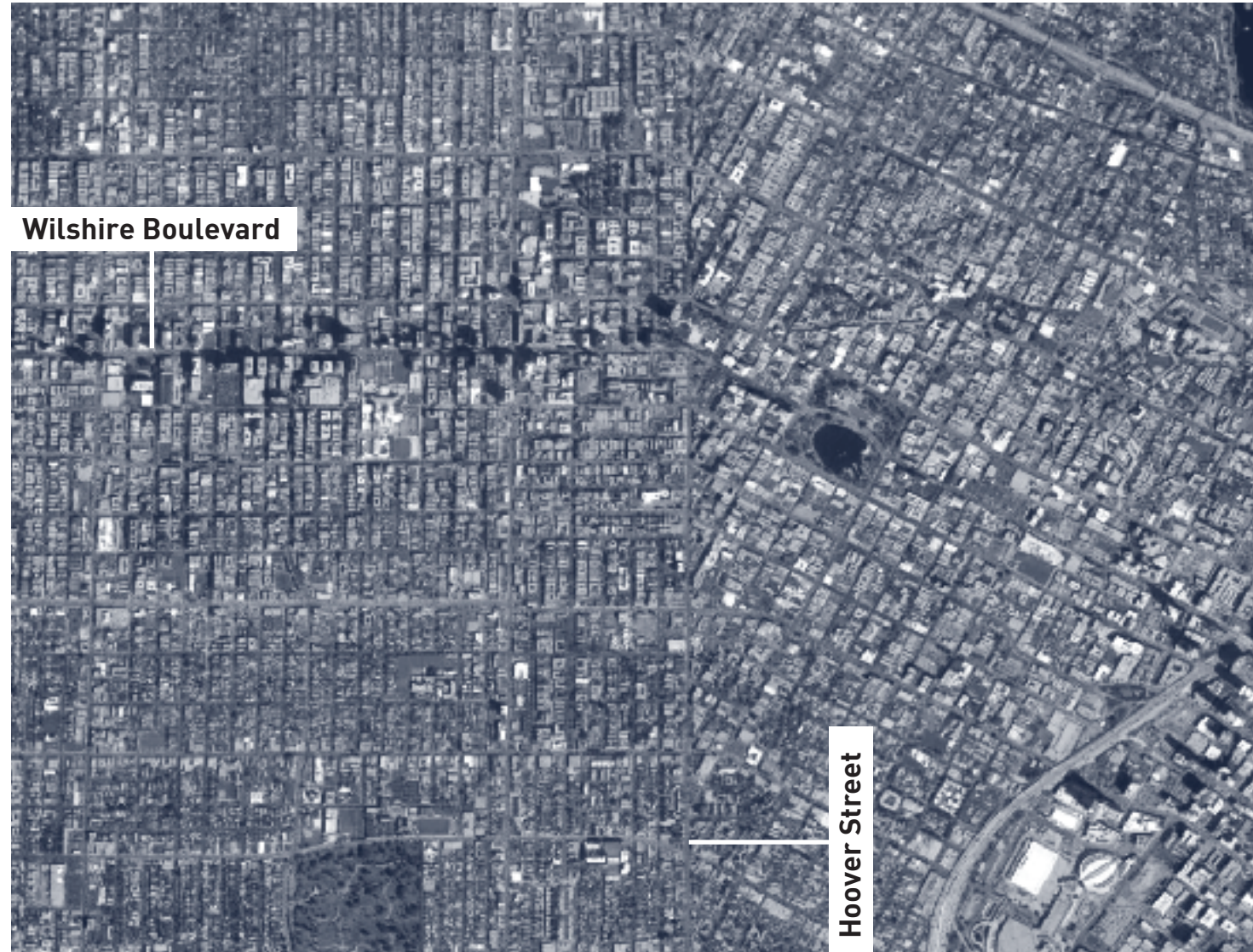


## LOS / LOSS / LOST

In the summer of 2015, I was artist-in-residence in Los Angeles, California. I had spent the previous months developing a research project with a colleague and friend in Berlin. My colleague through her research, had found a manuscript for an unpublished book. The manuscript contained detailed testimonies of former East German architectural sites, written by partisan authors. These sites were classified in the 1980s by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) as monuments of cultural significance. We had set out to photograph some 360 sites throughout the former East Germany in order to complete the publication. We instigated a pilot week, which located 13 sites around Berlin to tentatively work out the feasibility of such an expansive project.



Late-summer Los Angeles. Berlin and the drabness of GDR architecture felt far away. Nevertheless, I wanted to explore how each respective city engaged with its architecture as historical markers. The distance too, seemed a way to make sense of the GDR project. I was seeking a kind of distraction, or a buffer between the West Coast of America and Eastern Europe.

