

# JCU ScholarShip

## Ed Ruscha's Deadpan Mise-en-Scène

Item Type	Thesis
Authors	Antonova, Yuliia
Citation	Antonova, Yuliia. "Ed Ruscha's Deadpan Mise-en-Scène". BA Thesis, John Cabot University, Rome, Italy. 2022.
Rights	Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International
Download date	2026-06-18 04:33:30
Item License	<a href="http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/">http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/</a>
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/913">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/913</a>



## **John Cabot University**

Department of Art History

Bachelor of Arts in Art History  
Minor in Communications

Ed Ruscha's Deadpan Mise-en-Scène

Yulia Antonova

First Reader  
Sarah Linford

Second Reader  
Ilaria Gianni

Fall 2022

## Abstract

Ed Ruscha's artworks have often been discussed in relation to both cinema and deadpan aesthetics. While both issues have been extensively researched separately, they were not discussed concerning one another within Ruscha's art practice, especially his oil paintings. What is more, even though the impact of cinema on Ruscha's paintings and photographs has been extensively analyzed, his artworks have never been viewed through film theory itself. By focusing on *Large Trademarks with Eight Spotlights* (1962) as a case study, this thesis engages with the cinema, both Old Hollywood and experimental, film theory, and deadpan aesthetics in order to show the uniqueness of Ruscha's use of deadpan aesthetic through the visual devices of cinema.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Chapter 1: Hollywood in Context: A Literature Review .....	3
3. Chapter 2: <i>Large Trademark</i> in the Spotlight.....	15
4. Chapter 3: The Deadpan between Still and Moving Image.....	29
5. Conclusion .....	43
Bibliography .....	44

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Ed Ruscha, Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights, 1962, oil, house paint, ink, and graphite pencil on canvas, 170 × 338.1 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art (New York). ...	48
Figure 2: Ed Ruscha, Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas, 1963, Hood Museum of Art – Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH).....	48
Figure 3: Ed Ruscha, Hollywood, 1968, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles). ..	49
Figure 4: Ed Ruscha, Three Murders, 1981.....	49
Figure 5: Ed Ruscha, The End #1, 1993, Tate (London).....	49
Figure 6: Ed Ruscha, Every Building on the Sunset Strip, 1966, Princeton University Art Museum (Princeton, NJ). .....	50
Figure 7: Ed Ruscha, Clarence Jones, 2001.....	50
Figure 8: Ed Ruscha, A Fistful of Aliens, 1986.....	51

# 1. Introduction

Ed Ruscha became one of the most distinctive artists of the West Coast Pop. Among the many things that drew him to Los Angeles were the cinema and film industry of which this Californian city is iconic. His oil painting *Large Trademarks with Eight Spotlights* (1962) (fig.1) is just one result of this interaction – between the artist and the city, between the cinema and the painting. Ruscha’s art is associated with deadpan aesthetics which is by far one of his most characteristic qualities, second only to cinema. First detected in the photographic medium, the deadpan is characterized by a lack of emotional or expressive charge, alleged objectivity, and a matter-of-fact approach. Taking this 1962 artwork as a case study of Ruscha’s active engagement with cinema through painting, this thesis explores the intersections between deadpan aesthetics and film theory.

The first chapter discusses the existing academic literature on Ruscha, namely, the historiography of Ruscha’s practice, his reception as a West Coast-based artist, the influence of his art school education, of the cinema and film industry, and the extent to which the above-mentioned factors have been discussed in relation to deadpan aesthetics. The second chapter provides a visual analysis of *Large Trademark* and connects specific formal elements of the painting to the larger corpus of Ruscha works and issues associated with the artist, including contextual information about the LA film scene in the 1960s. The third chapter connects cinema and deadpan aesthetics, specifically the ones identified with Bernd and Hilla Becher’s practice, through the film theory of, first and foremost, Gilles Deleuze, as well as Stanley Cavell and

Rudolf Arnheim. The thesis is based on primary sources, chiefly, Ruscha's interviews as well as critical reviews from iconic figures in the art industry such as Lawrence Alloway.

## **2. Chapter 1: Hollywood in Context: A Literature Review**

Literature on Ed Ruscha largely concentrates on the artist's formal affinity with cinema which specifies the Californian character of his art – a feature widely discussed by art critics concentrating on West Coast Pop art at the time. The assessment and discussion of largely one-sided criticism directed towards Los Angeles-based artists as well as reception studies in a broader sense is yet another frequent topic among art historians and scholars writing about Ruscha. Besides, much of the scholarship concentrates on “deadpan aesthetics” (mostly referring to deadpan photography, which is characterized by a detached, minimalist, and expressionless approach) apparent in Ruscha's photography books. This chapter attempts to provide a literature review of Ruscha's visual work and its intersection with cinema.

At the time when Los Angeles-based artists, including Ed Ruscha, began to make prominent contributions to what became known as Pop art, the West Coast of the United States was far from the avant-garde world that defined the New York art scene. Despite being a quintessential personification of the Pop sensibility itself, with its glamorous Hollywood film industry and vainglorious celebrity culture, Los Angeles was on the outskirts of the contemporary art world, which, logically reflected the criticism towards the artists from the emerging LA art milieu. Scholars have frequently discussed the status of West Coast Pop art, as an unfairly underrated offshoot of the global Pop that was overshadowed and neglected in favor of New York-based “highbrow” Pop art. Art historians, including Alexandra Schwartz, have discussed the reception of Los Angeles Pop by its then-contemporary art critics that, besides devaluating it, also pinpointed the “regional” LA qualities of this 1960s art movement that are

also salient in Ruscha's oeuvre. Among the key features that are deemed as West Coast are cinematic quality, representation of '60s California culture, Hollywood-style commercialism, as well as the overall preoccupation with the material culture that is central to Californian cultural identity.<sup>1</sup> Schwartz also notes that 1960s critics distinguished Ruscha's art in particular because of its mixture of "humor, pleasure, and disquiet" that, together with its deadpan quality, became Ruscha's signature.<sup>2</sup> Despite the initial disdain that was coming from critics towards Californian Pop artists and their alleged glossiness, it was ultimately artworks such as *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlight* that helped redefine L.A. as an alternative art center of America, argues Ken D. Allen, due to its inclusion into seminal Los Angeles art exhibitions such as *New Painting of Common Objects* (1962) at the Pasadena Art Museum, as well his 1963 solo show at the influential Ferus Gallery.

In some sense, Los Angeles was already prepared for the arrival of its own art scene and cutting-edge art institutions, since the city housed one of the most progressive art schools of the time, and Ed Ruscha's alma mater – the Chouinard Art Institute. Jennifer Quick discusses the impact Chouinard's innovative curriculum had on Ruscha's later artistic career. The author argues that because the school was one of a few in the United States to combine training in both fine and commercial arts, its students were exposed to a dissolved hierarchy of arts that merged "high" and "low". Students, nonetheless, chose their intended area of emphasis and because Ruscha trained primarily as a commercial artist, his curriculum included draughtsmanship as well as advertising techniques and pasteup layout among others. Chouinard was also very practically-oriented and encouraged students to create portfolios since its alumni frequently went

---

<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Schwartz, "'Second City': Ed Ruscha and the Reception of Los Angeles Pop," *October* 111 (Winter 2005): 27.

