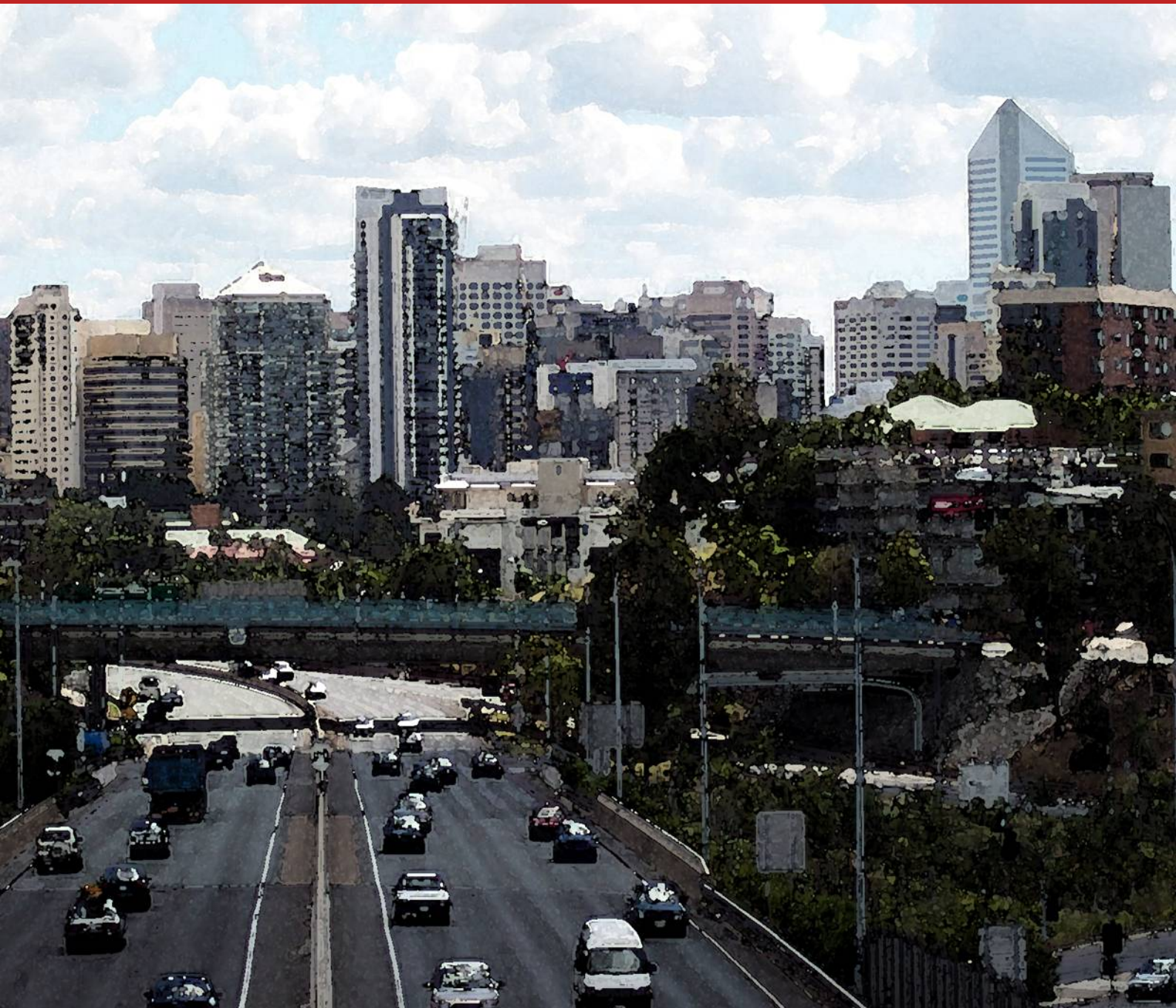


Growing younger: repetition and regression

Stephen Horton



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Introduction: object and method

The object of this study is a community of 80,000 retired people living in ‘The Villages’, a child-free ‘active adult retirement community’ in central Florida (U.S.A). All property owners and most of the residents, bar a smattering of under-age partners and household members, are over 55 years of age. Others may visit, for limited periods, as monitored guests. Children and adolescents are not welcome. “Those under the age of 19 can visit for a MAXIMUM of 30 days a year but may not live with you permanently in your home.”¹

The social position of The Villages is unusual. Having retired, residents are no longer part of social production — the material base of every society. More unusually, in excluding children and youth from their community, The Villages is also not part of social reproduction — the other foundation of every society, being the bearing and raising of the continuing generation. The Villages, in simple effect, is a community of consumers without social obligation.

