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The Body of Los Angeles, Between Commodity and Identity

Charles Joseph

- 1 How the body fits within the city and cityscape has been the starting point of some thinking in 20th century philosophy,¹ but the writings resulting from these reflections did not, for the most part, take into account both the urban and socio-cultural particularisms of the manufactured environment in which the body had to find its place. Whether stemming from the conceptualization or spatial structuring of the city, the timeframe of its construction, its population, its codes and cultural legacy, these factors influence how the inhabitants consider themselves among the others but also how they place themselves in these unique urban spaces. In Los Angeles, all of these components are peculiar, and if we now also find them in most megalopolises around the world, it was first in Los Angeles that they appeared and took roots. The postmodern city *par excellence* proceeds from a singular combination of geographical, socio-economic, historical and cultural elements which ultimately led to the city's nonstandard status and development. Central to all of these aspects, the inhabitants had to find their place but also had to build a corporeal integrity that would suit and resonate with the unprecedented morphology of the city. Cityscape and urban bodies thus find themselves engaged in a reciprocal relationship in which they influence each other, both growing more complex and intertwined with the other. In this dialog mediated through the body, something could emerge, a link between the city and the corporeal self that, in its ongoing dynamics, should inform both how a city works and how a city feels... The body and the city become co-dependent, as if starting a symbiosis, and they have never been so intertwined as in Los Angeles, be it in terms of form, purpose or ideology.
- 2 The theoretical approach favored in this article is firmly grounded within the field of cultural studies as it enables a transdisciplinary approach, as well as a transmedia one. The body in Los Angeles has served as an image from the very creation of the city and it has always been depicted, exposed or exhibited on cinema and TV screens, in art galleries and street billboards. Adjoined to an already complex emerging urban grid,

these corporeal models have been an additional layer of representation the inhabitants have had to take into account while already trying to maintain a grasp on an ever-expanding cityscape. It is when these different spatial conceptualization of the body and the city collide that a sense of 'psychasthenia' emerges.

Defined as a disturbance in the relation between self and surrounding territory, psychasthenia is a state in which the space defined by the coordinates of the organism's own body is confused with represented space. Incapable of demarcating the limits of its own body, lost in the immense area that circumscribes it, the psychasthenic organism proceeds to abandon its own identity to embrace the space beyond. It does so by camouflaging itself into the milieu. This simulation effects a double usurpation: while the organism successfully reproduces those elements it could not otherwise apprehend, in the process it is swallowed up by them, vanishing as a differentiated entity. (Olalquiaga 1-2)

- 3 Celeste Olalquiaga, who coined the term, thus links directly psychasthenia with simulation, a process which Jean Baudrillard has associated intimately with Los Angeles in *Simulacra and Simulation*: "Los Angeles is surrounded by these imaginary stations [Disneyland, Enchanted Village, Magic Mountain and Marine World] that feed reality, the energy of the real to a city whose mystery is precisely that of no longer being anything but a network of incessant, unreal circulation — a city of incredible proportions but without space, without dimension." (Baudrillard 1994: 13). The LA school of thought revolving mostly around Edward Soja and his *Postmodern Geographies* are precisely based on postmodern philosophical approaches such as the ones of Baudrillard or Henri Lefebvre, and Soja followed in their footsteps, opening geography to transdisciplinarity.² Soja thus took into account the cultural aspect of the city but in mostly geographical terms such as architecture, and left popular culture detached from any spatial considerations. But the body is the receptacle of both physical and representational spaces and when dealing with the corporeal bridge that is the Angelino body, one must find a way to link these combining discourses.
- 4 Following Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding strategies (Hall 90-103) seems appropriate when trying to understand the psychasthenic mechanisms at play in a city such as Los Angeles. Even though Hall intended his seminal essay mainly to discuss television, the "mixture of adaptative and oppositional elements" of the decoding process he analyzes could very well apply to the body in Los Angeles, and the various levels of influence it is submitted to. The body, however, in its various Angelino iterations and uses, is highly mediatized and Hall's perspective is rather fitting when engaged in the process of deciphering its origins, applications and results. To understand Angelino psychasthenia, the city's urban particularities should be taken into account, as well as the city's emblematic productions of body representations — whether in films, art exhibits, popular cultural practices, advertisement, or TV series —, and decoding their implications could shed some light on how the city and the body have been interlocked from the start.

Decentered city / Decentered body

- 5 The very morphology of the city and its singular conception of space impacted the inhabitants' corporeality, integrating aspects of the city's spatial conceptions in corporeal behaviors, but the city's peculiar form also triggered corporeal mechanisms to counteract its destabilizing effects. Los Angeles was developed horizontally and

continued its urban spread laterally ever since its inception, resulting in the polycentric urban sprawl its inhabitants have now grown accustomed to. The very limits of the city of Los Angeles are invisible and the many different municipalities forming the greater Los Angeles area are merged into one another to create an unending urban landscape where boundaries are the man-made freeways or man-dug river. Scholar Richard Sennett listed, in his essay “The Power of the Eye,” three fundamental rules to create a more human cityscape with his third and most challenging principle being one of finding and defining a clear center because, to “strengthen that sense of touch and contact, an urban design has [...] to focus on the edge as a scene of life” (Sennett 68-69). For Sennett, a clear urban concentric point is essential for a city identity to emerge but also for the inhabitants’ corporeal well-being. But how can one define a center in a polycentric megalopolis such as Los Angeles? It was built and created as a polycentric area relying on the initial impulse of the real-estate boosters who proclaimed themselves city planners. As soon as the city was attached to the rest of the American territory after the 1848 treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which ended the Mexican-American war, rich investors perceived an opportunity to make money and bought extensive parcels of land immediately. Tired of the congestions and growing density of eastern cities, the boosters’ main sales pitch was the ideal of the individual house and garden and coupled with the Gold Rush fever of the 1850s and the novelty of this newly acquired territory. Eastern Americans came rushing to the land of eternal sunshine as soon as the transcontinental railroad reached Los Angeles in 1869, contributing to the fast emergence of what was then considered as the “garden city”. Before becoming the fantasy of the newcomers, however, the detached house was first and foremost the ideal of the realtors and promoters given that the customers’ growing demand had to be addressed quickly. As explained by Carey McWilliams in *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (McWilliams 1973), the “California house” was the best way to address vast numbers of immigrants pouring into the city, a California house that already questioned the visible boundaries of inside and outside space.³ This California house that “was definitely subordinated” (McWilliams 357) to the landscape it was built in already denoted the territory’s power over human creations, blurring from the start the dialectics of public and private space which would resonate decades later with the Angelinos’ corporeality.⁴ These bungalows were built quickly all over the vast area of the Los Angeles basin without any particular urban planning to guide the construction — a disorganized development which contrasted drastically with the classic monocentric model and which contributed to creating the first American polycentric city.

- 6 The other centers of Los Angeles did not grow after one had emerged, rather, they all emerged simultaneously, making it impossible to specify which one should be *the* city center. Even more so, the very notion of center became very negative in Los Angeles because it became synonymous with imprisonment.⁵ Indeed, the actual geographic center of this urban sprawl has been associated with poverty and violence after the shifts of social classes after WWII. Compressed from each side by an ever-growing urban mass, Watts and South Central exploded into racial riots in 1965 and 1992, concentrating the worst failings of the city at its core. Entrapped within the city’s unending sprawl, these neighborhoods’ inhabitants proved how literal and social inertia would become defining factors of the social unrest.