<sup>2</sup> Schwartz, "'Second City': Ed Ruscha and the Reception of Los Angeles Pop": 40.

on to work at the city's many advertising agencies and publishing houses. Ruscha was one such student, as he turned to painting only after trying his hand at one of LA's top advertising agencies. Quick also notes that the Chouinard Art Institute's affiliation with The Walt Disney Studios impacted the school's standing and respectability among the many Los Angeles creative industries.

The unique influence of the film industry on the development of visual arts in Los Angeles has also been discussed in scholarly publications since the dominant status of the former has been leaving its footprint on all other industries in this West Coast city for decades. David E. James, for instance, explores Ed Ruscha's personal intersections with key New Hollywood filmmakers like Dennis Hopper and experimental filmmaker and artist Wallace Berman, both of whom informed his standing within the then-contemporary Los Angeles cultural scene. Monica Steinberg is yet another academic who examines the influence of the film industry on Ruscha through his collaborative project with Billy Al Bengston called *Business Cards* (1968). Steinberg argues that the project showcases not just Ruscha's characteristic deadpan humor but his take on film industry business roles, stage performances, and green names that the artists utilized in a similar way to movie actors who manipulated their fame and public image by using role-playing and pseudonyms.

The humorous nature of the *Business Cards* project also shows Ruscha's critical take on the surrounding Hollywood culture. Mary Richards notes, however, that Ruscha's approach towards Hollywood was not one-sided but rather deadpan – Hollywood's prominent position within his artworks was informed by Ruscha's standing as a West Coast artist and a commentator on the Los Angeles art world. Moreover, Alexandra Schwartz notes that Ruscha himself acknowledged moving to Los Angeles mostly because of the proximity to movies and

LA's image in it. However, it was the same Hollywood film industry that for a very long time has overshadowed the creative work of Ruscha and his artistic peers and was responsible for the city's relative lack of collectors of avant-garde and non-conformist visual art.<sup>3</sup> Minimalist and word-based, *Another Hollywood Dream Bubble Popped* (1976) and *Hollywood is a Verb* (1979) are the primary examples of Ruscha's mixed feelings towards Hollywood. The latter alludes to the commodity fetishism that makes anything for sale by formatting it as a Hollywood movie or otherwise subject matter.<sup>4</sup> Even the famous landscape-like works featuring the Hollywood sign take the critical stance of the industry as they expose the scaffolding (read: artifice) propping it up from the back, shying away the spectator's view from the movie magic synonymous with Los Angeles.

It is not uncommon for Ruscha's practice to treat the mythologized aspects of Hollywood and Los Angeles. The artist's depiction of the City of Angels is reminiscent of an illusion, a façade, and a surreal fantasy that is inspired by the city's image -- as well as contributing to it. Both paintings of innumerable Hollywood signs and *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, the earliest materialized testament to Ruscha's fascination with the Hollywood industry,<sup>5</sup> conjure what art critics called the "local color of Los Angeles."<sup>6</sup> Besides these paintings testify to the myth-making factor, as Lisa Pasquariello discusses, and the ways in which Hollywood's intrinsic idea of glamor, film industry, celebrity culture, and overall Tinseltown razzle dazzle influenced Los Angeles-based visual artist like Ed Ruscha. The latter made a specific case for the so-called "Hollywoodization" of subject matter that included all of the popular associations with

---

<sup>3</sup> Alexandra Schwartz, "An End in Itself: Ed Ruscha's Ribbon Word Drawings," in *Ed Ruscha: Ribbon Words* (New York: Edward Tyler Nahem, 2016): 19.

<sup>4</sup> Schwartz, "An End in Itself: Ed Ruscha's Ribbon Word Drawings": 19.

<sup>5</sup> David E. James, "Artists as Filmmakers in Los Angeles," *October* 112 (Spring 2005): 118.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Pasquariello, "Ed Ruscha and the Language That He Used," *October* 111 (Winter 2005): 84.

Hollywood and Southern California, as well as the use of the iconic Hollywood sign as the material object that Ruscha himself further used as a weather indicator from his window. Pasquariello also used *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* as the primary example of Hollywoodization as the painting conveys movie-watching culture, big studios, and film business, as well as the cultural, myth-like images produced by film companies which run counter to the materiality of real-life Los Angeles landmarks (such as in the Hollywood sign paintings). Ken D. Allan also discussed the iconic symbolism of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo as its representation in *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* marks one of the first artworks to depict the idea of Los Angeles and therefore, to establish the specific “LA quality” that 1960s art critics were most probably referring to.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from its industry connotations and being shorthand for the Western U.S. of which it is a part, Hollywood continuously inspired Ruscha thematically. Robert Silberman, for example, talks about Ruscha’s full-on embrace of the West, including the road culture and the iconic Route 66 which the artist experienced firsthand starting in his youth while taking car trips from his native Oklahoma to California. These experiences were reflected in Ruscha’s numerous gas station paintings represented from a dramatic, slanting perspective, such as *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas* (1963) (fig.2) which, according to Robert Silberman, is also prominent for its cinematic dynamism and “zoom quality”. Silberman also discusses an artistic affinity between Ruscha’s and Jack Kerouac’s vision of the West as a grandiose Western space which the Beat author described as “the too-huge world vaulting us.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the aforementioned “zoom quality” that Silberman uses to describe Ruscha’s gas station paintings is also linked to Kerouac

---

<sup>7</sup> Schwartz, ““Second City””: 24.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Silberman, “Ed Ruscha and the Great American West: San Francisco,” *The Burlington Magazine* 158, no. 1363 (October 2016): 853.

who used “zoom” as an operative word in his seminal book *On the Road* (1957).<sup>9</sup> Further exploring the intersecting mythologies of Hollywood and the American West, Ruscha’s artmaking resonated with the iconography of the eponymous Western genre, one of the most specifically Hollywood film genres, and old Hollywood movies in general. This is best seen, Silberman writes, in Ruscha’s 1980s series featuring blurred silhouettes of coyotes, bison, and wagon trains, as well as word-based *The End* series (ca. 1991-2002) which represent the clichéd idea of the Old West as seen through classic Hollywood movies. Additionally, James indicates that Hollywood sign paintings (fig. 3) convey nostalgia for the Western genre, evoking a space-ambiguous desert, at the same time celebrating, although in a rather deadpan manner, the film industry’s glamor and sumptuousness.