The Villages is investigated by way of textual interpretation. Representations of The Villages, mainly of its form and social life, are examined for ‘signifiers’. These signifiers are recognised by their ability to displace official meaning (assigned by communication) with an alternative context suggestive of other ‘meanings’ or significations (i.e., signifiers are recognised by their ability to, in a sense, free associate). In the development of a discourse of signifiers, manifest meaning is displaced in favour of a latent ‘other scene’ of desire.²

Us

At the heart of The Villages there is an unusual figure — “... his ashes are kept in Spanish Springs inside a statue.”³ The figure, a fusion of inner essence and manifest representation, what you see is what you get, is of “the founding father of the community.”⁴ A picture of the statue branded with a caption is displayed on ‘The Villages’ website under the label ‘About us’.



“We have dedicated our lives to building a retirement community where people’s dreams can come true.” — Harold S. Schwartz

Figure 1: About Us

¹ Erisman, Ryan (2011) *The Villages Florida Book*, Kindle Book, Chapter 2 (original emphasis).

² This method is dependent on Freud’s discoveries that allow for the scientific interpretation of dreams. His study of the same name is vital for textual interpretation.

³ Blechman, Andrew D (2008) *Leisureville: adventures in a world without children*, Grove Press (New York) 40.

⁴ Op. cit 39.

A welcoming figure, arm spread wide, the founding father of the community — he gave his life to it — asks of his children: “What is your dream? What is your deepest wish for all time?” Who, before the almighty father, ready to provide anything and everything, to make dreams come true, would be ready to stake their life on an answer?

There is another view of the figure of Harold S. Schwartz, who lived to be ninety and “... enjoyed socializing with residents, and some say he was a heck of a ladies’ man.”⁵ Photographed from the other side, by a visitor, a rather louche figure — sideburns, a trim moustache, hand in trouser pocket — surrounded by a retinue of kneeling fountains, ascends from a crystal expanse into a constructed world of sun lit contrast.



Figure 2: Other Signifier

In the dazzle of this other scene a salesman displaces the existential challenge of the ideal father with his more comfortable query: “What is your pleasure?”

⁵ Op. cit. 45.

There is, at present, only one recorded anthropological, that is participatory, observation of life in The Villages — *Leisureville: adventures in a world without children*.⁶ The most exotic finding of Andrew D. Blechman is a thriving cult of erotic pleasure. Its shrine is “Katie Belle’s in Spanish Springs, with its abundant cheap drinks and the elders’ endless antics.”⁷ Antics that result in “an eye-popping number of seniors with sexually transmitted diseases”⁸ presenting at the local hospital. The cult priestess “... in her early seventies [] has bright orange hair and is wearing a short skirt and a low cut blouse. Her bracelet and necklace are neon-colored and her belt jingles with golden medallions. Her name is Kat.”⁹ Kat’s ritual dance is announced with a question: “Want to see my mouse tattoo?”¹⁰ The priestess progressively hitches up her short skirt and brief underwear in search of the illusive representation. “Just as she is about to reveal all, Kat drops her skirt and announces, ‘It looks like my pussy ate it’”¹¹.

The high priest of this, college inspired it would appear, cult is Mr. Midnight. The priestess sings his praises: “... he’s our big man on campus. All the ladies love him. They call him Mr. Midnight. That’s what he calls his penis, and the name has kind of stuck. We all use it.”¹² Mr. Midnight, fusion of member and man, is a descendant of mythic Don Juan.

