists are not painting for the ages. They know the businesses that hired them can go under at any time. With the stakes not quite so high, they can be freer.

They know that humor sells—just like sex. And piety, a cynic might add. But I'm inclined to believe that the religious sentiment expressed in Catholic iconography on store walls is genuine. Paintings of the Virgin of Guadalupe are especially common throughout the Mexican quarters of Los Angeles, as they are throughout the southwest US, perhaps more common than in Mexico. Since the Virgin of Guadalupe is the most resonant and polysemic symbol of the Mexican nation, her image also expresses the longing for *Mexico lindo* that many immigrants feel—particularly the *indocumentados* who cannot return even for a visit.

The iconography of the Virgin paintings is strict, but there are variations. I had to cut one beautiful painting on the side of a moving van because the Virgin looked too much like Veronica in the Archie comics. The most obvious variations among the ten paintings of the Virgin that appear in *Get Out of the Car* are in their condition. Some are pristine, some are covered with graffiti, and one is cracked and peeling (it has since been whitewashed over). I hope this film will lead defenders of graffiti to rethink their position. I supported graffiti myself in its initial phases when it defaced public space that had been sold to private interests, such as the advertisements in subway cars. I thought it was a direct and effective protest against the degradation of public space. But there is no justification for defacing property belonging to individuals, particularly when the graffiti disrespects and disfigures a work of art, even commercial art.

Camilo Vergara, who has created a photographic survey of crucifixion paintings, believes that storeowners commission them to discourage graffiti. 'If someone is going to put some tag on there,' he claimed, 'the mural might lead them to think, Maybe something bad will happen to me if I deface a crucifixion.' (Vergara 2009: A29.) Unfortunately, it doesn't always work. We rephotographed one painting he had photographed earlier to show the progress of the graffiti. The other paintings of Jesus and the crucifixion were chosen to present a diversity of iconography and style. Some are crudely painted; others show a high level of skill. I like them all, and sometimes the less skilled artists compensate for their technical deficiencies by the originality and complexity of their ideas.

Manuel Gomez Cruz, for example, can't paint much better than I can, and he has no sense of perspective or modeling. But he was willing to attempt a bold variation on the seminal Los Angeles mural, *América Tropical* by David Siqueiros, painted in 1932 and almost immediately painted over (its restoration has been promised since 1995). Cruz transformed the central figure of *América Tropical*, a crucified Indian with a bald eagle perched above him, into an abject prisoner on the lower right of his mural. He doubled the figure with a cast-iron relief replica projected out from the surface of the wall and wrote underneath it, '1.2.3. WILL GET YOU LIFE.' But he reversed the theme of victimization in the Siqueiros mural by filling most of the wall with the Battle of the Alamo seen from the Mexican side. The Alamo itself is very tiny, almost unrecognizable, with a few defenders hanging from its roof, and it is dwarfed by exultant Mexican soldiers reveling in their victory.

This mural is on the side wall of a *lavenderia* at the corner of Cesar Chavez Avenue and Indiana Street in East Los Angeles. It can be glimpsed in *Get Out of the Car* behind a *cemitas* truck. I also included a detail from another Cruz mural a few blocks west: the crucifixion scene in a charming mural depicting the life of Christ from his birth to his ascension.

In the end, I included many examples of Latino art, both painting and sculpture, and so the film became a kind of gloss on Mike Davis's book *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City*, although Davis devotes himself to the continued discrimination against Latinos in the U.S. and their modest political victories, not to their cultural innovations. To grasp these innovations, it's more useful to read 'Into the Future: Tourism, Language and Art' by Peter Wollen, a world-wide survey of hybrid syncretic cultures, which reconsiders the work of the great Mexican muralists (Siqueiros, Rivera, and Orozco) as a major challenge to the norms of Western modernism. He concludes with these words: 'Modernism is being succeeded not by a totalizing Western postmodernism, but by a hybrid new aesthetic in which the new corporate forms of communication and display will be constantly confronted by new vernacular forms of invention and expression. Creativity always come from beneath, it always finds an unexpected and indirect path forward, and it always makes use of what it can scavenge by night.' (Wollen 1993: 209-210.)