Genre-wise, Western and Western-adjacent road movies are not the only film genres that scholars tend to associate with Ruscha’s style. A crime film is yet another cinematic category that is deeply intertwined with the city of Los Angeles and Ruscha’s artistic vision and sensibility. Many of Ruscha’s photographic books such as *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963), *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965), *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1966), *Thirtyfour Parking Lots* (1967), and *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass* (1968) represent gas stations, apartments, buildings, parking lots, and swimming pools in a forensically banal, black-and-white, and direct way have been attributed to the film noir due to their deadpan verging on the ghostly quality that evokes a crime scene.<sup>10</sup> Ralph Rugoff in his book *Scene of the Crime* argues that Hollywood and the larger Los Angeles area are perceived as scenes of the crime because of their highly covered violence in media and dozens of crime films and television shows set in Los Angeles, which eventually led to L.A. streets resembling the farrago of TV episodes and films.

---

<sup>9</sup> Silberman, “Ed Ruscha and the Great American West: San Francisco”: 853.

<sup>10</sup> James, “Artists as Filmmakers in Los Angeles”: 119.

For that reason, Los Angeles-based artists like Ruscha who were inspired by Hollywood as a locale and as a cultural industry also developed a taste for forensic aesthetics characterized by an impersonal, detached approach and the banalization of melodrama. In terms of Ruscha's art this aesthetic paradigm is best represented in his "forensic", pseudodocumentary, photography books with their deadpan display of banal architecture and urban environments of Los Angeles, evoking a neutral documentary record that forensic photography is known for.<sup>11</sup> What is more, the quality of the cinematic landscape in some of Ruscha's works, such as the CinemaScope-formatted landscape painting *Three Murders* (1981) (fig. 4), responds to the suburban, or postmodern, paranoia that also characterizes the forensic aesthetics and their representation on the silver screen. Even Ruscha's iconic Hollywood sign series features the cinematic landscape and color scheme which also call to mind the atmosphere of film noir. Just like the film genre and the Los Angeles-based noir movies, *Hollywood* paintings aim to expose the "seedy underbelly" of the dream factory.<sup>12</sup>

Other Ruscha artworks prominently feature the cinematic landscape format, notably the *Grand Horizontals* series and their American landscapes, writes Mary Richards. On a formal level, it is impossible to ignore striking visual parallels between some of Ruscha's artworks and cinema's inherent characteristics. *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* is an apparent poster child of this creative merger, as evident from its exaggerated perspective, striking, diagonal composition, and dramatic lettering. Allan notes that the painting mimics billboards with its monumentality and suggests the experience of wide-screen cinema. Further thematic connections between Ruscha's artworks and film are also informed by his background as a graphic design student during his Chouinard Institute of Art days. This is especially seen in the ribbon word

---

<sup>11</sup> Ralph Rugoff, *Scene of the Crime* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1997): 58.

<sup>12</sup> Schwartz, "An End in Itself": 19.

drawing series such as *Hollywood* (1970) and *Film* (1971) which feature the corresponding words as ribbons in a minimalist manner. Schwartz notes that the paintings’ “finely gradated, monochrome palette and kinship to graphic design evoke the titles of a black-and-white movie.”<sup>13</sup> Even more cinematic are Ruscha’s *The End* series (fig. 5), which comprises paintings, drawings, and prints featuring the words “The End” that resemble film titles set amidst craggy marks denoting “scratches on film.”<sup>14</sup> James Boaden, while reviewing Ed Ruscha’s exhibition in London, also remarked on the artist’s nostalgic *The End* series reminisce not just any end credits of films but the ones from a bygone era with their huge frame enlargements showing scratches and dust spelling out.<sup>15</sup> Boaden suggests that the melancholic atmosphere these paintings evoke calls to mind not just the swashbuckler and cowboy films Ruscha watched growing up in the 1950s but the experience of cinema-going as a communal activity.<sup>16</sup>

The mainstream Hollywood industry was not the only one to influence Ed Ruscha. The experimental cinema, paracinema, and structural film of the 1960s also left a noticeable footprint on the artist, argues Matt Reynolds, citing Ruscha’s photographic books as the most prominent testament to this causality. Reynolds identifies the following similarities between Ruscha’s photo books, the 1960s structural film movement, and experimental and New Hollywood cinema: visual similarity with the movie reel and filmstrips, the lack of narrative, disruptive use of stasis and movement, the use of *leporello* format which demonstrates both the art of editing and the experience of driving. In particular, Kevin Hatch discusses how the photographic book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* possesses essential cinematic qualities such as duration and temporality, while the photobook *Crackers* (1969) features interrupted motion also reminiscent of filmic medium.

---

<sup>13</sup> Schwartz, “An End in Itself”: 20.

<sup>14</sup> Schwartz, “An End in Itself”: 20.

<sup>15</sup> James Boaden, “Ed Ruscha: London,” *The Burlington Magazine* 152, no. 1282 (January 2010): 55.

<sup>16</sup> Boaden, “Ed Ruscha: London”: 55.

Other Ruscha photobooks such as *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (fig. 6) approach the cinema in its very format, similar to a 35mm film strip. The book also possibly references the TV show *77 Sunset Strip* (1958-64) and the movie *Riot on Sunset Strip* (1967) (both these references have been denied by Ruscha though).<sup>17</sup> What is more, Ruscha himself shot two experimental films, *Premium* (1970) and *Miracle* (1975) that Hatch states resemble film stills but are nonetheless more conventionally “Golden Age of Hollywood” in terms of style.

It is perhaps Ruscha’s idiosyncratic combination of mainstream Hollywood and avant-garde experimental cinema that makes his art truly stand out among his California-based and other Pop-related peers. James writes that this is especially visible in Ruscha’s word-based works that either invoke or are directly connected to Hollywood (*Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights, Hollywood, Back of Hollywood* prints and pastels, *The End*). These, at the same time, refer to structural film’s concern with the materiality of the medium itself, and the mobilized tensions between the denotations of words themselves and the connotations of the pictorial forms in which they inhere.<sup>18</sup> In short, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* alone was inspired at one and the same time by a classical Hollywood film *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) from Western “auteur” John Ford, a documentary *Quixote* (1965) directed by “one of the godparents of experimental film” Bruce Baillie, and the founding New Hollywood feature *Easy Rider* (1969), starring Ruscha’s personal friend Dennis Hopper.<sup>19</sup>

Another line of research commonly associated with Ed Ruscha and discussed in art criticism as in art historical scholarship is the deadpan aesthetics that the artist is associated with. Aron Vinegar discussed the use of the word “deadpan” in art and, even more commonly,

---

<sup>17</sup> James, “Artists as Filmmakers in Los Angeles”: 119.

<sup>18</sup> James, “Artists as Filmmakers in Los Angeles”: 118.

