

Los Angeles is the City of Dreams, the City of Angels, a city blessed and cursed with a glorious dream and façade of hopes -- glitter sprinkled on top of its sprawling expanse. It is a city without a center, a city with a rich and fabled past often bestowed with nostalgic memories not entirely based on fact; an erasure of memory. Without a distinct ancestry, it is often seen and referred to as a whore. The city is made up of so many distinct parts, communities intertwined and fraying at the edges. Sitting on top of one another, Los Angeles is seemingly without borders, an area of pulsing, moving bodies all swaying with the energy of the city's rich and unique cultures.

Navigating Los Angeles is an experience in itself. By way of its intricate mapping of freeways, streets and avenues, the veins and arteries of its body possess the inhabitant to follow these lifelines, dependent upon its circulating blood to survive. The body of Los Angeles makes one feel as if they can be instantly rewarded and punished by its beauty all in one moment. Los Angeles, the femme fatale, can lure one in with its bright lights, swaying palm trees, and warm sunshine yet punish at the same time – all in one sway of her hips. When the warm Santa Ana's blow in on a summer's night, dry and majestic, one can feel as though they have just kissed her lips, but the poison soon follows. Attracted to a dream, they pilgrimage to the City and become enraptured by the multi-faceted qualities of her magnificence. But what are we truly looking for? Many people come to the city, obsessed with an image and enraptured by an Angel. But the dichotomy that we find in her beauty is all too telling of how we see each other. Los Angeles is an angel, yet she is also a whore. Los Angeles as the femme fatale has been noted in Los Angeles film noir since the 1930s. The city itself is seductive, alluring, glamorous, and wanton. Yet she uses these qualities to her advantage, shattering the hopes and dreams of those who fall prey all too easily.

In Edward Ruscha's piece, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), a series of black and white photos outline the architecture of one of the main arteries of the body of Los Angeles. Black and white photos, minimalist and distant, draw the viewer in to a perspective of Sunset Boulevard not readily imagined. Often one's perspective of this area is littered with the exaggerated images that Hollywood has portrayed not only to the world, but to its own inhabitants. Ruscha provides a stark juxtaposition with his exacting documentation of its concrete jungle. It is as if he has documented the facades at a movie back-lot at Metro Goldwyn-Mayer. We are drawn in to imagine the buildings living and breathing on their own, blood cells positioned along this life-line. But what lies beneath? What stories have yet to be told? Who are the people that navigate along this boulevard and why? Documenting these photos by setting up a camera to the back of a pick-up truck and cruising down the boulevard, Ruscha's footage style picks up on the booster images of Los Angeles as an "autopia," a land of sprawling expanse of economic abundance where every god-fearing man or woman could own their own piece of moving, roaring steel on wheels. Even though this idea is seeped in propaganda, its main premise still rings true. Without a vehicle to navigate the city, are we truly Angelenos? By remaining in his vehicle to take the footage, his physical distance remains intact and all too telling of how the citizens of Los

Angeles live their lives. In one's own car, we do not *have* to interact with fellow human beings, lessening our sense of community.

Unfolded, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* measures 27 ft. long. Laid out, it is very reminiscent of the Los Angeles horizon line and visual scan that Robbert Flick references in his interview with Michael Dear:

What has always struck me about the city [Los Angeles] is the possibility of the scan, a left-right/right-left movement. There is always an open sky. The horizon line here is perpetually present in any vision of Los Angeles, and I think it has a lot to do with the shaping of the perceptions, the notions of light and space.

Mirroring LA's polycentricism, the booklet is a sum of many parts; individual photographs of city blocks pasted together. The top and bottom photographs of the booklet each represent one side of Sunset Boulevard while the blank space in-between symbolizes this main artery of Los Angeles, itself. This blank area is the only constant in this photo montage – a constant transformation. It is perpetually changing within the mind and within memory. Whereas the buildings that Ruscha so meticulously archived have most long been forgotten, the boulevard, the main drag, is still visible and remains a vital route for navigating the City of Dreams. John Gregory Dunne once pointed out that to understand Sunset Boulevard is to understand the meaning of Los Angeles. Sunset Boulevard is a prime representation of what many think of when imagining the city: unique architecture; a symbiosis of decaying buildings living side-by-side recently erected edifices; popular culture – glittery, obnoxious billboards in every view; a virtually unobstructed horizon line from downtown to the Westside, lightly dotted with swaying palms; decay, excess and physical manifestation of obsession. This is all seen and felt through the experience of physical movement, physically navigating Sunset Boulevard and in effect, experiencing something very "LA." For Ed Ruscha, this photographic collection of memory is intentionally created via the usage of the automobile, but this is pretty much the only aspect that *is* deliberate.

The length of the booklet, and the meticulous care that Ruscha takes in objectively documenting a day on Sunset Boulevard in 1966, allows the viewer an un-obstructed account of Los Angeles seen through the unforgiving camera's lens. Instead of descriptive captions, Ruscha opts instead for typed street numbers and names of road intersections. Ruscha's photographic style does not attempt to impose any of his own ideas or myths about the city onto the viewer. It is removed, carefree, nonchalant, lax even. There is no coincidence why Ruscha has been noted as an "LA artist." Not to say that his style is "lazy" by any means, but there is something about that blasé sophistication that is the epitome of LA cool. Ray-bans in hand, I'm sure Mr. Ruscha is just as hip as he was in 1966.