Later, back in London whilst assembling this publication, I came across the Wende Museum in Los Angeles. A museum dedicated to the archiving of historical and personal objects related to the Wende (turning point) of German history in the late 1980s. The museum holds one of the largest archives in the United States; preserving East German cinema, press and artifacts. In *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles*, Norman Klein plays with fiction and history as a means of probing erasure in LA's urban amnesia. Within geopolitical manoeuvres lies a process of clearing, whereby memory is forcibly replaced by new histories.



Only Los Angeles could offer a comprehensible distance in which to inspect the trauma of the GDR. Or more glibly, that the re-installed segments of the Berlin Wall at 5900 Wilshire Boulevard is evidence of Los Angeles' resistance to engage with its own historical agency.

The baffling complexity of Los Angeles lies in its disregard for preservation and monumentalism. The LA Conservancy organisation works to recognise and preserve buildings of cultural significance in the greater Los Angeles area<sup>1</sup>. As a private organisation, the LA Conservancy has surpassed the city's own public 'Office of Historic Resources' in campaigning to save buildings of importance. It is often remarked that Los Angeles' most interesting

architecture is not to be found in civic building projects but rather, hidden away behind security fences of private estates. The Conservancy categorises buildings according to the risk of demolition or re-development. It also documents failures of preservation, enigmatically classifying them as 'Lost'. I became interested in 'Lost' as a spatial and temporal status for architecture. Whilst in LA I read Rebecca Solnit's book *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. This seemed a good literal and metaphorical starting point in how I might be able to orientate myself to the city and the (as-yet-unknown) project. Navigating Los Angeles on foot, lost also took on greater practical significance. In one chapter, Solnit charts the etymology of the word Lost from the Norse word *Los*, meaning to disband or retreat.

Built by Austrian architects in LA over the summer; the Los Bar on Cochrane Avenue was a makeshift 0.65 scale replica of Adolf Loos' original American bar in Vienna<sup>2</sup>. Their version of Loos' bar was compacted to fit a suburban garage in West Hollywood. The Los Bar hosted a variety of gatherings before its eventual incineration in the desert. It seemed I wasn't the only European yearning of withdrawal in this bewildering city during that summer. In 2010 I wrote and edited a video essay on Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader and comedian Andy Kaufman titled *Amateur/Failure*. Through research, I became vaguely aware of Bas Jan Ader's final work *In Search of the Miraculous*. In the first part of *In Search of the Miraculous*, Ader documented a nighttime walk across the city of Los Angeles in a series of photographs. In the second and final act Bas Jan Ader was fatally classified as lost, whilst attempting a solo crossing of the Atlantic in a sailboat.



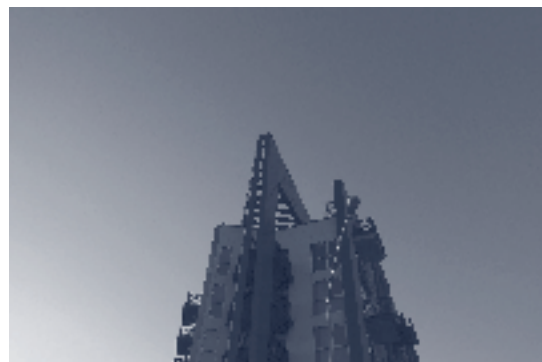
As of summer 2015 there are thirteen lost buildings scattered around Los Angeles. Thirteen also happened to be the number of buildings initially photographed in Berlin several months before. I decided to seek out and document what might be left of the LOST buildings of Los Angeles. Furthermore this publication is a meditation and drift through the city of Los Angeles, drawing influence from reading, watching, walking and functions as a vantage point towards projects, past and future. The LOST photographs are ordered starting inland and ending on the Pacific coast. LOS/LOSS/LOST is a triangulation whereby I consider the form of the publication and writing as a method of retrieval and disappearance.

Images

Google Maps - Centred on Hoover St, LA. & 5900 Wilshire Bld.

Bas Jan Ader - *Broken Fall (Geometric)*

Contents



It is somewhat inevitable that a metropolis such as Los Angeles, fractious and tectonic in nature, should have a competing number of organisations attempting to preserve its architecture. In a city created as real-estate speculation, there is great difficulty in consolidating an architectural past with complexities of its present. Los Angeles is a city that readily absorbs convention; a convention centre operating as enigma. Its de-centrality foregrounds the awkward contingency of the artist and the wanderer. On celluloid other cities are brought sharply into angular focus. In contrast, the flat haze of Los Angeles recedes past pylons and oil derricks into the distance.<sup>3</sup>



20600 – 20620 W Roscoe Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 91325



Emigrant Al Ruppersberg recognised the impulse for European artists in Los Angeles to use the city as material for work, such was its jarring effect.<sup>4</sup> Artist Bas Jan Ader arrived in California in 1963<sup>5</sup> and ten-years later performed the first part of his final work *In Search of the Miraculous* walking from Hollywood to Venice Beach in the night-time expanse of LA. In 1975 Ader was lost at sea, attempting a solo-sail across the Atlantic. The resulting staged<sup>6</sup> photographs are a series of disjointed images, haphazardly sidwinding across Los Angeles recording urban moments of the un-miraculous. Each indistinct black and white photograph relies on the artificial auratic illumination from the city and a hand-torch. Underneath each image - a scrawled lyric from the song *Searchin'* by The Coasters. The romantic artist pinned to the edges of LA's freeways, its underpasses and scrubland.