*I ask Mr Midnight how many women he has slept with. I don’t remember ... I don’t keep track. I throw out a number – 100. C’mon, were talking my whole life, not just the last couple of years, right?*¹³

Mozart’s Don Juan, too, is indifferent to the number of his seductions. His servant however keeps count:

Here is Italy, six hundred and forty,
France is down for five hundred and twenty,
Only two hundred the Rhineland supplied him,
But mark the climax, Spain has already one thousand and three.¹⁴

Soren Kierkegaard insists music is the proper, paradigmatic, medium for Don Juan. He argues a primal immediacy of music; it exists only in the moment of sounding. “Music always expresses the immediate in its immediacy ... Language involves reflection, and cannot, therefore, express the immediate.”¹⁵ The musical Don Juan is unreflective; he has no stratagems, no pick-up lines, no routines; that would require remembering the past and constructing a future — in short, an historical view for which he, of the immediate in its immediacy, has no time.

“The single men strut around Spanish Springs like a bunch of Don Juans ... the women are all over them.”¹⁶ A cult member suspects some women are lured by financial expectation. “I’ve also been told I am a good conversationalist.”¹⁷ Mr Midnight, member and man, the iconic pleasure

⁶ Blechman, Andrew D (2008) *Leisureville: adventures in a world without children*, Grove Press (New York).

⁷ Op. cit. 80.

⁸ Op. cit. 81.

⁹ Op. cit. 80.

¹⁰ Op. cit. 81. Blechman reports the ritual twice.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Op. cit. 85.

¹³ Op. cit. 91.

¹⁴ Libretto - *Don Giovanni or The Rake Punished* <http://www.opera-guide.ch>

¹⁵ Kierkegaard, Soren (1944) *Either/Or: Volume 1*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 68.

¹⁶ Blechman, 2008, 82178.

¹⁷ Blechman, 2008, 82.

cultist, recalls only the prosaic arrangements for transporting his already seduced object of desire back to his bed. As it goes without question that ‘all the ladies love him’ he has no cause for reflection.

“[C]onsciousness is lacking in Don Juan. Therefore he does not seduce. He desires, and this desire acts seductively. To that extent he seduces. He enjoys the satisfaction of desire; as soon as he has enjoyed it, he seeks a new object, and so on endlessly.”¹⁸

Don Juan embodies the force of sensuous desire, of corporeal joining, realized in the immediacy of the immediate. This erotic force conjures a one-dimensional temporality of ‘NOW’ and, its corollary, ‘again and again’; leaving Mr Midnight’s historical view radically foreshortened: “three days is his oft-mentioned limit.”¹⁹

As a pleasure cult acts out an a-historical culture woven of the repetition of immediate experience, the community media, in form and content, evokes a sympathetic mode. The local radio is broadcast far and wide:

I walk past a bantering rock and then a chatty lamppost ... WVLG streaming out of hidden speakers ... a DJ spins Neil Diamond’s “Sweet Caroline”. Retailers have long known that music affects customers purchasing habits and employees morale. Music is frequently piped into elevators, stores, offices, restaurants, and factories. Now it’s being used as a mood enhancer for an entire town.²⁰

In retail to lubricate the moment of exchange; in factories to dull repetition; in The Villages, both. The content of the message — Blechman notes in addition to ‘Sweet Caroline’, ‘Sunshine, Lollipops, and Rainbows’ and ‘The Candy Man’ — is comically obvious. The form, however, the immediacy of music, unnoticed, fertilizes a culture of repetitious ‘now’ and enhances the mood of an entire town.

The community newspaper is “an unusually handsome broadsheet.”²¹ If its form conjures of a history of the medium, its name, the Daily Sun, true to the order of all modern newspapers, signifies of diurnal repetition. The staple news reported in the Daily Sun, and repeated, often word for word, on WVLG radio and The Villages News Network (VNN) television channel, is inspired by the activity of residents. A bubble-blowing story serving on all three media grieves Blechman but his host finds it “... nice to read about good news for a change. I like reading about all these peoples’ accomplishments.”²² The desire encoded in this preference does not go unnoticed:

I’ve taken so many adult education classes that I can’t even remember them all – twelve history courses alone. . . . **but the majority of people here like to hide behind our gates and forget the world outside.** They’re the ones with the parades and the Guinness Book of Records competitions.²³

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, 1944, 97.