- 7 The ability to move within the LA cityscape has become synonymous with life and freedom, while inertia has become associated with failure and poverty. It should thus come as no surprise that the body of these open-air inmates of the city condensed such apathy to turn it into movement, to transform it into motion. Thus, in order to experience freedom, they have grown to rely on their only inalienable property, their bodies. They have experimented and explored new means to express their ongoing frustration to finally reach a body language of their own, a trance-like corporeality that triggers escape. This cultural phenomenon was retraced in the 2005 documentary *Rize* directed by American photographer David LaChapelle (2005) (see Figure 1, and video below). The director/photographer focused on the cultural scene of South Central and the rise of a new dance style called krumping, a dance which finds its origins in the trance-like movements of African shamans. Instead of falling into gang violence and the drug business of the ghetto, the young African Americans but also Asians and Hispanics participating in this hip-hop movement expressed, through their moving bodies, their anger and frustrations, experiencing the freedom they were denied outside their turf.

Figure 1: *Rize* by David LaChapelle (still)

This image is one of the 15 photos that compose the album related to the film on the director's official website

Source: <http://www.davidlachapelle.com/film/rize/?ss=images> [no longer accessible].

This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document <http://journals.openedition.org/angles/1881>

- 8 The athletic bodies and colorful outfits of the dancers are striking under LaChapelle's lens, and for the first time outside the field of erotica, the black bodies of these real ghetto kids that are usually criminalized in the news media are actually glorified, celebrated. The director is able to show how disenfranchised populations in Los Angeles manage to experience freedom in a closed space and under very bleak socio-

economic circumstances, the very conditions which the city's morphology tended to accentuate.

- 9 Because of the city's ever-growing dimensions, Los Angeles became, during the first half of the 20th century, what Jeremiah Axelrod labeled "Autopia". After the massive urban works of the late 1930s which built the country's largest freeway network, the city encouraged car ownership by reducing considerably its railroad network, and after WWII, public transportation was reduced to a minimum in Los Angeles. The car became the indispensable tool to move around the city and, in doing so, influenced the inhabitants' conceptions of the body. The car became vital and, decade after decade, grew into an extension of one's body. It is as if, upon entering one's car, the driver/inhabitant suddenly expanded his/her body limits to superimpose that of the car's body. The cars express one's identity, and the popular Angelino saying "you are what you drive" is verifiable on the freeways of Los Angeles.
- 10 One can be displaying craftsmanship around the license plate (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Decorated license plate

All these photographs of license plates were taken by the author during various trips in Los Angeles between 2002 and 2013.

Source: Charles Joseph.

- 11 Or one's consumers' habits with stickers (in Figure 3, an Apple computer enthusiast).

Figure 3. Stickers on cars denoting driver's consumer habits

Source: Charles Joseph.

- 12 One can also brand the car through the license plate with hints of social habits or social behavior, thus superimposing one's identity with the car's official identification ("BEACHN7") (Figure 4).

Figure 4: License plate hinting at the driver's social habits

Source: Charles Joseph.

- 13 Drivers also display personal history and patriotism on their windshields ("Our son is serving in the Gulf", Figure 5).

Figure 5: Patriotism prominently displayed on a car's windshield

Source: Charles Joseph.

- 14 They put forward their political beliefs as well (“We are occupying Los Angeles”) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: “Occupy” supporter in L.A.

The sign reads “We are occupying Los Angeles”.

Source: Charles Joseph.

- 15 And finally, cars can display thoughts and opinions about how the drivers feel about Los Angeles (“Don’t Follow Me / I’m Lost” — with an additional play with an internet error code: 303, which is used for pages which have been moved elsewhere to redirect browsers) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Humorous license plate: "I'm lost, error 303"

Source: Charles Joseph.

- 16 These habits, now common throughout the United States and the world, originated in Los Angeles, and car customizing is a business that also started in the city. For people to display these personal markings on their cars is no longer specific to Los Angeles but it still remains the most noticeable habit taken up by most of its inhabitants contrary to other cities.⁶ The purpose of these visible and added marks on the cars can easily be paralleled with that of tattoos, without the aesthetic choices of the latter. The “Don’t Follow Me, I’m Lost” framing the license plate and the other numerous personalized cars go on to show that the car and the “I” in the driver’s seat are now one and the same. The official identification of the car can be custom-made to parallel that of the driver’s habits or personality with one-of-a-kind license plates. The cars become metallic extensions of the drivers’ bodies, extending one’s personal space and body limits, with one crucial loss: that of the sense of touch.
- 17 Los Angeles is often described as a dehumanizing space because of its massive scale, but it is because of the city’s size and the automobile habit it triggered that this dehumanization became palpable, with Angelinos slowly starting to feel estranged to one of their bodies’ five senses. One of the main characters of Paul Haggis 2004 academy award-winning film *Crash* opens the movie on that same note:
- Graham: It’s the sense of touch.
 Ria: What?
 Graham: In a real city, you walk you know. You brush past people. People bump into you. In L.A. nobody touches you. We’re always behind this metal and glass. I think that we miss that touch so much that we crash into each other just so we can feel something. [...] You don’t think that’s true?
 Ria: Graham, I think we got rear-ended, I think we spun around twice, and somewhere in there, one of us lost our frame of reference. I’m gonna go look for it.
 (Haggis 2004)
- 18 What Haggis’ film ultimately shows is that Los Angeles is a city not so much made of individuals as of infinite individualities. The sense of community has been greatly lessened in Los Angeles since its inhabitants have been used to being untouched, either in their single detached houses or in their cars, comfortable in a space that is solely their own. What is even more striking is the mechanics at work when fear comes into play and one no longer feels safe in this sacred and expanded individualistic space. The ever-expanding space, and the new dimensions it implies, impacts the everyday life of Angelinos with large sidewalks even though no one actually walks on them or very wide cinema seats which are now sometimes clearly separated from one another, as if

comfortably settled in an independent armchair, just like at home. Individual private space becomes a norm that can be echoed in Los Angeles and its massive-scaled public space. Collective spaces have taken into account these enlarged personal space dimensions, reinforcing the corporeal autarky experienced in Los Angeles and also explaining how touching someone, even inadvertently, is perceived first as an aggression before being perceived as a natural occurrence.

- 19 Influential work about the Los Angeles' cityscape by Reyner Banham, professor of the history of architecture, also informs the correlation between corporeality and the built environment. In *Los Angeles: Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Banham 2009), he lists four different types of ecologies that he systematically links with a matching architecture. We thus find the following pairs structuring the book's chapters: Ecology 1: Surfurbia; Architecture 1: Exotic Pioneers; Foothills/Fantastic; The Plains of Id/The Exiles; Autopia/The Style that Nearly..., and so on. The analysis favored by Banham is one based on a systemic approach, one that puts the body of the city and its inhabitants to the forefront. As recalled by Joe Day in a foreword, Banham's work "is concerned with systems: of transit, building, communication, retail and enjoyment." (Banham xxvii). Banham deals with ecologies, not environments; he deals with spaces in which men already have their place and have already transformed the territory, giving a palpable, perceptible body to the city: "Such a very large body of first-class and highly original architecture cannot be brushed off as an accident, an irrelevance upon the face of an indifferent dystopia" (Banham 226). He refers to the body of the city earlier in his book to discuss the second architecture, "Fantastic", addressing issues of architectural symbolism that have later been discussed by Robert Venturi, Denise Brown and Steven Izenour in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1977) or Louis Marin in *Utopics: Spatial Play* (1973). Banham explained how representational architecture developed in Los Angeles, turning new buildings into gigantic recognizable signs:

The towers of Watts are as unique as they are proper in Los Angeles, for the going body of architectural fantasy is in the public, not private, domain, and constitutes almost the only public architecture in the city — public in the sense that it deals in symbolic meanings the populace at large can read. (Banham 114)

- 20 For Banham, the Grauman's Chinese Theater in Hollywood, the Watts Towers or the Randy's Donuts sign all stem from the same "symbolic packaging" which he perceives as "the only gesture of public architecture that matches the style and scale of the city" (Banham 116).
- 21 Angelino photographer Allan Sekula also helped to put into perspective the relationship between the cityscape and the body of its inhabitants in symbolical terms during the second half of the 20th century through his art but also through his texts, notably in his essay "The Body and the Archive" (Sekula 1986). What becomes striking in Sekula's creative process is how he questioned the many interconnections between the body and the city in several of his exhibits. The most compelling is also one of his first, the 1973 exhibit entitled *Aerospace Folktales* (Sekula 1973), which focuses on his family. His father was working at the Lockheed corporation in Burbank and Sekula took several photographs of his father's workplace and more of his home with his mother and sister. If Los Angeles is not an immediate or apparent focus in Sekula's work, space, on the other hand, is. Being brought up in Los Angeles from a very early age, he integrated this space as his own, but his parents, who moved to Los Angeles, struggled with the city's amorphousness. Two pictures from Sekula's exhibit positioned next to

one another are particularly revealing (the photographs in the exhibit were untitled) (Figures 8 and 9).

Figure 8: Allan Sekula, *Aerospace Folktales* (1973)

Generali Foundation Collection, Permanent Loan to the Museum der Moderne Salzburg. Photo: Werner Kaligofsky. Source: <http://foundation.generali.at/typo3temp/pics/7ddbc66872.jpg>

Figure 9 : Allan Sekula, *Aerospace Folktales* (1973)

Generali Foundation Collection, Permanent Loan to the Museum der Moderne Salzburg. Photo: Werner Kaligofsky. Source: <http://foundation.generali.at/typo3temp/pics/ea4484401d.jpg>

- 22 What becomes visible in the second photograph is the map of Los Angeles which is stuck to the cupboard door. The residual body of the photographer's mother is visible with the open cupboard, yet the viewer's gaze is also drawn simultaneously to the organized cupboard on the left and the city map on the right, creating a parallel in which the actual body does not fit, only its residual corporeality. Space, even domestic, familiar, homely, suddenly turns outwards into a vaster strange space. What is also striking is the mere fact of having a map of the city in the kitchen even though the family moved to Los Angeles more than a decade ago. It reveals how hard it was for them to be able to visualize the urban maze that is Los Angeles and ultimately to understand how to fit in the city. This ongoing questioning becomes even clearer upon reading the photographer's essay accompanying the *Aerospace Folktales* exhibit:

so i have written down some things so you will understand what i am talking about
so you won't think i'm documenting things for the love of documenting things
obviously i am not national geographic looking for native customs or alligators i'm
not trying to discover my self i am not trying to present you with a record of my
anguished investigations this material is interesting only insofar as it is social
material i do not think that i can provide you with an object with no relation other
than an art relation to your world... (Sekula 1973)

- 23 This work by Sekula shows firsthand what Fredric Jameson explains in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Not only does the American scholar consider Los Angeles as one of the notable starting points of postmodernism through architecture (Jameson 38-45) and cityscape, but he also discusses how one's corporeal relationship to its built environment tackles issues that go far beyond one's immediate surroundings:

So I come finally to my principal point here, that this latest mutation in space — postmodern hyperspace — has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. It may now be suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment — which is to the initial bewilderment of the older modernism as the velocities of spacecraft to those of the automobile — can itself stand as the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects. (Jameson 44)

- 24 The absence of a very clear and linear reading of the city creates a certain confusion for the people who must inhabit it, who must situate themselves and project into it. Such a vast amorphous space with redundant-looking neighborhoods constantly crawling with people ends up feeling anthropomorphous, and what was once experienced as freedom becomes anxiety. The horizontal city is no longer a refuge but becomes a compression machine where the absence of structure turns the hive into an agitated crowd without any perceptible unity. This lack of centrality, of visible boundaries, of height, of density too, leads to what could be perceived as a new state of enslavement, one to a complex space, difficult to understand and apprehend, where the inhabitants' physical integrity diminishes. As personal space expands beyond the body's reach to adapt to the city's massive scale and habits, the body becomes porous to the objects which constitute its new limits such as the car, the seats, the home, etc.
- 25 Encouraged by the peculiar conception of space on which Los Angeles is built, the body has become gradually de-personified, as if the unprecedented polycentric urban form

that was born from marketing strategies had simultaneously brought about an ideological shift superimposing corporeality with commodity. In Los Angeles, the urban matrix becomes chimerical and amorphous, virtual even, and the flaws of the city are reverberated onto its inhabitants' mental images and projections but are more importantly felt through their bodies. The body becomes too frail and consistent, too centered (if not central) and cannot rival with the decentered postmodern urban grid that Los Angeles itself instituted. Because the body as a subject cannot position itself clearly in Los Angeles, it cannot find its place and it does not belong anywhere, whereas the body as an ideal seems to fit perfectly both in the ungraspable materiality of Los Angeles but also in the polished image that the city is so eager to sell.

Desirable city / Desirable body

- 26 If taken solely on the urban scale, the city seems to suffer from a sort of a-corporeality, but on a more cultural level, the city has motivated an objectification of the body which has become intrinsic to the territory and its identity. The exponential growth of a highly mediatized society where images are displayed on billboards, covers of magazines, cinema, television, computer or telephone screens comes into play as well, especially when dealing with Los Angeles which has upheld images as key historical instruments, and which has transformed them component into a leading world industry. The city's influence has been linked with how the body has been represented on any and every media surface from the early 20th century, and this needs to be taken into account not as an exclusively cinematographic influence but as a more general trend. Indeed, Hollywood's cinematographic hegemony gave Los Angeles a tremendous momentum, but the body conceptions the city has put forward were already in motion within LA's earliest history. As such, what are now known as Hollywood canons refer not only to the cinematographic industry but also to what Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy have called "The Global Screen" (Lipovetsky and Serroy 2007), one that transcends place, time and media forms. This "global screen" emphasizes the growing blur between photography, cinema and television, explaining how images have become pervasive in contemporary societies, but also how they have sped up and sustained globalization. Hollywood canons thus do not refer to a clearly delimited industry but to the original space from where this body-centric conception originated. To try to pinpoint the beginning of the prominence of body image in Los Angeles, one simply needs to go back to the boosters' early attempts to make money from the land they had bought in Los Angeles. Tom Zimmerman retraces in *Paradise Promoted* the mechanics of the strategies real-estate promoters put in motion, showing in his heavily illustrated book how images came into play in their ads. Zimmerman opens his book with an illustrated brochure of the city in which a sentence is associated with an image and which reads as follow:

Los Angeles: a city where [...] all the men retained their vigor [...] all the women were beauty queens [...] everybody took pictures [...] Hollywood stars exercised right by their bungalows [...] and even the oil fields had palm trees [...] and where absolutely everybody had his own car. (Zimmerman 2-9)

- 27 In these images and slogans he took up from early boosters' campaigns, the body is central. Beauty is one non-negligible aspect that was put forward with the beauty queens and Hollywood stars, but also a place and lifestyle that would get people into shape and stay healthy. We can see a young actress exercising, and the picture

associated with “all the men retained their vigor” shows an old man skipping rope. The body and its beauty and health became a sales’ argument from the start in Los Angeles. The question of well-being is not expressed because such subjective assumptions could ostracize people who did not condone or agree with this lifestyle. By staying on a very factual level, people could project more easily on the city, and the beauty canons already in place in America suddenly became a visible and powerful norm through the rising media formats to which Los Angeles became home. Moreover, the space of the beach itself, also associated with the city, became a sales argument that appealed unconsciously to carnal desires.⁷