I dedicated *Los Angeles Plays Itself* to Johnny Otis and Art Laboe; I called them 'guardians of our history' because they kept alive the musical history of Los Angeles on their radio programs. But that is only the sketchiest summary of their achievements. Through his long-running radio show (beginning in 1956 and still going stronger than ever), Laboe nurtured an appreciation for 1950s rhythm and blues among local Chicanos that helped spawn a distinctive style of hybrid rock in East Los Angeles and later a form of Chicano hip hop rooted in the 'oldies' Laboe championed. A Greek American who calls himself 'black by persuasion' and a person of unique integrity in the music business, Johnny Otis has been a drummer, a pianist, a vibraphonist, a singer, a bandleader, an arranger, a composer, a talent scout, a record producer, a newspaper columnist, a political activist, a pastor, and a TV host, as well as guardian of our history on his radio programs, which ran from 1953 to 1991. In *Get Out of the Car*, I wanted to elaborate a bit on my dedication to Otis and Laboe.

I found a way when I abandoned my original idea for the soundtrack. In the early stages of work on the film, I planned to use simple background ambient sound, a kind of 'street tone' for each shot that would do no more than differentiate one space from another. It came into my mind that I can still remember hearing certain songs in certain places even fifty years later: 'Runaround Sue' in a San Francisco bus station, 'Willie and the Hand Jive' in a beachfront hamburger stand in Santa Monica, 'Every Little Bit Hurts' on a street in Oakland, 'Just One Look' sung in Spanish on the car radio as I was driving alone through Arizona (never heard it before, never heard it since, but just one listen was all it took). I wanted to evoke these memories. These random juxtapositions of sounds and places are one of the great joys of modern life and of city life in particular. The cinema is the only art that can recreate these experiences and their emotional resonance.

So I built the film around juxtapositions of songs and places. To pay tribute to Johnny Otis, I filmed around the site of the Barrelhouse, a rhythm and blues club he set up in 1948 with Bardu Ali at Wilmington and Santa Ana in Watts. No trace of it remains, and no plaque marks its location. So I hung up a sign on a fence for the filming, like the sign on the other side of the street that advertises funerals for only \$2,695.

The eighteen shots in the Barrelhouse sequence are accompanied by a live recording of tenor saxophonist Big Jay McNeely playing 'Deacon's Hop,' introduced by disc jockey Hunter Hancock. It wasn't recorded at the Barrelhouse, but it could have been: Hancock often emceed there, and McNeely often played there. In fact, it was recorded on October 6, 1951, at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles, during a midnight concert Hancock promoted and emceed. It was the birth of rock'n'roll, although nobody noticed it at the time and nobody has noted it since. For the first time, thousands of white 'hepcats' jammed a large auditorium to see black rhythm and blues artists and adopted the music as their own. Because American cultural history is written from an Eastern perspective, Alan Freed is credited with building a 'crossover' white audience for rhythm and blues, turning it into rock'n'roll, sometime in 1954 or 1955. But it happened here first.

Before the 1960s, the United States was a nation of regional cultures. The 'national culture' was simply the regional culture of the northeast, the center of publishing and the music business. Many Los Angeles singers and musicians recorded for local record companies that could not secure national distribution for their work, and consequently they never received the fame and fortune they merited. For me, discovering their music was an important part of discovering Los Angeles. I thought I knew it, but I didn't. I listened to Johnny Otis and Hunter Hancock on the radio, and I loved Big Jay McNeely's 1959 recording of 'There Is Something On Your Mind' (it was his biggest hit, but an inferior cover version by Bobby Marchan was a bigger hit). I even put it in a movie.

But I didn't realize that McNeely had created a sound more radical than bebop. He was the most inventive of the honking saxophonists whose playing was characterized by 'freak high notes, the relentless honking of a single note for an entire chorus, and the use of low notes with deliberately vulgar tonal effects,' in the words of conservative jazz critic Leonard Feather (quoted in Shaw 1978: 170). This

style emerged in the late 1940s as an inchoate protest against the US failure to honor the promises of freedom made to its black population during World War II. It was a cry of despair and defiance, and Big Jay McNeely took it further than anyone. Amiri Baraka called it 'Black Dada': 'The repeated rhythmic figure, a screamed riff, pushed in its insistence past music. It was hatred and frustration, secrecy and despair. ...There was no compromise, no dreary sophistication, only the elegance of something that is too ugly to be described... McNeely, the first Dada coon of the age, jumped and stomped and yowled and finally sensed the only other space that form allowed. He fell first on his knees, never releasing the horn, and walked that way across the stage. ...And then he fell backwards, flat on his back, with both feet stuck up high in the air, and he kicked and thrashed and the horn spat enraged sociologies. ...Jay had set a social form for the poor, just as Bird and Dizzy had proposed it for the middle class.' (Baraka 2000: 184-185.)