¹⁹ Blechman 2008, 88.

²⁰ Op. cit 64.

²¹ Op. cit. 52.

²² Op. cit. 110.

²³ Op. cit. 110 (emphasis added).

In the repeated representation of the narrowly parochial the community media reflect a bounded, 'gated'²⁴ community turning ever inward. A transportation study found: "It's not unusual for Villagers to go weeks without leaving their all-inclusive community."²⁵ Self-absorption — "[t]he news doesn't interest me ... I somehow feel distant from it"²⁶ — and repetition — 'it's another beautiful day here in The Villages' — are destructive of social memory.

... we don't keep old newspapers on file. We don't even keep our notes. We are supposed to destroy them after a story is run. Taped interviews, too. And every few months somebody from the company goes through our computers and deletes all our files.²⁷

Yet the built form of 'The Villages' two 'town centres' (re)present a rich history. Spanish Springs is "an imitation Spanish colonial town spiced up with a few Wild West accents. There's a central square with splashing fountains ... The streets around the town square are lined with buildings that appear to be about 150 years old. There are faded advertisements on their facades for a gunsmith, an assayer, and a telegraph office."²⁸ A copy of an original (betrayed by eccentric Wild West accents) that never existed — a simulacrum — Spanish Springs represents for the pleasure of immediate experience a past that never happened. The pleasure, in short, of anti-history.

What the centre lacks in authenticity it makes up with colour. The haunt of Kat and Mr. Midnight plays its part. "Katie Belle Van Patten was the wife of Jackson businessman John Decker Van Patten, who, along with a number of other investors, built the luxurious hotel in 1851 ...' The plaque looks so authentic that I have to remind myself I am standing on what was pastureland a mere decade ago."²⁹ For Sumter Landing, 'The Villages' second town centre, the developer "hired a design firm with experience working with Universal Studios to invent [a] make believe town, including its history, customs and tradition."

The signifier of anti-history is embedded in the nostalgia it evokes.

Nostalgia ... f. Gr. *νόστος* return home + *ἄλγος* pain]. A form of melancholia caused by a long absence from one's home or country; severe homesickness.³⁰

At the level of effect, rather than particular content, the town centres of 'The Villages' discourse of a longing for home – bordering on sickness.

The houses of 'The Villages', the bulk of the built environment, reflect four basic patterns from two original sources: the 'villa' and the 'ranch' house.

Ranch ... 1. A hut or house in the country.³¹

The original 'villa' is a product of Imperial Rome, flourishing between the first and fifth centuries AD. For the classical scholar: "It is clear ... that a villa is a country phenomenon and not a town

²⁴ The Villages is not, strictly speaking, a gated community. Although there are booms and guards, sometimes residents themselves, scattered through the development, the checkpoints have no legal standing and are, in operation, a mere 'show of gated-ness' rather than a substantial barrier.

²⁵ Op. cit. 210.

²⁶ Op. cit. 203. (Mr Midnight)

²⁷ Op. cit. 112.

²⁸ Op. cit, 12-13.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Oxford English Dictionary (Compact Edition, 1971).

³¹ Ibid.

one [but] it is a townsman's word: that is, a villa is not simply a place in the country, but a place in the country from the point of view of someone living in the town ... part of the vaguely romantic feeling which the country inspires in the town dweller."³² The basic text of *The Villages*, its 42,000 houses, writes of a pastoral sojourn— a refuge from the discord of urban life.

The housing away from home occurs in large swathes of repetition (all properties being subject to extensive deed restrictions) served by a web of roads, itself repetitious in its curvilinear trace. Resident approve the standardization that protects their property values but for the visitor “[i]t doesn't take long before I am hopelessly lost. Every direction is filled with nearly identical rooftops, curvy streets, gates and flawless golf courses.”³³ The names of the different ‘villages’ are of no help.

I continue to find the nomenclature of “the village” and “The Villages” frustratingly vague and confusing ... From what I can tell, a “village” is little more than a monotonous grouping of similarly priced ranch homes ... There are about fifty villages in *The Villages* ... Most have distinguished-sounding yet meaningless names such as “Village of Lynnhaven” or “Village of Winifred”.