- 28 The overall Californian myth thus banked from a very early phase on a healthy body in a wholesome environment. In a favorable and luxuriant climate, one could find slim women showing more skin than anywhere else in the United States, as well as muscular men who became physical heralds in terms of fitness and bodybuilding. The newfound Eden of the “Garden city” needed its bodily idealized Adams and Eves, and by hinting at this original myth, boosters hoped that it would appeal to the masses — and it did. This advertising ideal started a process explored in *This Side of Paradise* (Watts and Bohn-Spector 2008). In this illustrated publication, Sophie Bohn-Spector and Jennifer Watts comment on how body and landscape relate to one another in Los Angeles photographs and also discuss their evolving dynamics. In a chapter entitled “Lust in the land of sunshine,” Bohn-Spector analyzes how images of the body became central to Los Angeles and its narrative:

The exaltation of Southern California’s physicality, with all its attendant racial and ethnic prejudice, helped spawn a pervasive body culture that firmly took root in Los Angeles in the 1920s, aided by the camera as its promulgator and eager amanuensis. Over time, gorgeous physiques, bronzed skin, and an infectious sex appeal became virtually synonymous with Southern California, fostering increasingly lustful interpretations of both the city and the landscape itself. (Watts and Bohn-Spector 62)

- 29 Heather Addisson’s book *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture* (2003) bolsters Bohn-Spector and Watts’ arguments and explores the beginning of the Hollywood film industry, analyzing how the body became the most capitalized-on goods in the city, but also how Hollywood became prominent in setting new canons and standards in terms of beauty and attractiveness. Addisson perceives an obvious correlation between the development of the city and its widespread imagery found in the many films of the same era, motion pictures in which the territory’s propaganda was inextricable from an elaborate image of the body. Once shown or broadcasted, this ideal sold to the masses became the ideal to which one should conform, providing the city’s ever-growing audience with a goal. The reasons why people uprooted themselves and moved to Los Angeles took form and reality once they had finally made it there. Therein lies Los Angeles’ biggest power: the images of these ideals became reality through the sheer allure of the fantasy the city was able to create, because these ideals were appealing, desirable. The same mechanism was at play in the “muscle beach” gyms that opened on the Santa Monica seafront in 1934 and on the Venice seafront in 1951.⁸ From very early on, these institutions were created as spaces where athletes worked out under the sun, to perfect their already imposing muscle structure. In exposing themselves this way, half-naked, hard-muscled and sweaty, these athletes both focused the gazes and triggered desire in the passers-by, thus contributing to the implementation of an athletic figure strongly associated with the city and its industry. Actors on the silver

screen or on television gradually became more and more muscular throughout the 20th century, helping to anchor these beauty canons of masculinity. Aspiring actors and actresses knew that they had to conform to these athletic canons and spent time perfecting their bodies in order to 'get the part. Many fitness centers opened in Los Angeles in the late 1950s because of the surge of aspiring movie stars (Addison 37).

Figure 10: Open-air gym on the beachfront, where passers-by can admire the bodybuilders' physique

Source: Charles Joseph.

- 30 The same thing can be said of women, of course, but the ongoing canons perpetrated through Hollywood have been either highly reinforced or greatly amended by fashion magazines and women's press in general. Fashion magazines, especially, built a competing canon, reflecting the rivalry between New York's high fashion and Los Angeles' screen canons. Slim models took the upper hand and voluptuous Hollywood actresses suddenly had to be thinner as well in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One could thus compare two representative icons of the time, opposing buxom Pamela Anderson and petite Kate Moss, two physiques at opposing ends of a spectrum. Yet, as stated in the 2011 exhibit *Beauty CULTure*, which took place at the Los Angeles Annenberg Space for Photography, located 2000 Avenue of the Stars, these competing norms are not actual rivals (see <https://www.annenbergphotospace.org/exhibits/beauty-culture/>). They are, on the contrary, quietly dovetailing to create an even greater constellation of canons that are usually in tune with the place they emanated from, contributing to Lipovetsky's "global screen". Yet, the exhibit also put forward the unparalleled ability of Los Angeles to bend its rules and to shift its canons in order to appeal to the masses. Because the city's history is irrelevant in mediatized perspectives, it is easier than anywhere else to adapt the canons to demand. As one of the centerpieces of the 2011 exhibit, the question of plastic surgery was evoked in a very

thorough documentary directed by photographer and filmmaker Lauren Greenfield who wanted to show how the body became the primary expression of identity for girls and women, but also how all these canons were interconnected.⁹ The fact that this exhibit was commissioned for a Los Angeles-based gallery made it all the more fitting since in Los Angeles, more than anywhere else, conforming to the canons has become an industry of its own.

Figure 11: Advertisement for the *Beauty CULTure* exhibit (2011)

The ad is above a street sign for the Figueroa Corridor lined with palm-trees.

Source: Charles Joseph.

- 31 Plastic surgery boomed earlier in Los Angeles than anywhere else in the United States, if not the world. Actresses were always increasingly pressured to remain as young and beautiful as possible, which pushed them to resort to plastic surgery. Other aspiring actresses also started to turn to plastic surgery to conform to the existing beauty canons of their time in order to maximize their chances of “making it” in the business. The porn industry also fueled plastic surgeons’ practices with more and more models and actresses. Over time, men also started to resort to surgery. Everywhere else in the country, plastic surgery boomed for those wishing to conform to the beauty canons to feel desirable or beautiful. In Los Angeles, plastic surgery is a means to a professional end, it is part of the job to first ‘look the part’. Given the city’s image close association with carnal qualities, transformative reality TV programs showcasing plastic surgery makeovers take place in Los Angeles, using the city’s inherent glamour as the perfect set to emphasize spectacular physical transformations.¹⁰ The beauty cult which the exhibit *Beauty CULTure* insisted upon is more palpable in Los Angeles than elsewhere because some of Los Angeles’ most lucrative businesses depend on the craving bodies it harbors. In *The Consumer Society*, Baudrillard reminds us that the body is “the finest consumer object” (Baudrillard 1998: 129) in a chapter with the same name; the

philosopher also reasserts that “the body is a cultural fact” (129). This idea reinforces how plastic surgery developed, particularly in Los Angeles, since its endemic culture required it. For Baudrillard, “the body sells. Beauty sells. Eroticism sells” (Baudrillard 1998: 135), and he goes on with what he calls the “narcissistic reinvestment” which implies a

process of sacralization of the body as exponential value, of the functional body — that is to say, the body which is no longer ‘flesh’ as in the religious conception, or labour power as in industrial logic, but is taken up again in its materiality (or its ‘visible’ ideality) as narcissistic cult object or element of social ritual and tactics — beauty and eroticism are two major leitmotifs. (Baudrillard 1998: 132)

- 32 The very notion of narcissism is also something Gilles Lipovetsky commented in *The Era of Emptiness* in a chapter entitled “Narcissus or the strategy of emptiness,” articulated around the body:

The body is no longer the meaning of an abjection or a machine, but it shows our most profound nature which is no longer a matter to be ashamed of and which can, from that moment on, be exposed naked on the beaches or on stage in all its natural truth. As a person, the body gains dignity; one must respect it, implying making sure of its proper functioning, fighting against its obsolescence, battling the signs of its degradation through a permanent recycling that can be surgical, sporty, nutritional, etc.: “physical” decrepitude has become a turpitude. [...] Narcissism, through the meticulous attention it pays to the body, through its permanent worry to have it function at its most optimal level, breaks down the “traditional” obstacles and makes the body available for any and all experimentations. [...] Nothing less than the level zero of the social, narcissism proceeds from an hyper-investment of codes and works as an unprecedented type of social control over souls and bodies. (Lipovetsky 87-91)

- 33 Lipovetsky expands greatly from the notion of narcissism and on the role it held in terms of social control, yet this analysis resonates particularly with Los Angeles’ city space. When one walks in Los Angeles, one does so in a space where bodies are to be shown. People do not instinctively walk the streets, they drive in avenues. As far as the trivial activity of walking is concerned, showing-off is never far off... People walk on the seafront in Venice or Santa Monica, where muscular men are topless and slim-waisted women are in bikinis. People also walk when they are going out at night, cruising Hollywood or Sunset Boulevard where people go to see and be seen. The body thus integrated in a social context where people are actually interacting with one another needs to fit in the established canons in order to be deemed desirable and thus, acceptable. Moreover, this notion of narcissism is spread everywhere over Los Angeles where bodies are exposed tanning at the beach, cruising in the streets, placated on billboards and exercising behind bay windows of gyms or fitness centers. Promoted at every city corner, this athletic visibility of the body cult is itself praised to the skies and helps to build up a lifestyle as much as an idealized conception of the body. In her book on the social construction of the body, Christine Detrez retraces the appearance of what British sociologist Bryan Turner called the “somatic society” (Turner 1984) which would not be concerned with people’s well-being in terms of emotions but of body sensations and projection. For Detrez, many different factors can be isolated to explain this sudden concern solely devoted to the body, but the most important one would be “the shift from a production society to a consumption society, and the simultaneous transformation of society into one of leisure and consumerism” (Detrez 190; translation mine). The emptiness associated with Narcissus by Lipovetsky prefigures how, in Los Angeles, the hollowness of the car contaminates the body, sustaining its ever-growing

objectification, identity is not measured upon social interaction but upon social projection.

- 34 When referring to the transition from a commercially conceptualized ideal into reality, the process leading from one to the other is not one of realization per se, but one of simulation as Baudrillard has repeatedly argued. Television has been the most profound revolution of the past two century given the considerable impact it has had on the world's population but also the more subliminal one that was orchestrated through decades of programming which all lead to a hegemony of the body image. In *The Consumer Society*, Baudrillard argues that "the 'message' of TV is not the images it transmits, but the new modes of relating and perceiving it imposes, the alterations to traditional family and group structure." (Baudrillard 1998: 123) What differs in Los Angeles is that mimetism and simulation become one and the same since being in the city that serves as a setting for blockbusters or TV series changes the mimetic relationship drastically. In Los Angeles, mimetism is no longer a sense of integration of movements or attitudes, it is a sense of material immateriality that surges all at once. Mimetism still remains in practice, and seeing pictures of people standing with their feet in the Pacific ocean as in the earliest photographs taken in Los Angeles proves how enduring these images still are. Simulation suddenly appears when people are taking pictures of themselves posing at a lifeguard's cabin they saw when they watched *Baywatch* in the comfort of their homes. The same can be said of people posing in front of other famous shooting locations, such as the house of the Halliwell sisters of *Charmed*, the house of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or of Sidney Bristow in *Alias*. The TV screen suddenly shatters, and the body becomes the vector through which this transition is operated. The advent of Turner's somatic society takes its full grasp in the *Simulacra and Simulations* by Baudrillard where the body becomes the central motif of reality's sliding. When the body, material property *par excellence*, throws itself headlong into hyperreal society, what can be done to keep up appearances?
- 35 It is perhaps in the dark side of Hollywood, or as Legs McNeil and Jennifer Osborne put it, in "the other Hollywood" (McNeil and Osborne 2005), one which solely rests on the body, that one could find the best example of this gradual prominence of fantasized body images in everyday life.
- 36 Los Angeles is known as the porn capital of the world, and the biggest world studios of pornography are all located in Los Angeles, notably in the San Fernando Valley, in the north-west portion of the city. This very lucrative business found in Los Angeles an endless supply of young disillusioned actors and (mostly) actresses who fell in the trap of the adult film industry. It heralds the most extreme objectification of the body which stages men and women overexpressing a natural, sentimental and primal impulse, for significant sums of money for one day of shooting. Once in the easy-money cycle, by choice or by necessity, these actors and actresses came to embody the Hollywood canons of beauty spending their days either eating protein shakes and working out or sun-bathing in remission after having had breast implants. The city thus overflows with body-objects and becomes the pool of an industry of the absurd whose very presence maintains the territory under an artificial light and turns Los Angeles into a city of forgery which then broadcasts them all around the world, an unforeseen yet globalized side effect of mass media. In his chapter entitled "Stereo-porno" in *Seduction*, Baudrillard explains how pornography has matured into a symptom of postmodernity which considers the body as already hyperreal:

One sees from up close what one has never seen before; to one's good fortune, one has never seen one's genitals function from so close, nor for that matter, from so general a perspective. It is all too true, too near to be true. And it is this that is fascinating, this excess of reality, this hyperreality of things. The only phantasy in pornography, if there is one, is thus not the phantasy of sex, but of the real, and its absorption into something other than the real, the hyperreal. Pornographic voyeurism is not a sexual voyeurism, but a voyeurism of representation and its perdition, a dizziness born of the loss of the scene and the irruption of the obscene. (Baudrillard 1990: 28-29)

- 37 Art has sometimes received similar critiques when the use of the body was obscene, but because it was intended to be so. The Hollywood industry, whether empirical or pornographic, does not revolve around artistic or political considerations, its intents are all directed towards profit. Hollywood, no matter how aware of its influences, is more entertainment than culture as what matters most is profitability, not the messages or canons it could represent. Los Angeles' culture, crushed under Hollywood's omnipotence, has become known for its inconsistency, and the city has come to be associated with a cultural wasteland or an intellectual blackhole no matter how vibrant its artistic scene. It has also been considered as such because Angelinos have been more often identified as bodies than as people, or even as body parts or body doubles. The Angelino agency named "Body Parts Models" speaks for itself. It is one of the only agencies in the world that is specialized in hiring actors to stand in a frame to replace an actor that would be uncomfortable showing his behind on camera, or an actress that would not want to show her stomach on film because it is not as flat as the canons would expect. It is also the same industry that becomes the standard-bearer for new corporeal building methods implying conformation or transformation.

Cannibal city / Carnival body

- 38 A perfect illustration of a city where excess rules unconditionally is a local celebrity, Angelyne, who could be seen as the personification of the afore-mentioned obscenity. Angelyne is famous in Los Angeles for the numerous billboards displaying her persona. She started out as an actress and was hired as an extra in several films in the late 1970s, but it was in the middle of the 1980s that she became widely known with the dozens of billboards appearing throughout the city (Figures 12 and 13). She thus became known as the "billboard queen" of Los Angeles and was suddenly famous for being famous. Who paid for these billboards remains a mystery, and Angelyne remains elusive about the identity of the mysterious patron who helped kickstart her career. In fact, few details of Angelyne's life are known, and the contradictory pieces of information disseminated throughout the years make it even harder to separate wheat from chaff, but what is clear is that her persona and her physique are one and the same. Angelyne as a character was built simultaneously as her body was exposed, and while she claims to represent Hollywood and the mystery that glamour should induce in every star, her body now speaks for herself as much as it speaks for itself.