<sup>19</sup> James, “Artists as Filmmakers in Los Angeles”: 119.

photography, and how this aesthetic is exemplified by Ed Ruscha's sixteen photographic books. Vinegar states that Ruscha's photobooks are not just the forefathers of proto-Conceptualism in photography but also the first works of photographic media to which the word "deadpan" was applied. The author says that traditionally the "deadpan" was associated either with a mode of rhetoric delivery in which humor is delivered without change in emotion or facial expression or with "artless" art because of its dry and direct mode of delivery. Vinegar goes on to explain that in photography, "deadpan" is used to suggest a "matter-of-fact" mode of delivery and an approach to photographic presentation devoid of subjective emotion or affect that explored cool, detached, or neutral, and keenly sharp type of representation that does not seem to suggest outright judgments.<sup>20</sup> Applied to Ruscha, deadpan aesthetics, otherwise called "aesthetic of indifference" in his photographic books, exemplify a nonjudgmental and antihierarchical approach to the existing environment of American urban sprawl. What is more, deadpan aesthetics are often linked to a documentary mode of representation because of the factual appearance that defines them. Vinegar in this case further links this aesthetic facticity with the way people attune to certain moods that factuality suggests in deadpan and documentary photography.<sup>21</sup> Overall, the deadpan can be characterized by flattened-out expression, monotone coloration, apparent disinterest, and distance from any engaged relationship to the world<sup>22</sup>. Deadpan aesthetics also very often can be identified through dedramatized lighting and evenness of tone, affect, and setting that suggest the "grey everyday."<sup>23</sup>

Having said that, Vinegar mentions that the alleged "protagonist" impersonated in Ed Ruscha's deadpan photographic books is the "Everyperson" or "Everyman" which is also linked

---

<sup>20</sup> Aron Vinegar, "Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography," *Art History* 32, no. 5 (2009): 854.

<sup>21</sup> Vinegar, "Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography": 863.

<sup>22</sup> Vinegar, "Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography": 864.

<sup>23</sup> Vinegar, "Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography": 865.

to the aesthetic indifference of the deadpan.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, one of the people most closely associated with the deadpan is American silent-film actor and comedian Buster Keaton, known by his nickname the “Great Stone Face”, who with his deadpan facial expression suggested a particular, “deadpan” vision of the world.<sup>25</sup> Vinegar argues that Keaton’s specific performance type registers evenness of its response to objects in the world that do not accommodate themselves to him in response. Therefore, according to Vinegar, Keaton’s gaze conveys his “acceptance of the external world and the things in it.”<sup>26</sup> This narrative quality of the deadpan hints at the storytelling potential of this “aesthetic of detachment”, as defined by Laura Podalsky, who discusses the use of these aesthetics in cinema, specifically deadpan comedies and minimalist dramas. Podalsky explains that the “aesthetics of detachment,” closely associated with the deadpan, is the mode that “purposefully displaces the centrality of characters’ emotional expressivity in fictional narratives” and focuses on rather impassive characters with unclear motivations whose facial expressions and bodily gestures do not serve as a transparent register of their psychic state.<sup>27</sup> In such movies, the spectator does not gain any sort of access to the characters’ thoughts or feelings since they appear expressionless and the dialogue is sparse, thus non-conforming to the existing socio-cultural guidelines for expressing and experiencing emotions.<sup>28</sup> Podalsky also notes that the aesthetic of detachment promotes a notable distance between the viewer and the characters in ways involving both narrative structure and stylistic devices, often conveying de-dramatization of the events.

---

<sup>24</sup> Vinegar, “Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography”: 864.

<sup>25</sup> Vinegar, “Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography”: 854

<sup>26</sup> Vinegar, “Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography”: 860

<sup>27</sup> Laura Podalsky, “The Aesthetics of Detachment,” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 20, Affect, Bodies, and Circulations in Contemporary Latin American Film (2016): 239-40.

<sup>28</sup> Podalsky, “The Aesthetics of Detachment”: 240.

All in all, scholarship has focused on Ruscha's biographical relation to the film industry and the film authors some art historians have even discussed other references in subject matter, genre, or format. Some academics also discuss the deadpan aesthetics in Ed Ruscha's photography books. However, none have used critical methods of film theory to thoroughly analyze works such as *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*. Additionally, none have analyzed the deadpan aesthetics applied to Ruscha's oil paintings. Moreover, no scholars have discussed the cinematic component that characterized deadpan films in Ruscha's art. This senior thesis argues that Ruscha's oil painting is an amalgamation of deadpan aesthetics and cinematic reality through its affectless quality.

### 3. Chapter 2: *Large Trademark in the Spotlight*

*Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* is an oil painting by Ed Ruscha. The artwork features a large logo of a major Hollywood film studio, 20th Century Fox. The subject matter connects Ruscha to the wider framework and sensibility of global Pop art. Pop art centered upon and explored everything concerning popular culture – be it the everyday, the lowbrow, the glamorous, the commercial, the mass-produced, or the commonplace. At the same time, Pop varied significantly, with each artist making his contribution to a common collection of Pop themes, styles, and techniques. Pop artists outside of New York City were still largely dismissed for being “regional” and “middlebrow” by the artistic establishment. As such, Ed Ruscha was added to the West Coast “branch” of Pop artists, who were deemed glossier than their New York counterparts. While the term “glossy” can be hardly applied to Ruscha – his art verges on Minimalism and Conceptual art – he and other West Coast Pop artists were distinguished by their “Los Angeles” subjects.

Generally, the Southern Californian artists that came to be associated with Pop art were more interested in the local scenery, in both the physical and socio-cultural meanings of the word. As seen from Ed Ruscha’s practice, the artist represented both sides of his (adopted) West Coast identity by painting vast landscapes and highways of West Coast America, photographing streets, buildings, and swimming pools of LA, and addressing the Hollywood film industry and culture in numerous paintings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo, Hollywood signs, and Hollywood- and film-related phrases and words. The heavy, and inevitable, impact of the nearby Hollywood film industry which in and of itself serves as an epitome of chief Pop art qualities, lead to *Large*

*Trademark with Eight Spotlights* which, in turn, became iconic of West Coast Pop at large. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo depicted on *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* certifies Pop both by its popular culture themes and by its Southern California motives due to the logo's clear linkage to Hollywood and its ever-blossoming dream factory.

Ruscha essentially did not implement any changes to the icon itself. The trademark, which is the focal point of the entire artwork, features lettering, represented in a three-quarter view, dramatically extending from a point in the lower right corner to the left side of the long, rectangular space of the image.<sup>29</sup> The trademark's monumentality pairs well with the colossal size of the artwork (170 × 338.1 cm), which mimics the movie theater screen format or perhaps a billboard format. The graphic and billboard quality of the painting reflects Ruscha's training as a commercial and fine artist at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles. Closely affiliated to and even funded by Walt Disney, the progressive art school was one of the few schools in the US to combine fine arts, primarily painting and sculpture, and commercial arts, including illustrations and layouts.<sup>30</sup> Because of its proximity to the Hollywood film industry, the school's focus was largely professional and encouraged its students to create portfolios since many of the Chouinard graduates went on to work in the region's many advertising agencies, publishers, and especially The Walt Disney Studios. For that reason, studying at Chouinard Art Institute might have been Ruscha's first, if indirect, contact with the major Hollywood film studios, one of which some years later became the subject of this large canvas oil painting.

