

MYSTERIES of the SUBURBAN

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I walked to the cinema that was showing *Mulholland Drive*, setting off from the centre of the city and crossing a number of inner urban localities I hadn't been in for a long time.

I had lived in that suburb well over twenty years ago. Many of the same landmarks are still there, mostly unchanged, but what is so different now is how the region is crisscrossed by high-speed multi-lane roadways.

After the movie was over I strolled across a number of other suburbs back home to my borrowed apartment. I'd planned to do that anyway, and the absence of buses and taxis on the streets confirmed it was the right decision.

As I left the cinema and restaurant precinct I noticed that all the houses were locked up, windows closed, and where shutters were installed they were firmly shut. The lights in each house were out. The porch lights people are accustomed to leaving on if they are out or expecting visitors were also switched off.

While making my way along a major road and then a series of side streets the same scene repeated itself. Occasionally I would hear the distant sounds of music and low voices coming from dim, amber-lit houses well off the main road, where I could see drinkers lolling about on the verandahs alone or in pairs. All the surrounding houses were dark, and quiet.

Every so often, though, there would be a roaring in the distance and a posse of cars would come hurtling along, scream to a halt at a traffic light, then loudly zoom off again. Each motor car was a mobile display of light and sound, and each cluster of them reminded me of a travelling circus, or a school of light-emitting deep sea fish flitting its way through ocean deeps.

After an hour of darkness and silence punctured by sudden bursts of noise and light, I found myself in the shopping strip near to where I live, at the corner where the video store, the cinema and the cafés meet. The same faces were there that gather night after night around the same outdoor tables, and the same people were exchanging their tapes and disks inside the video store.

Things just weren't adding up. If the shut-up houses meant their inhabitants were out, yet the gatherings at the oases of film, food and booze were the same as always, and the cars in close formation on the roads were so many, where were they all going? And was my impression that it was the same few automotive posses everywhere driving up and down, up and down, in fact correct?

Where had all the people who lived in all the houses gone? Had they become the motorists who were now roaming the streets around their own homes? What were they searching for? Or for whom? What drama was playing itself out here?

Had David Lynch's dark and disturbed cinematic world leaked over into my own? 🍀 🚗