Figure 12: William Reagh. [Painted billboard of Angelyne on building], 1986

Source: https://cs1.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/01CSL_INST/12136452470005115

Figure 13: Anthony Friedkin. "Angelyne in a bikini", 1997

Source: <https://tessa.lapl.org/cdm/ref/collection/photos/id/3706>

- 39 Because she became so popular and integrated in the city's landscape, she inevitably became and remained an icon of the city.¹¹ When asked in the 1996 documentary

Boulevard of Dreams what role she would like to play, her answer was that of a “perfect beautiful doll [...] coming to life” (see video below).

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- 40 But if Angelyne could, at some point in Los Angeles history, be considered as inherent in Hollywood glamour, canons changed and shifted over the years while Angelyne remained the same. The persona followed the Los Angeles 1990s trend of “porno chic” with her massive breast implants, and the way that Angelyne dressed made her look more like a pornstar than an actress. Sexy can be part of Hollywood glamour, but her sex-imbued looks now ostracize her from the glamour she so desperately wished to represent, stripping her from the star qualities she hoped to acquire. While Angelyne sees herself as an extension, if not a personification, of Hollywood glamour, what she truly represents is Hollywood celebrity. In the words of Elizabeth Wilson, glamour and celebrity are different notions:

Glamour is primarily an attribute of an individual. It is an appearance, including the supernatural, magical sense of that word — as in apparition. The appearance of glamour resides, though, or is created in combination with dress, hair, scent, and even *mise en scène*. Its end result is the sheen, the mask of perfection, the untouchability and numinous power of the icon. Celebrity deconstructs all this, displays everything in bits, the inside, the mess, the clothes apart from the person, the naked greed, the genuine suffering, the painful excess. The celebrity is desperate for our attention. (Wilson 105)

- 41 The deconstruction that Wilson associates with celebrity is consistent with the atomization of bodies which appear not as unalienable property, but as dispensable tools. When Pamela Anderson decided to step out of the “porno chic” trend in the early 2000s, Angelyne kept going in the same direction, even if it meant maintaining an image that did not fit with her aging body or with the evolving canons of the new era. This growing gap between how Angelyne saw herself and how she intended to represent herself turned her into the pathetic figure of a starlet craving visibility, yet it also made her a representative of how Los Angeles takes hold of bodies. She still wears the same body-tight pink garments she wore when her first billboards appeared in Los Angeles, and even though Angelyne still appears in TV shows and interviews on Youtube channels, she now covers her face with a fan (*Ring My Bell*, see below) or appears from behind, her back to the camera (*The Red Booth*, see below).

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- 42 The pathos of Angelyne is reinforced by her desire to live up to an image that died out long ago, and her unwavering will to be surrounded by images of her former beauty and billboard glory reinforces this phenomenon. The porno chic trend still exists and David LaChapelle still contributes today to this aesthetic movement while Angelino clothing companies such as the widely-known American Apparel brand hire real porn actresses to promote their lingerie line. Angelyne was born from that exclusively visual

culture and this image which she desperately attempts to maintain intact is now what brings about an entirely different reaction from the onlookers: what was once desirable has turned into the exact opposite. The Angelino ideology glorifying the body as the canvas of identity ended up turning against itself, as one's identity cannot shift as easily as trends and canons. This superimposition of body image over identity thus creates time-trapped freaks who seem incapable of keeping up with the city's changing appearances. In *Carnaval et Cannibale*, Jean Baudrillard retraces the same mechanism and perceives it in the political life of Southern California with the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger as governor of California:

With the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger as governor of California, we are deep in the masquerade, when politics is only but a game of idols and fans. It is a tremendous step towards the end of the representative system. And this is the fatality of politics today — that everywhere, he who invests in the spectacle shall perish by the spectacle. This is true for the “citizens” as well as for politicians. It is the immanent justice of the media. Do you want power through image? Then you shall perish by the feedback image. The carnival of image also means the auto-cannibalization through image. (Baudrillard 2008: 23-24; translation mine)

Figure 14: Cover for *Time Magazine*, 18 August 2003

Source: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20030818,00.html>

- 43 A 2003 cover of *Time Magazine* illustrates Baudrillard's point with the gubernatorial candidate posing in a posh suit with the ironical "Ahhnold!?" title emphasizing the discrepancy between the political aspirations of the man and the actor he simultaneously embodies (Figure 14). Image could be the downfall of those who invest in the spectacle, and the media treatment of Arnold Schwarzenegger's gubernatorial candidacy showed just that. This idea is reminiscent of Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle" but Baudrillard is not attached to show how the spectacle works and comes

into effect, but wishes to show how the dynamics surrounding the spectacle affects socio-political as well as socio-cultural mechanisms. As if to assert once more the power of images over our bodies, Baudrillard uses the notion of “auto-cannibalization”, as if our bodies were now, first and foremost, images of ourselves, if not, to keep with Baudrillard’s terminology, simulations of ourselves. We could thus consider the “selfie” phenomenon which has taken over the internet and social media as an extension of this idea. Are we not simulating a paparazzi-like interest in our daily lives by taking and posting such pictures, staging bodies to trigger interest? Are we not trying to emulate the Hollywood stars that fill the celebrity’s news sections of the press, celebrities who, for the most part, live in Los Angeles? When Baudrillard explains the third and ultimate order of simulation which seals the hyperreal era, he relies on the presence of Disneyland in Los Angeles to exemplify how the advent of the imaginary became reality’s killing stroke:

Disneyland exists in order to hide that the “real” country, all of “real” America that is Disneyland (a bit like prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, that is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus saving the reality principle. (Baudrillard 1994: 12-13)

- 44 As people take physical possession of these imaginary spaces with all their might and faith, they become part of a reality in which bodies have become derealized. The same strategies occur when one indulges in the city’s corporeal conceptions and beauty canons. Attractiveness is key to social status and opportunity in a city that values bodies as a means to an end. Bodies’ appearances need to simulate success in order to be successful, images precede identity. This game of make-believe is supported by the illusion which Los Angeles fosters onto people. The same idea is brought forth by Louis Marin in his *Utopics: Spatial Play*, in a chapter entitled “Utopic Degeneration: Disneyland” in which he details how Disneyland’s conception was symptomatic of a degenerating over-signified spatiality which became gradually integrated by architects and city planners from Los Angeles and beyond (Marin 239-258). Yet because these imaginary spaces were so appealing, they became compelling as well in terms of how bodies take place within them. Stepping into an idealized and imagined Los Angeles opens the possibility of conforming to its expectations infusing bodies with fantasized objectives of corporeal alterations. Such an instrumentalization of the imaginary is also evoked by Michel Foucault in *The Utopian Body* as he explains that:

It may very well be that the first utopia, the one most deeply rooted in the hearts of men, is precisely the utopia of an incorporeal body. The land of fairies, land of gnomes, of genies, magicians — well, it is the land where bodies transport themselves at the speed of light; it is the land where wounds are healed with marvelous beauty in the blink of an eye. It is the land where you can fall from a mountain and pick yourself up unscathed. It is the land where you’re visible when you want, invisible when you desire. If there is a land of fairy tales, it is precisely so that I may be its prince charming, and that all the pretty boys there may turn nasty and hairy as bears. (Foucault in Jones 229)

- 45 This description of the land of fairies given by Foucault seems rather fitting compared to Los Angeles. Bodies there do not transport themselves at the speed of light, because there is traffic congestion. The land where “wounds are healed with marvelous beauty” is portrayed in TV shows such as *Miss Swann* or *Extreme makeover* where men and

women considered ugly and greatly suffering from it are operated on by a team of plastic surgery experts to be revealed anew a few months later, more beautiful than ever and finally in tune with Hollywood's canons of beauty. It is in such TV reality series mostly set in LA that the body really is deconstructed into millions of pixels, where the obese turns thin, where ugly becomes pretty, as if suddenly sublimated by the inherent glamour of the city. Los Angeles is literally the land of people falling from mountains and picking themselves up unscathed; they can jump over a volcano, fall from a plane, fight evil monsters or entire armies of aliens, go jogging during an earthquake or swim during a tsunami and walk away without a scratch. Los Angeles is a fairy-tale land and the irremediable superimposition of body image and identity seals it once and for all. This conclusion parallels that of Henry Jenkins in *Convergence culture* in which he believes that "the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways." (Jenkins 270). The convergence becomes fully realized in the city that was nicknamed appropriately "LA-LA Land,"¹² where surrounding canonized bodies stand as constant reminders of a now perennial conceptualization process of beauty, desire and attractiveness but they also appear as the unexpected masochistic guardians of a process that objectified them excessively.