It is worth mentioning that at the time of Ruscha's studies at the art school from 1956 to 1960, Abstract Expressionism was the dominant art movement in the United States. Its

---

<sup>29</sup> Allan, Ken D. "Ed Ruscha, Pop Art, and Spectatorship in 1960s Los Angeles." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 3 (September 2010): 231.

<sup>30</sup> Jennifer Quick, "Pasteup Pictures: Ed Ruscha's 'Every Building on the Sunset Strip,'" *The Art Bulletin* 100, no. 2 (June 2018): 127.

influences stretched to the West Coast institution where Ruscha studied. Some of the lecturers Ruscha studied under were Emerson Woelffer, a notable Abstract Expressionism painter, and Robert Irwin, a painter who later became prominent for his minimalist installations. Therefore, it is ever-more important that Ruscha turned to representational art, such as *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, in part as a reaction against Abstract Expressionism.<sup>31</sup> While the use of pasteup layouts is mostly seen in Ruscha's photographic books, the art school emphasized draughtsmanship, despite maintaining a disciplinary distinction between the "fine arts" and "commercial arts" which informed the permeability of the two spheres.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, this mixture of "high" and "low" links Ruscha's trademark painting to paracinema, characterized by the same anti-hierarchical and "blending" approach in cinema.

The billboard qualities of the trademark painting show the influence of graphic design and print layout that Ruscha also studied at Chouinard and later utilized in his early career as an assistant layout artist for the Carson/Roberts advertising agency. There, his assignments included contributing to the design of the Baskin-Robbins logo and creating a mailer for the agency announcing its move to a new building designed by Craig Ellwood, a celebrated modernist architect. What is more, Ruscha did the title design for Mel Damski's comedy film *Yellowbeard* (1983) which merged the artist's proficiency in both advertisement and cinema designs. This further testifies to Ruscha's immediate knowledge of advertising techniques and logotypes which later served for the trademark painting. The word-based format that Ruscha displays in the 1962 logo painting shows his intertwining interest in both advertising techniques and the cinematic medium. Another device that Ruscha clearly adopted from the latter is representing flat text

---

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Garland, "Picturing Distance: Ed Ruscha's Los Angeles Photobooks," *Journal of American Studies* 54, no. 3 (July 2020): 473.

<sup>32</sup> Quick, "Pasteup Pictures: Ed Ruscha's 'Every Building on the Sunset Strip': 126-27.

against a non-figurative sky or landscape ground. Ruscha reflected on his particular interest in word-based art in one of his interviews where he mentioned that he feels attracted to specific words due to his love for the language. He also said: “Words have temperatures to me. When they reach a certain point and become hot words, then they appeal to me.”<sup>33</sup> In this light, the word-phrase “20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox” might have certainly had a temperature to Ruscha.

As seen in his mountain series, *Clarence Jones* (2001) (fig. 7), this combination of language and images is remarkably similar to the way text and image coexist on the cinema screen during title-credit sequences.<sup>34</sup> The series not only references the essential cinematic element that is a film title but also potentially alludes to yet another film studio, Paramount Pictures, through its use of the mountain on a background. In a similar fashion to the *Mountain* series (2010-15), the artist added his own artistic interpretation of the iconic trademark when painting *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*. Painted in three primary colors, blue, red, and yellow, as well as white, the icon’s color scheme appears to be drastically different from the iconic golden finish of the on-screen 20th Century Fox logo. At the same time, the work’s rendering directly cites the image of the 20th Century Fox logo that appears in front of the audience just before watching a film created or distributed by this major Hollywood studio. The similarity between the original and Ruscha’s logo lies, first and foremost, in the identical font, design, and especially in its pictorial three-dimensionality.

As to the medium of the painting itself, which is primarily oil combined with house paint, ink, and graphite pencil on canvas, it seems to elevate this pop-cultural trademark from a mere commercial logo to a subject for a large-scale oil artwork. Therefore, *Large Trademark with*

---

<sup>33</sup> Howardena Pindell, “Words with Ruscha,” *The Print Collector’s Newsletter* 3, no. 6 (February 1973): 126.

<sup>34</sup> Richards, *Ed Ruscha*: 114.

*Eight Spotlights* highlights the paradoxical nature of making a commercial company logo the sole subject matter of an imposing artwork. This quality not only labels the painting as Pop but further brings it into the realm of deadpan aesthetics with its cool, indifferent, and largely purposeless approach to art making, an aesthetic perhaps first detected in photography. Moreover, the matter-of-fact and unadorned representation of the trademark in this 1962 painting further conveys deadpan sensibility and its factual and almost documentary qualities. Because of the seemingly unchanged logo together with its minimalist presentation, Ruscha's work seems to be fundamental "artlessness" which further enhances the feeling of deadpan that *Large Trademark* conveys.

The deadpan aesthetic itself is often linked to Proto-conceptualism and Conceptualism, an anti-aesthetic movement that emerged in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>35</sup> Even though from the very dawn of his artistic career Ruscha was connected to Los Angeles Pop art, some art critics and art historians argue that he actually prefigured Conceptual art, especially in his photographic books.<sup>36</sup> Conceptual art places the idea above the physicality of the artwork itself, particularly its aesthetic component, which somewhat characterizes Ruscha's approach to photography. Ruscha's photo books such as *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, *Some Los Angeles Apartments*, *Every Building on Sunset Strip* and *Thirtyfour Parking Lots* are characteristically deadpan in their approach, which in this case can be attributed to their deliberate lack of style, the banality of representation, and a rather documentary approach to photography. Having said that, other artistic modes of expression in Ruscha's oeuvre are marked by Conceptualism. The oil painting *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* is one such example. Unlike the carefully constructed

---

<sup>35</sup> Peter Lančarič, "The Theoretical and Philosophical Basis of the Deadpan Aesthetics," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 13, no. 6 (2017): 112

<sup>36</sup> Kevin Hatch, "'Something Else': Ed Ruscha's Photographic Books," *October* 111 (Winter 2005): 124.

1962 oil painting, however, when making these 1960s photographic books, Ruscha was much more interested in the documentary-style representation of the city of Los Angeles in its essential attributes like parking lots, swimming pools, and apartment blocks.