The Villages is built for a community of ‘insiders’; for ‘those in the know’. Amongst *The Villagers* themselves residential neighbours are valued, fellow residents greeted and respected; for insiders *The Villages* is ‘Florida’s Friendliest Retirement Hometown.’

Outsiders are, as the confused visitor reports, less welcome. Residents actively guard the portals to their community. “She stops in mid-stroke and calls from across the pool. ‘Do you belong here? ... Are you a member? I noticed that your license plates aren’t from out of state’”.³⁴ Local ‘(un)neighbours’ are doubly suspect not only as intruders but as persistent intruders. The un-neighbourly youth is particular unwelcome. “I’m never going back there. The old people are always following us around like we were criminals.”³⁵ The exclusion of children is a necessary condition of *The Villages*. Resident opinion is unequivocal:

Children don't fit the lifestyle we've got in *The Villages* ... You can't mix the two. It's either one or the other.³⁶

At every turn *The Villages* erects barriers to strangers as if wary of letting others, especially, it would appear, children, into their world. Even Mr Midnight respects the prohibition. “I won't sleep with anyone younger than my kids ... That's one of my rules.”³⁷

Many residents compare their life to being at college again; without the examinations. Aged women in brief skirts and waving pom-poms give public displays; teams set Guinness Book of records; cheap alcohol is readily available; there is a BMOC. “Our residents say it's like being a kid again.”³⁸ In the natural order of human being, youth exists in a context of future maturity and responsibility. In *The Villages* rediscovered youth is conjured in a perspective that, looking backwards, has, of necessity, turned away from adulthood. “I don't want the real world anymore. I just want to keep getting laid. Whatever happens now, you guys have to worry about it.”³⁹ The

³² Percival, John (1976) *The Roman Villa: an historical introduction*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 14.

³³ Blechman 2008, 11.

³⁴ Op. cit. 85.

³⁵ Op. cit. 155.

³⁶ Op. cit. 171.

³⁷ Op. cit. 88.

³⁸ ‘Lifestyle’, *The Villages* website, <http://www.thevillages.com/lifestyle/lifestyle.htm>

³⁹ Blechman 2008, 91-2 (Mr. Midnight).

regressive social outlook of The Villages, expressed in its most modest form in a wish to remain young, reaches back beyond a simulacrum of college days.

Young children love The Villages: “... the little boy could barely contain his enthusiasm ... ‘I love visiting The Villages ... It’s the happiest place on Earth – just like Disney World!’”⁴⁰ The streets are filled with 50,000 golf carts. Residents find these vehicles, about half the size of a car, ideal for all travel —“Golf carts quickly became a way of life.”⁴¹



Figure 3: A Way of Life

While some are basic and some customized all the little vehicles recall to middle class, English-reading eyes, Noddy’s little car and the magic of Enid Blynton’s Toytown; and to U.S. eyes ‘Disney World – The happiest place on earth.’ The predominant form of community transport in The Villages evokes a miniature world fit for the fantasies of children.

Blechman takes the official tour:

... a bus masquerading as a San Francisco cable car ... Buddy, a paunchy midwesterner with a big smile is the driver. He is wearing a festive miniature hat – a child’s party favor ... Mindy, also a heavyset midwesterner with a contagious smile, is the tour guide. She wears a festive miniature plastic tiara.⁴²

The regressive perspective of The Villages and its culture of repetitive immediacy excludes any reflection of the terminus of individual life — death.

The Villages’ hospice is a sunny, bright building with cathedral ceilings, lazy fans, and handsome furnishings. ... If it were a hotel I would check in immediately.⁴³

On a visit to the hospice, as he leaves the room of a dying man, Blechman falls victim to itinerant clowns and the classic water-spouting camera slapstick, beloved of small children and now deployed to cheer the dying.

⁴⁰ Op. cit. 162.

⁴¹ Op. cit. 45.

⁴² Op. cit. 53.

⁴³ Op. cit. 162-3.