Figure 15: LA-LA LAND, at the Venice Beach seafront

Source: Charles Joseph.

- 46 This enchanting place is indeed Los Angeles, a city-décor overtly used as such without many alterations, precipitating the city in a globalized collective imaginary. When one's own personal image does not conform to the canons, to displace oneself into an imaginary land facilitates the resolution of any crisis. It also allows transformations to be made, following a logic similar to that of the mass media, forming the endless basis of the fantastic Angelino illusion. Yet it is thanks to those resisting the LA sirens, to those challenging the current Hollywood canons that the city becomes intelligible.

Concluding her essay “Moving in place”, Jennifer Watts writes that “it is in the interstices between the everyday city of fact and the mythic city of mind that the truth of Los Angeles lies” (Watts 58). These interstices, as Watts puts it, are indeed where the truth of Los Angeles lies, but they are nowhere as visible as on bodies. The truth of Los Angeles’ corporeal, or rather, corpo-hyper-real conception becomes readable and somewhat obvious on resisting or displaced/misplaced bodies. Angelyne is out of place because she claims to represent a city that now promotes a brand new aesthetic... Schwarzenegger seemed misplaced in the gubernatorial race because he represented the body culture that brought him to Hollywood in the first place. Angelyne, Schwarzenegger and many more, despite their (sometimes vivid) differences, are nevertheless all united around an act of resistance they display through their bodies. This can also be said about the African-American dancers of David LaChapelle’s 2005 documentary. The cinematographic object is in opposition with what Hollywood stands for, but its focus is in opposition with Hollywood’s corporeality. The industry established white skin as the ultimate beauty canon, and there are still today many controversies regarding the “whitewashing” of blockbusters.¹³ Black bodies in LA are mostly represented in the evening news segment dealing with local crimes; showing Angelino black bodies differently is, in itself, an act of resistance.

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- 47 Ever since it was attached to the United States, Los Angeles has managed to encode the body within its history like no other city has done before, a code all the more easily integrated by the inhabitants as they were already struggling to decipher the physical reality of this strange emerging urban space. There were thus two competing corporealities that the Angelinos had to take into account. The ever-changing corporeal relationship with an unprecedented urban space as well as the corporeality that was mediatized within the urban space. If any indication, the massive bibliography dealing with Los Angeles’ urban history and its evolution shows how destabilizing the cityscape can be, and thus how difficult it is to ground a comfortable corporeal link for newcomers or passersby. This instability generates the most fertile ground for the mediatized corporeality associated with Los Angeles to take hold, because as the latter relies exponentially on image, it suddenly feels like a code that can be made sense of. First the boosters used the body as a sales’ argument, *mens sana in corpore sano*, creating a healthy and desirable lifestyle associated with Los Angeles, one that has ever since been relayed through television or Hollywood. This original link between the city and the body that propelled Los Angeles as a model of the ideal American way of life generated a mediatized form of corporeality that slowly but surely led to Olalquiaga’s “psychasthenia”. Image being a simplistic code in comparison with Los Angeles’ complex cityscape, it became much easier to apprehend it through image rather than physical contact. Thus, experiencing this peculiar urban space through its image has been both held as the right way as well as the most comfortable one compared to an unknown physical journey in the middle of a limitless urban sprawl in order to develop a corporeal relationship on one’s own. In his conclusion of Los Angeles, Reyner Banham asserts:

It is hard to laugh at the need for beauty and romance. It is indeed, especially face to face with the physical reality. The distant view, processed through morality and photography, erudition and ignorance, prepares us, as Nathan Silver rightly

observed, for almost anything except what Los Angeles looks like in fact. [...] At its most extreme it can become a naïvely nonchalant reliance on a technology that may not quite exist yet. But that, by comparison with the general body of official Western culture at the moment, increasingly given over to facile, evasive and self-regarding pessimism, can be a very refreshing attitude to encounter. (Banham 224)

- 48 The disruption between what Los Angeles *looks* like and what Los Angeles *feels* like becomes a sensory experience of its own, which is part of the Los Angeles' experience. This dialectic focused solely on the human body is perceptible on native and temporary Angelinos alike, implicitly and relentlessly requiring their compliance to an illusory mediatized corporeality. As boosters and investors of early Los Angeles encoded the body in idealized terms at the very core of Los Angeles, it resulted in the substitution of collective history by a collective imaginary, paving the way for the city's drift into what Baudrillard calls hyper(corpo)reality.
- 49 Yet there are times when the homogenous code is challenged, when the reality of the city becomes perceptible and the veil lifts. There are many Angelino authors who have confronted this issue without being heard, as they remained invisible, suffocated by the omnipotence of the Hollywood industry. They have gained visibility and recognition, however, with the help of the internet, but they are still not the ones who are perceived as being able to fight against the hyperreal Los Angeles. It is on the field of the image that the fight seems to be the fiercest. Visual artists, filmmakers or public figures show and challenge the mediatized corporeal coding. They depict people who stand where they are not wanted, not expected, out of place but mostly out of line, as they intend to reclaim the rights to their own physicality from the one authority that controlled it unabashedly. In order to understand how the body of Los Angeles works, one must simply locate those who do not seem to belong. These resisting bodies exhibit how, like the city itself, the decentered Angelino body became atomized in pixels/parcels that did not seem to fit with one another. How then can one make sense of these parts, how can one decode portions that appear as detached from the whole if not by exposing the codes? It is precisely these free electrons that are materializing disruptions as they show how the mediatized corporeality does not match with the physical reality it is trying to address. These competing corporealities are not only perceptible in physical terms as they are also becoming visible in cinematographic narratives as well. Elizabeth Bank's Meghan Miles in *Walk of Shame* (Brill 2014), Mia Wasikowska's Agatha Weiss in *Maps to the Stars* (Cronenberg 2014), Ryan Gosling's unnamed character in *Drive* (Winding Refn 2011), Laura Dern's Nikki Grace in *Inland Empire* (Lynch 2006), Jake Gyllenhaal's Lou Bloom in *Nightcrawler* (Gilroy 2014), the driving duo in Michael Mann's *Collateral* (2004), the father-daughter duo in Sofia Coppola's *Somewhere* (2010), the improbable cast of Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales* (2007) or the overall plot of Starz comedy series *Party Down* (Enborn et al. 2009-2010) and HBO comedy-drama series *Togetherness* (Duplass et al. 2015) and *The Comeback* (King and Kudrow 2005; 2014) all challenge the established fantasized corporeal canons and show how irrelevant they have become. These displaced mediatized bodies, real and imagined, demonstrate how, like the city itself, the fabricated Angelino corporeal canons mix commodity and identity toward one single purpose: seduction.

