

DAVID REED—PAINTING/VAMPIRE STUDY CENTER: IS LOOKING AT AN ABSTRACT PAINTING SIMILAR TO A VAMPIRE'S NOT REFLECTING IN A MIRROR?

Notes from the artist's journal:

April 12, 1999. In Tod Browning's *Dracula*, the Count strikes down the mirror not because he is upset that he doesn't see his reflection, but because he is angry that he has been exposed. Looking at an abstract painting can also expose us to ourselves.

I imagine viewers looking at abstract paintings and finding themselves asking: "Who am I that I don't see my reflection in the painting? What part of me is missing? Is there a new part being shown?"

Is our experience of looking at an abstract painting like the vampire's experience when looking into a mirror? Does looking at an abstract painting help us see the vampire in ourselves?

May 20. Last week, I had an interesting talk with the painter Dona Nelson after visiting her studio. She spoke about how abstract painting reflects not the actual appearance of our body but a distorted body, a body closer to the way we actually experience it. We are not the simple body form we see reflected in a mirror but a strange amalgam of our actual appearance and distortions. Many of these distortions are caused by our experiences of photography, film, and video. These mediated distortions of our body mean that like the vampire we are both alive and dead. We are each part machine. Like the vampire's stare our gaze can be as mechanical as the view through the lens of a camera. We have been changed by our identifications while watching movies and TV. We are not just ourselves, but a residue of all these identifications. I'm 1% Richard Widmark, for example, and 2% Kim Novak. The vampire's transformation into a bat or wolf is a metaphor for these experiences of identification.

July 6. Did Bram Stoker sit down at his desk one day and invent the mirror non-reflection motif? Are the notes from the Rosenbach Museum and Library evidence of this? Or, is there evidence that he came across this motif in his research of vampire legends? I like to think that he did invent the motif. Then there is a specific insight from which all the variations are derived. I will continue this research at the Rosenbach Museum & Library. . . .

July 8. Add laptop computer to table of researcher. Nice relation to the cigarette case. It looks like a lap top computer in Tod Browning's film, which was made in 1931, many years before there were any laptop computers. When *Dracula* knocks down the cigarette case it is as if he is trying to destroy future technology. The vampire is an emblem of our anxiety, even fear of being changed by technology. One could make a chart: more anxiety about technological change/more vampires.

July 14. Looking at these paintings on white grounds together, I've realized that I see them now in a completely different way—not really as paintings but somehow as fragments of something else; each painting a piece of a longer unscrolling image with parts as flashbacks or flash forwards. Make a scroll of all the white paintings. On a white ground the marks will be isolated into a

different time/different world. I imagine a long sequence of these paintings moving by. The white turns into endless space.

August 20. Several years ago, Frank Owen, a painter friend spoke of a theory he developed about the vampire's reflection. He said that a reflection in a mirror is half the size of what is being reflected. Perhaps a vampire reflects back the reflection. So the reflection is reflected back and forth an infinite number of times and becomes infinitely small. Perhaps that is what Count Dracula sees when he looks into the cigarette case—his image becoming infinitely small. Or perhaps for a vampire the image is doubled instead of becoming half the size, as it does with humans. Then the vampire sees his image reflecting back and forth doubling in size until it is infinitely large. Perhaps that sight is what scares the vampire. That seems to be what the media is doing to us.