A resident assailed by the reality of death, grieving the passing of her husband, declares: “But I am not going to let it take over. I'm going to fill up my time until it's my time.”⁴⁴ Turning her back on death, the daily task becomes to fill the ominous hours with activity, one new minted day after another, until death arrives; if merciful, unannounced, and from behind.

Not counting golf courses The Villages’ “... amenity tally stacked up to: more than 30 tennis courts; 26 pools; 5 soft ball fields; 2 bowling centers; 74 shuffleboard courts; 72 bocce ball courts; 56 pickleball courts; 57 billiard tables and 53 horseshoe pits. Plus The Villages has two town centers, a wellness center, a performing arts center, 12 recreation centers (and clubs to keep them full).”⁴⁵ The Sarasota Herald Tribune reports The Villages to have clubs for “just about any legal activity known to man.”⁴⁶ Every day thousands of villagers are engaged in hundred of activities. The tag line on The Villages’ Google link claims The Villages to be: ‘... Florida's premier active adult retirement community.’

Active 1. Opposed to contemplative or speculative: Given to outward action rather than inward contemplation or speculation.⁴⁷

The immediacy of un-reflected activity, it exists only in the doing, calls forth repetition to fill the suddenly empty moment. Extreme forms — “countless bingo games later I am bored and exhausted”⁴⁸ — show a reversal of effect; from repeated pleasure to constant displeasure. The effect of less intense repetition is structural rather than immediate.

At the end of the day we look at each other and say what a great day, and we get to do it all over tomorrow.⁴⁹

The single most significant activity in The Villages is golf — “... the little dimpled golf ball was the crucial factor in making Orange Blossom Gardens [the first ‘village’] a success. ... ‘Free golf’ is still one of The Villages’ major selling points.”⁵⁰ There are 29 ‘Executive’ (9 hole) and 10 ‘Championship’ (27 hole) golf courses in The Villages.⁵¹ The game is played extensively by men and frequently by women. Blechman’s female host, summing up the shortcomings of a malcontented couple who eventually left the community, declared ‘with finality’: “They didn’t play golf.”⁵²

The first desire of a golfer is to have ‘a swing’ that repeats. For each and every shot approaching the initial target, or ‘green’, the ideal is to make, each time, an identical stroke; to repeat exactly the gesture of the body, to make a single, dependable movement over and over again; varying only the club to calibrate the distance the ball should travel. The arms and hands, holding the shaft of the club, are the central lever of the golf swing; the hieroglyphic outline of the game may, consequently, be conceived in the (repeated) representation of an arm and hand holding a club.

On reaching ‘the green’ and approaching the final goal (a hole in the middle of a surround of manicured grass) the golfing gesture is reduced to its fundament. Propelling the ball a distance is

⁴⁴ Op. cit. 175.

⁴⁵ Erisman, Ryan (2011) *The Villages Florida Book*, Kindle Book, Chapter 3. The number of bowling centers is missing in the original text and is inferred from another source.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Oxford English Dictionary (Compact Edition, 1971).

⁴⁸ Blechman 2008, 177.

⁴⁹ The Villages Magazine, 2011, 135. accessed <http://www.thevillagesdailysun.com/magazine/>

⁵⁰ Blechman 2008, 44.

⁵¹ This would, at present, average out at a golf course for about every 2,000 people.

⁵² Blechman 2008, 18 (emphasis added).

no longer required. For the short strokes, with the body braced, the forearms and hands command the shaft and head of the club. We need only make the interpretative abstraction of seeing the club as a phallic symbol for the discourse of golf to become apparent. It writes, in repetitious gesture, of an ever more intimate manipulation of phallus by hand and, in a climax of bodily rigidity (albeit vertical) of autoerotic pleasure.

The golfing text by no means discourses solely of male autoeroticism.