5077 Lankershim Blvd. North Hollywood, CA 91601



## 3901 San Fernando Road

The original 18 photographs were edited down from a much larger number. Ader later exhibited a further redux 14-picture version of the work. In addition the size and format of the pictures varied dependent upon the context they were shown.<sup>7</sup> The 14 photographs, displayed in a grid creates a cinematic sequence, enabling Ader to move from frame to frame, from Century City to Beverlywood unimpeded – impossible street movements for the pedestrian. The photographs were arranged from hills to coast, enacting writer Reyner Banham's ecologies of Los Angeles.<sup>8</sup>



## 3901 San Fernando Rd. Glendale, CA 91204



Hoover Street running southwards from Hollywood to the University of Southern California, marks a threshold where the 90-degree grid system of West Los Angeles meets the 45-degree clustered streets of Downtown; manifesting the economic and social push-pull that shaped so much of the city since the 1920s. The high-modernity of Piet Mondrian's perpendicular crushed next to Theo Doesburg's diagonals. This collision of abstractions manifests in Bas Jan Ader's film *Broken Fall (Geometric)* recorded in front of Mondrian's lighthouse at Westkapelle. The artist stands upright, swaying in increasing motion with the breeze until his lean becomes a fall and Ader collapses across a propped wooden work-bench.



133 W. Avenue 45, Los Angeles, CA 90065



The still photograph becomes a lost marker for the city. The buildings spectate as vehicles jolt to the next intersection; a constant stream of 6 lane-wide traffic moats below LA's architectural confusion. Gridlocked traffic on the 101 runs parallel to a 2-mile-long used-car lot at LA's western extremities. For every creaking, tired automobile is a replacement, poised fathoms below the Interstate. Speed is understood via freeway signs and the stillness of photography. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon describes Los Angeles' endless texts and freeways as unfulfilled promises of meaning.<sup>9</sup> I think about this as drones fly low overhead, infinitely strafing the word *C O M P T O N* in co-ordinated puffs along Venice Beach.



520 S. Lark Ellen Avenue, West Covina, CA 91791



Los Angeles has always been the geographical edge of the western world. In cinema it becomes the point of crisis for the protagonist and host to anthropocenic endgames. In Wim Wenders' first road movie *Alice in the Cities*, journalist Philip Winter suffers writers block when trying to report on his experiences of America. Sat underneath the boardwalk and singing The Drifters song of the same name, Winter flaps a freshly taken polaroid out towards the Pacific. The image becomes the first in a series of temporal simulacrum. A television is hauled to the floor of a motel room and a Chevrolet's radio tuner kicked out of frequency. Winter faces the choice; to give himself to a space beyond America (and the known) or turn and retreat across a continent back to Europe.



9900 Santa Monica Blvd. Beverly Hills, CA 90212



In *Falling Down*, Michael Douglas' frustrated LA commuter engages in a series of violent confrontations from Pasadena to Venice Beach. In a symbolic rejection of LA, Douglas abandons his car on the freeway and continues on foot, immediately marking him out as transgressor. Hostilities increase as he encounters platitudinal markers of a failed America; the disappointment of the super-sized fast-food meal, officious authority, territorial gangs, armed fanatics and idling Beverly Hills golfers. Douglas is all of these things and Los Angeles is all of America; Boulevards of Wilshire, Pico and Olympic stretching out towards the Pacific. The outlaw's last stand happens at the end of Venice pier - maybe Winter's pier - in a showdown with Robert Duvall's Sheriff. The film ends conclusively as Douglas is fatally dispatched into the cool Pacific below, out beyond California.



900 North La Brea Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90038



The Los Angeles dramaturgy sits atop a parched faulted-landmass, with water trickling down aqueduct-freeways from its northern reservoirs. Deployed matt-black shade balls bob atop the Silverlake reservoir in attempts to conserve moisture. In Westside galleries I contemplate eight precariously assembled sculptures and stare at the cracked polished concrete floor underneath my feet, wondering if this too is another contingent ground. LOST buildings provide a reminder of the regenerative spirit of the city. Preservation is European and therefore anachronistic. The recent past becomes continually deferred as vistas and blocks conspire with aging, crumbling freeways. The Los Angeles basin is a dispersed capitulation to the suburbs; delineated by freeways, boulevards and avenues. Each suburb brutally enclosed by an I or an US.