The fact that the work that directly references film and its industry lacks any kind of storyline itself, as it does emotions, except for a vague sense of drama which is communicated through the language of cinema. Represented from a dramatic diagonal perspective, the painting's "action" is concentrated on the left side of the monumental landscape with the imposing icon lit up by eight spotlights that emanate light in different directions, creating theatricality. At the same time, Ruscha's pictorial use of a long shot, one that appears to be taken from a long distance, conveys emotional distance from the subject matter represented since the closer the camera is to the subject, the more emotional weight the subject gains.<sup>37</sup> Apart from the trademark painting, the effect of a long shot, or rather an extreme long shot, can be seen in his panoramic and landscape paintings of the Hollywood sign and his *Grand Horizontals* series that create a similar feeling of aloofness by "capturing" their respective subjects at a great distance from the viewer. This juxtaposition of dramatic angles and perspectives together with a sense of spatial, and emotional, detachment creates Ruscha's signature deadpan style through the use of cinematic language.

As can be seen from *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, Hollywood is both the subject matter and an instrument for Ruscha's painting. The artist, being both a representative and a critic of this nearly mythical neighborhood, also uses Hollywood as a verb.<sup>38</sup> In his dictionary any subject can be "Hollywoodized" and he utilizes this strategy quite frequently. In order to

---

<sup>37</sup> Ed Sikov, *Film Studies: An Introduction*, Second Edition, Film and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020): 10.

<sup>38</sup> Schwartz, "'Second City'": 24

Hollywoodize, Ruscha employs visual devices that are standard for the medium of moving images. To begin with, the 20th Century Fox logo exists on a widescreen, CinemaScope format that was a dominant mode for shooting as well as screening films at the time, from 1953 to 1967. CinemaScope as an aspect ratio format was developed by the very same 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox studio by using an anamorphic lens of the camera that squeezed a very wide image onto each frame of standard-sized film stock and another anamorphic lens on the projector which spread it back again.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of this enormously widescreen aspect ratio was to rival television by giving the viewers something they could not enjoy at home for free. Therefore, by using the CinemaScope format for his trademark piece, Ruscha brings it even closer from the realm of painting to the realm of shot – a basic element of filmmaking, which is essentially a piece of film run through the camera, exposed, and developed.<sup>40</sup>

The camera angle is yet another unit of the language of cinema that features frequently in Ruscha's art, notably in *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* and *Standard Station* (1966) which both represent their respective subjects as low-angle shots.<sup>41</sup> A low-angle shot is created when the subject is captured from below producing an effect of the viewer looking up at the subject.<sup>42</sup> In cinematic terms, this type of camera angle is usually used to aggrandize the shot's subject, which is exactly what Ruscha does with the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo. Moreover, together with the rushing train effect that Ruscha was fascinated by in movies, the low-angle position creates drama and evokes the speed of a car traveling down the highway. Among other cinematic shots that Ruscha uses are crane shots such as in *Los Angeles County Museum on Fire* (1965-68), which represents the museum building from a distant vantage point, and his numerous ribbon

---

<sup>39</sup> Sikov, *Film Studies: An Introduction*: 39.

<sup>40</sup> Sikov, *Film Studies*: 8.

<sup>41</sup> Richards, *Ed Ruscha*: 113.

<sup>42</sup> Sikov, *Film Studies*: 12.

word paintings such as *Hollywood* (1979). The use of tracking shots in his art is best exhibited in his book *Every Building on Sunset Strip*, with topographical record of all buildings located on Sunset Strip in Los Angeles. The photographs in the book were the result of a camera attached to a moving car and shot in real-time which creates a film-like effect once all photos are seamlessly assembled in a leporello-formatted book.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the flat nature of the canvas, Ruscha maintained the moving quality of the original 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo by highlighting the slanting perspective of the three-dimensional tail the logo leaves in motion. This also creates the impression of a speeding train rushing past, one of the features that fascinated Ruscha in movies. The artist recalls:

It also echoes a memory I had of watching movies when I was young. It seemed like all movies would have a train in them. Invariably, they had the camera down on the tracks and shot this train, so it appeared as though it was coming from nowhere, from a little point in the distance, to suddenly zooming in and filling your total range of vision...It's super drama.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, some of the earliest memories of being impressed by the sense of motion in cinema likely influenced Ruscha's practice, steeped in conveying mobility and movement regardless of the subject he depicts. Be it a highway with its graphic signs, the streets of Los Angeles seen by a driver through the windscreen of his car, or references to movies that are essentially moving images too. Ruscha's artistic obsession with movement extended beyond *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*: his gas station paintings and photographic books are notable representatives of the sense of movement in art. This can be seen either through the use of striking diagonal lines, the depiction of flame in the moment of burning (as in 1965-66 *Burning Gas Station*), or through the *leporello* format that created a "movement panorama" out of Los Angeles streets. These Ruscha works not only share cinema's sense of temporality and movement but also visually

---

<sup>43</sup> Richards, *Ed Ruscha*: 114.

<sup>44</sup> Garland, "Picturing Distance": 481.

recall movie reels and filmstrips. This brings *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* even further to the realm of cinema. The painting seems less like a painting and more like a film still that captures the composition, or rather mise-en-scène, in motion. Composition and mise-en-scène are related terms, however, while composition means the precise arrangement of objects and characters within the frame, its connotations are comparatively static.<sup>45</sup> Mise-en-scène, on the other hand, is the more dynamic term for the expressive totality of everything that is seen in a single filmed image - meaning all the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed (settings, props, lighting, cast, etc) as well as the camera's actions and angles and the cinematography.<sup>46</sup>

Apart from the traditional understanding of cinematic movement, Ruscha's preoccupation with motion, as seen in his photo books and *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, links him to the experimental cinema and structural film movements that were simultaneously developing in 1960s Southern California. These cinematic tendencies are characterized by their formalist approach and, especially, by their exploration of stasis and movement. Moreover, two more features that Ruscha's *Trademark* artwork and photographic book share with experimental cinema are the emphasis on materiality and the conscious rejection of narrative with the form itself becoming content.<sup>47</sup> Materiality in structural film refers to insisting upon the shape of the film which is predetermined and simplified, and it is that shape that is the primal impression of the film, while the content in structural film is kept to "minimal".<sup>48</sup> Regarding the first factor,

---

<sup>45</sup> Sikov, *Film Studies*: 19

<sup>46</sup> Sikov, *Film Studies*: 5-6

<sup>47</sup> Matt Reynolds, "Ed Ruscha's Moving Pictures," in *Alternative Perspectives: Experimental Film in Los Angeles, 1945-1980*, ed. David E. James and Adam Hyman (New Barnet, Herts.: John Libbey Publishing Ltd., 2015): 197.

<sup>48</sup> R. Bruce Elder, "The Structural Film: Ruptures and Continuities in Avant-Garde Art," in *Neo-Avant-Garde*, ed. David Hopkins, vol. 20, *Avant-Garde Critical Studies* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006), 119.

Ruscha himself said that his books remind him of sculptures rather than a set of independent photos. While *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, a painting essentially devoid of narrative, expresses its content through the canvas shape itself and the commercial logo of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox film studio.

*Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* presents an idiosyncratic combination of cinematic influences – from the mainstream, Hollywood film industry through its depiction of the trademark icon, to experimental film movements, through deadpan sensibility and the form itself. What is more, Ed Ruscha was a staple in independent filmmaking in LA in the 1960s, just in time for the arrival of New Hollywood, a late 1960s film movement of young filmmakers and artistic avant-garde that revolutionized American filmmaking. Some of its key representatives, particularly Dennis Hopper (*Easy Rider*'s director and lead) were Ruscha's personal friends. Other significant artistic figures of the time that Ruscha was in close contact with were the actors Dean Stockwell, Harry Dean Stanton, actress Teri Garr, multidisciplinary performer Toni Basil, a visual artist prominent for his pioneering video works Bruce Conner, experimental filmmaker and assemblage artist Wallace Berman, the trailblazing duo of experimental filmmakers Stan and Jane Brakhage, and the “the godfather of American avant-garde cinema” Jonas Mekas among others.<sup>49</sup> Ruscha's involvement in the film scene was not limited to 1960s and 1970s New Hollywood and experimental cinema. He continued to participate in selected film projects later in his career (although these rather recent ventures did not impact Ruscha's already-established artistic sensibility): he had a small role in Alan Rudolph's *Choose Me* (1984) while his painting *Sin/Without* (1990) had a bit part in Michael Tolkin's *The New Age* (1990).

---

<sup>49</sup> Britt Salvesen, “Ruscha and Film,” *Unframed - LACMA*, January 15, 2013.

At the same time, it was the mainstream Hollywood film industry (together with its movies, palm trees, and the idea-collage of what LA is about) that prompted Ed Ruscha to move to Los Angeles. Movies played a key role in forming Ruscha personally, from seeing Hollywood films at the local theater when growing up in Oklahoma to becoming a dweller of Tinseltown in 1956.<sup>50</sup> In 2009 Ruscha even curated a collection of personal film suggestions for his exhibition at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne which included *Island of Lost Souls* (1932), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *Try and Get Me!* (1950), *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), *Paths of Glory* (1957), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), *Private Property* (1960), and *Cul-de-Sac* (1966). Some of these films Ruscha remembers watching upon his relocation to LA in the late 1950s, together with *The Savage Eye* (1959), as well as foreign films and silent classics at the Vagabond Theatre on Wilshire Boulevard while others had more a pronounced impact on his art.<sup>51</sup> For instance, John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* with its representation of Depression-era Dust Bowl migration is referenced in the photography book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*.<sup>52</sup> Even more so, Ruscha's iconic *Standard Station* paintings, known for their representation of West Coast car culture, are also citing films. Ruscha said:

It seemed like all movies would have a train in them. Invariably, they had the camera down on the tracks and shot this train so it appeared as though it was coming from nowhere, from a little point in the distance to suddenly zooming in and filling your total range of vision. In a sense, that's what the Standard gas station is doing. It's super drama.<sup>53</sup>

Trains in movies fascinated Ruscha because of the way they divide the picture plane while starting out in the lower-right corner and gradually filling the screen, which is the effect he

---

<sup>50</sup> Salvesen, "Ruscha and Film."

<sup>51</sup> Salvesen, "Ruscha and Film."

<sup>52</sup> James, "Artists as Filmmakers in Los Angeles": 119.

<sup>53</sup> Richards, *Ed Ruscha*: 113.

applied to his gas station paintings with their striking diagonal perspectives.<sup>54</sup> The same “train motive” was applied to *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* where the lettering projects forward in a magnifying manner from an ambiguous distance.

Among other features of Old Hollywood cinema that Ruscha references in his art are the traditional cinematic genres, namely 1940s and 1950s film noir and the Western. A genre in cinematic terms is a type of film that has its own recognizable conventions and character types.<sup>55</sup> Film noir, for instance, is characterized by inducing a sense of tension and malaise in their audiences by almost always taking place at night, in bad parts of town, with low-key-lighting that emphasizes striking contrasts in the film. Borrowing this low-key cinematic illumination, Ruscha recreated noir’s signature lightning to enhance the dramatic potential of his art. This effect is best seen in his *Silhouette* series with its high-contrast lighting, deep shadows, and scenes set in the moonlit darkness.<sup>56</sup>

The footprints of film noir can also be traced to Ruscha’s *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* which notably conveys what is technically known as low-key lighting through the spotlights that create a stark contrast in this night-set painting, further enhancing the sense of drama. Besides, film noir directly intersects with forensic aesthetics, characterized by a banal, emotionless, and pseudo-documentary way of representation that invokes, in turn, the aesthetics of the crime scene, that Ruscha used in his *Trademark* as well as other works. The dramatic lighting is also used in Ruscha’s artworks that seem to have more in common with Westerns, a broad category of films that are set in the nineteenth-century American West. His work *Fistful of Aliens* (1986) (fig. 8), for instance, directly cites the Spaghetti Western called *A Fistful of*

---

<sup>54</sup> Calvin Tomkins, “Ed Ruscha’s L.A.,” *The New Yorker*, June 24, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Sikov, *Film Studies*: 143.

<sup>56</sup> Richards, *Ed Ruscha*: 114.

*Dollars* (1964) (Spaghetti Western is a subgenre made by Italian film directors that is characterized by certain pastiche quality that seems to quote and or even parody classical American westerns<sup>57</sup>) and menacingly depicts cacti and Joshua trees set against a misty sky. Ruscha also painted the *Silhouette* series, such as *Coyote* (1986), which presents soft-edged silhouettes of classic bits of Western iconography such as coyotes, bison, and wagon trains while at the same time playing with the cliched idea of the Old West which had practically died out by the late 1980s when Ruscha painted the series.<sup>58</sup>

Similar to films that by design exist in multiple variants, Ruscha's practice is also characterized by painting numerous editions of the same subject matter. As such, the 20th Century Fox logo series exists in multiple variants, the most famous of them being housed at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. Other notable editions of the 20th Century Fox logo are located in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (*Trademark 2* and *Trademark 4*, both from 1962), The Museum of Modern Art (*Trademark*, 1962), and the Tate (*Trademark #5*, 1962). Nonetheless, the first of Ruscha's 20th Century Fox icon versions is *Trademark Study* (1961) which Ruscha drew while staying at the Hotel Governor Clinton in Manhattan upon his first visit to the city in 1961. Being painted on hotel stationery, it makes it even more interesting that Ruscha decided to paint this iconic symbol associated with Los Angeles and Hollywood while vacationing in the artistic and cultural capital of the United States – New York City. What is more, the dramatic perspective from which the trademark projects forward in all of the *Trademark* versions, including the Whitney one, seems to mimic the view of the printed image of the hotel building in the upper right-hand corner of the hotel stationery paper. Therefore, "Ruscha's drawing is an exaggeration of the perspective used to depict the hotel's

---

<sup>57</sup> Sikov, *Film Studies*: 147.