The vulva consists of two sets of folded skin (labia major, labia minor) that cover the opening to the reproductive tract, and a small nub of sensitive, erectile tissue (clitoris), which is the remnant of the fetal penis.⁵³

Widespread masturbation, both male and female (although not to the same extent) in pubescence and young adulthood is well documented. It is less well known that psychoanalysis has also discovered an immediate sexual life of infants "... reach[ing] its first peak between the ages of three and five".⁵⁴ This sexual life is "... essentially autoerotic (i.e. it finds its object in the infant's own body)."⁵⁵ Autoeroticism and sexual immaturity are, in short, long associated. At the level of the signifier the gesture of autoeroticism written in 'The Villages' environment is part of a discourse of a second childhood; a mirror image of first childhood. While it might, to the innocent observer, look the same, causality is in fact reversed.⁵⁶ In the Villages' second childhood the progress of social life is secretly replaced by the regress of individual existence. They meet at the extreme - in death.

Them

The Villages constructs, in both word and deed, an 'Us', an inward focussed community, against an implicit 'Them'.

I purchase a map ... depicts only streets inside The Villages. Anything outside the community – even something just across the street – is represented by a white void. Curiously, there is a large white empty space in the center of the map as well.⁵⁷

The Villages brands spaces and communities outside its world, even if immediately adjacent, as blanks; as non-spaces and non-communities. This, from a gated community, is to be expected. The 'curious' large white space in the centre of the map, however, remains to be understood. Surprisingly, the non-representing space at the centre of The Villages is the private domain of a developer whose ubiquitous presence controls almost every dimension of The Villages — "... but this is extreme. The Morse family owns everything and controls everything. It's a true company town."⁵⁸ Morse control even extends to local political administration. In the grand tradition of the company town the developer, through its agents, is a decisive presence on all significant local government bodies (including the Board of Supervisors).

⁵³ Human Reproduction 101, fatherhoodbychoice.org, accessed 28 December 2011.

⁵⁴ Freud (1956) Three Essays on Sexuality, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and edited by James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, The Hogarth Press, London, Vol. VII, p. 194. Freud later amended his estimate of the span of the efflorescence of infantile sexuality to between the ages of 2 and 5.

⁵⁵ Op. cit. 197.

⁵⁶ When looking at one's image in a mirror if one moves one's right arm the mirror image appears to move its left arm.

⁵⁷ Op. cit. 14

⁵⁸ Op. cit. 111.

When Harold Schwartz (who lived in a modest ranch house in one of the villages) decided to develop ‘The Villages’ as more than housing, he invited his adult son from the mid-West to become his partner. A vigorous, ambitious man he brought with him a production network developed around a failed Illinois tourist venture. It is the son who now owns and controls The Villages. In his name Harold ‘Gary’ Morse, the son of Schwartz’s first marriage, doubly distances himself from the founding father. An ambiguous ‘Gary’ replaces his given first name, Harold jr. As a teenager ‘Gary’ elects to take his stepfather’s surname — Morse.

Blechman reports: “Gary is often described as somber, aloof, and a ‘hard guy to get to know.’”⁵⁹ Only his name is known in The Villages. He never appears in public, he grants no interviews, he and his company answer no questions. “You can ask if the sky’s blue and they still won’t comment.”⁶⁰ The desire for anonymity that possesses the massive economic and political power at the centre of the Villages is unquestionable.

... seven foot aerial photograph of The Villages ... color coded districts ... in the middle of the photograph [] devoid of color coding there is a large empty area as big as any district. It corresponds to the white space in the middle of the map ... ‘that’s were Morse lives?’ ... ‘Uh, yes.’⁶¹

During the boom years before 2007/8, The Villages sold over 4,000 homes a year, or, approximately, a house every two hours, and realized more than a \$1 billion dollars in annual gross income — “even the military doesn’t build houses that fast. This is a retirement community on steroids.”⁶²

At the centre of the production of The Villages is a financial structure pioneered by Disney. To facilitate the Magic Kingdom development (1971) the Florida legislature created, on Disney land and at its request: “a wholly independent district, free of state, county, and local ordinances and land-use laws, and empowered with the ability to float its own tax-free bonds.”⁶³ In 1980 Florida enacted Chapter 190; a legal vehicle for similar privileges now available beyond Disney.