Hunter Hancock was also the first disc jockey to play 'Louie Louie,' the original version recorded in 1957 by Richard Berry, who wrote the song a year earlier, making it a regional hit. I had always admired Berry's "Louie Louie" (for me, it's still the best version), but I didn't know the range of his work. He never had a hit outside Los Angeles, but he made some of the best records of the 1950s. One of them, a talking blues he recorded in 1954, suggested the title of my film, and the saxophone solo by Maxwell Davis is the music over the opening credits. Davis is another unsung master of Los Angeles rhythm and blues, a tenor saxophonist of great versatility (he has been under-rated because he didn't have a distinctive sound—he could play like Big Jay McNeely or like Lester Young), and a gifted arranger-producer not only for Richard Berry but also for many of the best singers of the 1950s. He also discovered Leiber and Stoller. They showed up one day in 1950 at Aladdin Records without an appointment. Davis, who was then musical director for Aladdin, gave them a chance anyway. They played him two songs, and he immediately gave them a songwriting contract. There is also quite a bit of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller in *Get Out of the Car*, mostly from the catalogue of their own small Los Angeles record company, Spark Records, which lasted only two years, 1954 and 1955.

Of course, this history is only back-story in *Get Out of the Car*, but I hope the film will at least inspire curiosity about the music.

Rock'n'roll was betrayed by men like Dick Clark who pandered to a racism that was more imagined than real by pushing out black artists. As a result, the careers of Berry, Hancock, and McNeely ended prematurely. The saxophone became too black for rock'n'roll when it entered its racist phase, and it was replaced by guitars. Big Jay lost his audience and he settled back in Watts, where he had grown up, and found a job as a postman. Hancock couldn't accept the Top 40 format that took over radio in the 1960s, stifling the disc jockey's creativity, and he quit in disgust in 1968. Berry quit making records in 1962 and eked out a living by playing at after-hours clubs around Los Angeles. He sold the rights to 'Louie Louie' in 1957 in order to buy a wedding ring, but he was able to reclaim them in 1985. He made more money in the next year than he had in the previous thirty.

Johnny Otis and Art Laboe were able to survive, although Otis was unhappy with most of the records he made in the late 1950s for Capitol Records and he quit

making music for most of the 1960s to concentrate on working in the struggle for black civil rights. When he returned to performing in 1970, he tried to counter the emerging 'Rock'n'Roll Revival' formula by showcasing still forgotten musicians he considered the true originators of rock'n'roll, such as Esther Phillips, Pee Wee Crayton, Charles Brown, Big Joe Turner, and T-Bone Walker. Art Laboe was sustained by the loyalty of his Chicano listeners to 1950s rhythm and blues.

I pay tribute to Laboe in a sequence filmed on the site of El Monte Legion Stadium, another cultural landmark that has vanished without a trace. Both Laboe and Johnny Otis (with business partner Hal Zeiger) promoted shows there, but the Legion Stadium is now particularly associated with Art Laboe because in 1963 his Original Sound Records released 'Memories of El Monte,' written by Frank Zappa and Ray Collins for Cleveland Duncan of the Penguins, and for a while Laboe made it almost his theme song. Of course, it provides the music for this sequence of the film. In the 1950s, Otis and Laboe had moved their shows to El Monte, thirteen miles east of downtown Los Angeles, because racial harassment by the Los Angeles Police Department under Chief William H. Parker made it increasingly difficult to hold racially integrated dances in the city of Los Angeles.

When I went to the El Monte Historical Museum to research the shows put on by Otis and Laboe, the curator could barely acknowledge they ever happened. She couldn't tell me anything about them, and there were no records of them in her archives. However, she did recall vividly Cliffie Stone's *Hometown Jamboree*, a country music show telecast live from El Monte Legion Stadium on KCOP-TV beginning in 1949, which meant nothing to me, although it launched the careers of Tennessee Ernie Ford, Billy Strange, Merle Travis, Speedy West, and many others.

I realized our tastes and interests are partial, mine as well as hers. However, we probably share a disdain for contemporary pop music. A sign of aging, I guess. Rock music died for me on 22 December 1985, the day of D. Boon's fatal van accident. But I do like recent *norteño* music, particularly Los Tigres del Norte. So all the more recent music in the film is by Mexican and Mexican American artists, mostly singing in Spanish, with an emphasis on Los Tigres. Anglos know Los Tigres del Norte—if they know them at all—as the popularizers of the *narcocorrido*, the ballad of the drug traffickers, but to Latino immigrants, they are the voice of the people. They are the most important music group in the United States today, their impact greater than Dylan and Springsteen combined.