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NOTES

1. We could mention here among many others, the work of Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1964), Pierre Sansot and his *Poétique de la Ville* (1988), Claude S. Fischer with *The Urban Experience* (1976) or Richard Sennett's *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (1994) as well as most of Henri Lefebvre's and Edward Soja's bibliography.
2. In his introduction to *Thirdspace*, Soja writes: "My objective in *Thirdspace* can be simply stated. It is to encourage you to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent *spatiality of human life*: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography." (Soja 1).
3. "Around the turn of the century (19th century), however, experience with the environment had produced a new and livable home, the California bungalow. In part the bungalow was an outgrowth of what had earlier been called "the California house": a simple structure built of rough redwood boards. But, as finally developed, it was based upon the bungalow originally built by Englishmen for use in tropical countries. British officials had found the bungalow to be a reasonably comfortable home in a tropical environment and, being inexpensive, it appealed to them, for their residence was, in most cases, temporary in character. It was precisely the qualities that appealed to newcomers in Southern California. A low, spacious, airy house, the bungalow could be built by people of moderate means and informal tastes, who were not quite sure that they intended to remain in Southern California and therefore did not want to invest a considerable sum in a home. The great merit of the bungalow was that it minimized the distinction between the exterior and interior walls, that it tended to merge the house with the landscape to which it was definitely subordinated" (McWilliams 357).
4. A similar idea is developed by Dana Cuff in her book *Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (2000), in which she analyzes how Los Angeles' constant urban shifts are in tune with the fast-paced socio-economic history of the city, leading to a terminological fracture between the home and the roots. Home becomes transitional and the refuge it once represented does not apply so well in Los Angeles.
5. This idea was developed in parts by Stéphane Degoutin in his chapter "No-Go Areas vs Nogoland" in his book *Prisonniers Volontaires du Rêve Américain* (Degoutin 2006: 261-286).
6. More regarding how Los Angeles differs from other great American metropolises concerning its relationship with cars can be read in Scott Lee Bottles book *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City* (1987).
7. Work by Elsa Devienne, including her PhD on *Beaches in the city: a social and environmental history of Los Angeles coastline (1920-1972)*, hints at some of these issues and shows the evolution of legal considerations on the body, and how it should be displayed or covered on the city's beaches. See <https://northumbria.academia.edu/ElsaDevienne>.
8. More information can be accessed through the muscle beach website: <https://www.musclebeach.net/new/>.
9. Lauren Greenfield gave an interview about her documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEor9yS9RCE>.
10. We can mention, among other shows, *Extreme Makeover* (2002-2007), *Bridalplasty* (2011), *Botched* (2014-?), *The Swan* (2004), *Dr. 90210* (2004-2008). All of these plastic surgery reality TV programs were or are based in Los Angeles, relying on the glowing reputation of the plastic surgeons of the city who are considered among the best on the planet given who they operate on, using celebrity names as both references and catalogs...

11. Many recent articles and interviews still appear about Angelyne: https://www.vice.com/en_au/topic/angelyne, <https://la.racked.com/2014/7/22/7585553/angelyne-exclusive-interview>

12. The nickname entered in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2011. The definition reads as follows: “La-la land (n.) can refer either to Los Angeles (in which case its etymology is influenced by the common initialism for that city), or to a state of being out of touch with reality — and sometimes to both simultaneously” <https://latimesblogs.latimes.com/jacketcopy/2011/03/la-la-land-now-the-dictionary-definition-of-los-angeles.html>

13. For example, Chadwick Boseman, who plays Toth in the upcoming film *Gods of Egypt*, was very vocal regarding the whitewashing of the Egyptian gods. https://www.comicbookmovie.com/black_panther/black-panther-actor-bluntly-addresses-the-gods-of-egypt-whitewashing-controversy-a127768#gs.93fqqh

ABSTRACTS

Los Angeles has mostly been studied in geographical or urban terms for the past fifty years in order to try and decipher a cityscape that had never been encountered on American soil before. Stemming from these studies, the LA school led by Edward Soja and his *Postmodern Geographies* experimented on new theoretical tools for this unprecedented space to be made sense of, tools that propelled the inhabitants to the center. Soja structured his thought according to his “trialectics of being” which is composed equally of spatiality, historicity and sociality (Soja 71). In doing so, the cultural factor became inherent to the analysis of urban environment, a posture which is the starting point of this paper. Focusing on the body in Los Angeles is a bilateral task as the body influenced, if not built, Los Angeles, while, the city, once established, shaped the body of its inhabitants on a physical and representational level. Taking into account emblematic cultural productions or practices rooted in Los Angeles, this paper intends to explore and analyze the closed-circuit generated between the Southern Californian megalopolis and the body in urban, corporeal and representational terms.

La ville de Los Angeles a été, dans la littérature scientifique qui lui a été consacrée ces cinquante dernières années, étudiée au travers d’approches géographique, urbaine ou architecturale afin de déchiffrer un type d’espace qui n’avait encore jamais pris forme sur le sol américain. Prenant appui sur ces différentes études, l’école de Los Angeles menée par Edward Soja et ses *Postmodern Geographies*, a cherché des modèles théoriques d’analyse applicables à cet espace sans précédent afin d’en faire sens, outils qui se concentrent sur l’habitant, l’usager de ces espaces et non leurs concepteurs. Soja a ainsi structuré son approche à l’aide de sa « trialectique de l’être » composée à part égale de spatialité, d’historicité et de socialité. Ce faisant, le facteur culturel est devenu inhérent à toute analyse de l’environnement urbain, posture qui constitue également le point d’entrée de notre article. Cependant, se concentrer sur le corps à Los Angeles s’avère être une tâche double puisque d’une part le corps a influencé, sinon construit, Los Angeles tandis que d’autre part la ville, une fois bien établie, a profondément influencé le corps de ses habitants aussi bien sur un plan physique que représentationnel. En s’appuyant sur des productions et pratiques culturelles emblématiques ancrées à Los Angeles, cet article se propose d’explorer et d’analyser le circuit fermé qui s’est formé entre la mégapole californienne et le corps, en des termes à la fois urbains, corporels et représentationnels.

INDEX

Mots-clés: corps, Los Angeles, représentation, pratiques culturelles, études urbaines, études culturelles

Keywords: body, Los Angeles, representation, cultural practices, urban studies, cultural studies

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Doctor in American Studies, my research focuses on the territories of Los Angeles and Southern California, their history, their culture, their singular operating mechanisms as well as the different levels of influence that such iconic places produce. My PhD dissertation entitled “Being and writing (from) Los Angeles: Wanda Coleman” (carried out under the supervision of Hélène Aji, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, and Éliane Elmaleh, Université du Maine, defended in June 2014) is situated at one of the many converging points between literature and territoriality and examines the complex and evolving relationship between the work of the African-American author and the city that harbored her birth, life and death. Symbolism and representation cannot be ignored when dealing with Los Angeles and its many facets, and I consequently developed an interest in the implications and practices of the entertainment industry based in the city. The TV series business is deeply rooted in Los Angeles and its history, and exploring this specific form has become a useful research tool. Because of its increasing power within the Hollywood industry, I also investigate the super-hero genre. Discussing the comic genre and commenting on its different levels of apprehension/adaptation is a growing research activity which I intend to pursue in the years to come. I am, for the time being, a teaching assistant at the University of Tours, France. Contact: charlesjoseph [at] outlook.fr