The most important Chapter 190 boon for The Villages is the legal ability to issue its own tax-free bonds. Instead of buying credit from banks at commercial interest rates, The Villages is empowered to raise money directly from the financial sector at rates discounted by the investor’s marginal tax rate. This privilege of raising ‘cheap’ money has traditionally been reserved for the social sector (e.g. municipal and school district bonds).

In 1983 the founding father had to sell everything to raise the capital to start The Villages – “I put every cent I had into a high-risk venture. I was seventy-three.”⁶⁴ Lines of commercial credit were necessary to fund the construction of both housing and the necessary collective infrastructure (e.g., roads and sewage). The debt was redeemed with the proceeds of house sales; priced to reflect the total cost of the development.

In the new age of the son, Chapter 190 allows for another model of land development. The Villages is a site of constant construction. In addition to new housing tracts and their immediate infrastructure, The Villages has been enhanced with a steady stream of additional recreational and

⁵⁹ Blechman 2008, 42.

⁶⁰ Op. cit. 38.

⁶¹ Op. cit. 104.

⁶² Op. cit. 39.

⁶³ Op. cit. 105-6.

⁶⁴ Op. cit. 43.

activity centres, more golf courses, another town centre, a regional hospital (with no paediatric ward) and a hospice. Most, if not all, of this enhancement has, with a financial shuffle here and there, been funded by bonds drawn against residents' income and wealth with the developer playing a lucrative brokerage role. As a result 'The Villages' development has been super-charged, as it were, with the income and credit capacity of residents – the erstwhile customers in the traditional model.

The community meets its obligations with a rising stream of 'amenities fees', 'assessments' and the like. The non-golfing malcontent who fled 'The Villages' complained of being "controlled, and nicked and dimed"⁶⁵ at every turn. Blechman's report is from the boom years, before the onset of the global financial crisis. He found while residents were aware of ever-rising amenity and administration charges, they were unconcerned. At the margin they could afford it. "Who cares if the monthly amenities fee is \$129 or \$134?"⁶⁶ We have no report on the contemporary situation. The financial situation of residents will have deteriorated with falls in both investment income — evident in the souring of global stock, commodity and financial markets — and, consequent on the large declines in Florida house valuations, the central pillar of middle class wealth, credit capacity.

The principal dimensions of the traditional model of land development were building and selling (with finance a constraining, exogenous frame). The ability of the developer to create credit has led to a new model, the major dimension of which is the very raising and structuring of flows of money. Construction and retail are now inputs into a financial model.

The replacement, at the heart of land development, of machines and men (the home range of traditional, white-shoe developers) by the flow of money is accurately reflected in the transition from the flamboyance of the founding father to the anonymity of 'Gary' Morse and the featureless space at the centre of representations of 'The Villages'. Finance capital is an abstract entity; a boundless possibility, ready, at the promise of more money, to be transformed into any and everything that can be bought and sold — that is, in the contemporary world — into everything. And it is every-thing that is represented at the centre of 'The Villages' as a featureless 'white space' — 'devoid of color coding.' A black space, a no colour space, would sign of nothing. A white space, white in the conflation of all the colours of the spectrum, signifies an excess of things. As a consequence of everything the space can no longer be (colour) coded. At the centre of 'The Villages' signification fails. Interpretation of a place where "where people's dreams can come true" is no longer possible.

Epilogue

Blechman concludes with a citation from *The Odyssey*, Book 1X. Odysseus is threading his way through seductive utopias, where as guest his every appetite is satisfied in the most refined style. As guest he is plied with gifts beyond measure. As guest his every wish is fulfilled. As guest he carries no responsibility and does no work. As guest he has no social function. Odysseus has too much; the consumption of 'everything' has crowded out the possibility of human (historical) action.

From his companions he "select[s] two, and joins them with a herald"⁶⁷ and sends them on ahead. In myth space may signify time; the companions sent ahead are the older generation — their social task, figured in the herald, is to report back.

⁶⁵ Op. cit. 18

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Homer (1962) *The Odyssey*, trans. George Herbert Palmer, Bantam Books, New York, 119.

But whosoever of them ate the honeyed fruit wished to bring tidings back no more ... to feed on lotus and forget his going home.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Op. cit. 120.



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