3400 Wilshire Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90010



## Sixth Street Viaduct

All cities are sites of rehearsals; they adjust their character in preparation of things to come. A good city knows this; but historical obligation stutters the rehearsal and forces a new kind of choreography. For each photograph of the staged *In Search of the Miraculous*, Ader posed one leg behind the other to simulate walking forwards.<sup>10</sup> Edward Bellamy's novel *Looking Backwards* purportedly influenced the architecture of the Bradbury Building in Downtown Los Angeles. Written in 1888, Bellamy's novel imagines a socialist-utopia in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century. The rehearsal is in perpetual motion re-forming the city as capital and as commodity.<sup>11</sup>



1400 E. Sixth St. Los Angeles, CA 90021



## La Villa Basque

Ader was interested in the architectural remnants of Los Angeles during his early studies at Otis College in the city during the mid-sixties. He was specifically drawn to the (then) dilapidated Bradbury Building and took many photographs of its interior for his work.<sup>12</sup> The Bradbury Building underwent significant restoration by the city of Los Angeles in the early nineteen-nineties as interest in conservation practices finally reached the city. The building is designated Historic-Cultural Monument, part of the canonised 'Historic Downtown', a touristic re-generative initiative to revive the once catatonic downtown area. The Bradbury Building has featured heavily in Hollywood filmmaking, regularly transformed into noir-futuristic spaces and locations.



2801 Leonis Blvd. Vernon, CA 90058



The city of Los Angeles is the tentative rehearsal *par excellence*; the demolished Lou Ehlers Cadillac on Wilshire Boulevard was later reconstructed as a BMW showroom. The city defaults and renews with multi-purpose units, model suburbs, condos and Starbucks. Sentimentality is slow and slowness in Los Angeles is supposed to be spent on the sidewalk and not on the freeway. Bas Jan Ader responded the only way he could, by using his Maglite® torch as a surrogate car-lamp and commencing the walk towards Venice Beach. Ader is participant in Baudrillard's nighttime landscape of perspectival lights adrift in the desert, just another flicker in the city.



5220 Wilshire Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90036



**Lou Ehlers Cadillac**

In 2009 I made the work *Loss Velocity* as an attempt to bring together artworks through a durational performance. Taking two hip Californian white male artists in their respective institutional environments: the studio and the university. Each addressed a specific material and territorial constraint – a bouncing ball and a body impacting against a wall. In response, I choreographed a 90-minute rehearsal of disappearance. The rejected image for the press release showed me dressed in all-black mimicking the romanticised Bas Jan Ader, re-enacting the rehearsal.



**5151 Wilshire Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90036**



**Moore House**

In his search for the miraculous, Ader attained a degree of invisibility often eluding the European artist. Searching for the miraculous, but likewise desperately trying to find a way to disappear into the city. His was a triumph of transparency, the miraculous night of 1973 was the European's submission to the American landscape. In Los Angeles the artist struggles to perform, resigned to be kerbside fume-guzzler, humming lost songs of searchers and drifters.

**504 Paseo del Mar, Palos Verdes, CA 90274**

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> LA Conservancy, What We Do, <https://www.laconservancy.org/what-we-do>

<sup>2</sup> Documentation and information on the project can be found at: <http://los-bar.tumblr.com/>

<sup>3</sup> Andersen, Thom (2003) Los Angeles Plays Itself, Thom Andersen Productions

<sup>4</sup> Dumbadze, Alexander (2013) Bas Jan Ader: Death is Elsewhere. Chicago: University of Chicago Press p.94

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p.8

<sup>6</sup> Due to the huge distances covered along with subsequent efforts to map out the whereabouts of the photographs, (<http://willcenci.com/projects-2/in-search-of-in-search-of-the-miraculous/>) it is highly unlikely Ader would have been able to visit each area in the space of one night. Additionally in a later interview Ader's wife Mary Sue Ader Andersen revealed that she drove the artist around various spots before settling on a location.

<sup>7</sup> Dumbadze, Alexander (2013) Bas Jan Ader: Death is Elsewhere. Chicago: University of Chicago Press p.93

<sup>8</sup> The other two being freeways and foothills. Banham's book Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies explores the impact each has on LA's residents.

<sup>9</sup> Davis, Mike (1990) City of Quartz. London: Verso Books p.83

<sup>10</sup> Dumbadze, Alexander (2013) Bas Jan Ader: Death is Elsewhere. Chicago: University of Chicago Press p.93

<sup>11</sup> Davis, Mike (1990) City of Quartz. London: Verso Books p.33

<sup>12</sup> Dumbadze, Alexander (2013) Bas Jan Ader: Death is Elsewhere. Chicago: University of Chicago Press p.9



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