Their song "*Ni aquí ni allí*" plays over the end credits. It's the plaintive lament of a Mexican immigrant lost between two worlds, a protest song in a gentle and sometimes humorous vein. I will quote only the chorus, in the original Spanish and in English translation:

*En dondequiera es lo mismo
Yo no entiendo y no entenderé
Que mis sueños ni aquí ni allá
Nunca los realizaré.
Ni aquí ni allá, ni allá ni acá
Nunca los realizaré.*

Wherever you go it is the same
I don't understand, and I never will
That my dreams, neither here nor there,
Will never be realized.
Neither here nor there, neither there nor here,
Will never be realized.

The film is in English and Spanish, without subtitles. I wanted to put bilingual viewers in a privileged position (they are the only ones who can fully understand the film) and remind monolingual viewers of their cultural disadvantage. This perverse obscurity has a polemical purpose. Los Angeles has become a bilingual city, but English-only speakers stubbornly refuse to learn Spanish, cutting themselves off from a good part of the local culture and compromising their ability to understand the politics of the city. The cure is obvious: real bilingual education in the schools of California to insure that all English-speaking students learn Spanish and that all Spanish-speaking students learn English. Only the crudest nativist sentiment would oppose this simple initiative yet animosity toward Latinos is so pervasive in California that no 'mainstream' politician or educator has even broached the idea. However, this 'dual language immersion' program has been adopted in the schools of Chula Vista, a San Diego suburb near the Mexican border, and of course it works. Native English speakers learn Spanish, and native Spanish speakers learn English more quickly and thoroughly than they do in English-only schools.

The form of the film doesn't allow advocacy, but I can suggest something of what is lost to a monolingual person in Los Angeles.

If California could become bilingual, perhaps there would be greater understanding between Anglos and Latinos and tragedies like the destruction of South Central Farm could be averted. In *Get Out of the Car*, the site of South Central Farm is another of the unmarked historic landmarks depicted. It is the one sequence of overt social criticism I left in the film, and the razor wire that surrounds it (also appearing in the three shots that follow) is the one thing I don't like that appears. I tried to include the essential information about South Central Farm in the memorial sign I made: "Site of SOUTH CENTRAL FARM, 1994-2006, one of the largest urban community gardens in the United States, bulldozed on July 5, 2006 by owner Ralph Horowitz whose repurchase of the property from the City of Los Angeles in 2003 is still mysterious and legally questionable." The battle over South Central Farm pitted the Spanish-speaking farmers against the English-speaking Horowitz and local councilwoman Jan Perry, and the moral rights of the farmers against the legal rights of Horowitz. I still believe that cultural misunderstanding played an important role in the unfolding of the tragedy, making compromise impossible when it should have been feasible.

Although Horowitz promised to develop the site as a distribution center for clothing manufacturer Forever 21, it is still an immense 14-acre vacant lot.

South Central Farm should still be there, but I didn't mean to suggest that the Barrelhouse and El Monte Legion Stadium should be. The German film-maker Klaus

Wyborny once said, buildings disappear when our feelings desert them. Our feelings haven't deserted El Monte Legion Stadium and the Barrelhouse, but we don't need the buildings to sustain those feelings and the memories they made. A building of intrinsic beauty should be preserved for as long as possible, and a useful building should not give way to a useless building, but it's not necessary to preserve a simple utilitarian building just because it is a repository of historic memories. That would be a misguided nostalgia.

Get Out of the Car could be characterized as a nostalgic film. It is a celebration of artisanal culture and termite art (in Manny Farber's sense, but more precisely in the sense Dave Marsh gives the phrase in his book *Louie Louie*). But I would claim it's not a useless and reactionary feeling of nostalgia, but rather a militant nostalgia. Change the past, it needs it. Remember the words of Walter Benjamin I quote in the film: even the dead will not be safe. Restore what can be restored, like the Watts Towers. Rebuild what must be rebuilt. Re-abolish capital punishment. Remember the injustices done to Chinese, Japanese, blacks, gays, Mexicans, Chicanos, and make it right. Put Richard Berry, Maxwell Davis, Hunter Hancock, Art Laboe, and Big Jay McNeely in the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame. Bring back South Central Farm. Only when these struggles are fought and won can we begin to create the future.

It's also a sad film, some people say. I presume they understand Spanish. Then it is a just film, because the world we live in is sad, but, as Jonathan Tel has written, 'Great cities are tough; their ugliness is inseparable from their sexiness.' (Tel 2010: 21.) Los Angeles is certainly tough and certainly ugly when seen in medium shot or long shot. But Roman Polanski once suggested it has another kind of beauty: 'Los Angeles is the most beautiful city in the world—provided it's seen by night and from a distance.' *Get Out of the Car* proposes a third view: that Los Angeles is most beautiful when seen in a close-up and that its sexiness is not to be found where most tourists look.

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