<sup>58</sup> Silberman, "Ed Ruscha and the Great American West": 854.

facade in the stationery, which, of course, is also a kind of trademark or logo and shows Ruscha's training in this standard graphic design technique".<sup>59</sup> Despite this visible similarity in perspective, Ruscha's drawing does not represent a building, or even an easily-defined pictorial space but an iconic image or idea associated with Los Angeles and Hollywood.<sup>60</sup> Overall, the paintings suggest the immersive experience of wide-screen cinema, as seen in its content and form.

---

<sup>59</sup> Allan, "Ed Ruscha, Pop Art, and Spectatorship in 1960s Los Angeles": 233.

<sup>60</sup> Allan, "Ed Ruscha, Pop Art, and Spectatorship in 1960s Los Angeles": 233.

## 4. Chapter 3: The Deadpan between Still and Moving Image

The deadpan aesthetics of Ed Ruscha's art reveal itself mostly through his works related to cinema. Whereas his photographic books are the ones discussed particularly in relation to cinema as well as deadpan aesthetics, his oil painting *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* also possesses deadpan and cinematic qualities. In his 1989 interview with Pindell, Ed Ruscha said that Jasper Johns was the artist who got him into artmaking due to the fact that Johns's paintings did not look like paintings, especially his *Flag* (1954-55) and *Target* (1955) works.<sup>61</sup> This contributes to explaining Ruscha's *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* as essentially a meta-referential intersection between cinema and painting. *Large Trademark*, according to its very medium, exists in a frame (a feature inherent to the media of both painting and film); the oil painting is brought even closer to both the cinematic medium and deadpan aesthetics, due to the allegedly neutral and aloof representation and the fact that the painting was created to mimic the film screen and the cinematic icon that is the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo.

In one of his interviews, Ruscha said that he never intended to document anything, and his photographic book *Royal Road Test* (1967) is as closest as he got to documenting something. The very same thing can be said about the deadpan aesthetics that Ruscha is so frequently associated with. The deadpan aesthetic was also characterized as "Germanic" by Charlotte Cotton since the deadpan sensibility originated from the photographic works of Bernd and Hilla Becher, the husband-wife duo that further spurred a generation of German artists to work in the same technique through their lecturing at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. The Bechers' oeuvre, in turn, seems to stylistically stem from the photographic tradition of the 1920s-30s New

---

<sup>61</sup> Pindell, "Words with Ruscha": 126.

Objectivity or *Neue Sachlichkeit*, yet another artistic phenomenon from Germany.<sup>62</sup> The Bechers can even be credited with the creation of the Düsseldorf School of Photography. A characteristic of Bechers' photography was the subject matter that focused on depicting run-down industrial architecture throughout Europe and North America, including water towers, coal bunkers, gas tanks, and factories. Their work adopted a documentary style, and their images were always taken in black and white while never including people.<sup>63</sup>

All of the aforementioned qualities can also be seen in both Ruscha's photography books, such as *Some Los Angeles Apartments* with its factual and topographical representation of banal Los Angeles architecture, as well certain oil paintings, notably *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*. As a matter of fact, it was Ed Ruscha to whom the term "deadpan" was applied in an art-critical manner for the first time – by Lawrence Alloway, an influential English art critic, curator, and one of the co-founders of Pop art.<sup>64</sup> Alloway exhibited Ruscha's photographic book *Baby Cakes* (1970) (which humorously juxtaposes black and white images of a newborn baby with cupcakes) within his curatorial project called *Artists and Photographs* (1970). Alloway's curatorial text states:

Edward Ruscha is represented by *Baby Cakes*, one of the factual series of photographs which began as early as 1962 with his book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. This book like his later ones, is neither sociological (the sample of subjects is arbitrary) nor formalistic (the imagery is casual), but it is a concordance of decisions, unmistakably esthetic, for all their deadpan candour, in the absence of other purposes.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Charlotte Cotton, "Deadpan," in *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004): 82.

<sup>63</sup> "Who Are Hilla and Bernd Becher?," Tate.

<sup>64</sup> Lančarič, "The Theoretical and Philosophical Basis of the Deadpan Aesthetics": 110.

<sup>65</sup> Lawrence Alloway, "Artists and Photographs," *Studio International* 179, no. 921 (April 1970): 163.

The “deadpan candour” Alloway refers to can be traced in *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* just as well. The latter, while not being black and white, engages with a factual, documentary style through its direct depiction of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo in a seemingly unaltered and defictionalized fashion. The colors in the painting are used very graphically, not as a vehicle for expression, or psychology, or transcription, or description but instead as iconic of film and reflecting cinema’s use of Technicolor – the prevalent cinematographic mode of representation by this point.

Even more so, the overt absence of people in Ruscha’s art, taking the *Trademark* painting as an example, is yet another link that connects Ruscha with the “foreparents” of deadpan aesthetics, namely the Bechers. Ruscha even stated: “I’ve avoided having people in the pictures in all my books, because they’re... because that’s not the subject. Very distracting. People are very distracting anyway.”<sup>66</sup> Whereas Ruscha views people as distracting, the Bechers’ lack of interest in human figures might be explained by the fact that they were primarily invested in the idea of an encyclopedic collection of pre-Nazi Germany industrial and vernacular architecture, such as water towers, gas tanks, and mine heads, that they began in 1957.<sup>67</sup> “Each building within a series is photographed from the same perspective, notes on each are taken, and a typology is systematically created,” writes Cotton.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, their photographs are grouped according to the same type of structure and presented in grid formations. Ruscha, in a different mode, also adheres to typology as a systematic record of a certain type of objects – be it gas stations, swimming pools, or apartment buildings.<sup>69</sup> His typology is achieved through organizing

---

<sup>66</sup> Pindell, “Words with Ruscha”: 127.

<sup>67</sup> Cotton, “Deadpan”: 82.

<sup>68</sup> Cotton, “Deadpan”: 82-3.

<sup>69</sup> Lančarič, “The Theoretical and Philosophical Basis of the Deadpan Aesthetics”: 111.

photographs within a book's serial layout and leporello format as a series of iconographical forms that, when combined, leads to emptying them out of meaning. Repetition and seriality were a strategy in some New York Pop – such as Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Diptych* (1962) to empty it out of not just meaning but also emotional content or affect. What is more, Bernd and Hilla Becher called their photographs “anonymous sculptures,” and they produced a successful photobook of the same title in 1970.<sup>70</sup> In 1990, they even received an award at the Venice Biennale – not for photography, but sculpture, - due to their ability to illustrate the sculptural properties of architecture.<sup>71</sup>

Regarding Ruscha's practice, he himself once stated about his photographic books:

I even perceived them as bits of sculpture, in a way. They were three-dimensional, they were thick. I even painted on the sides of my canvases for a few years to accentuate the idea that this was a three-dimensional thing. I even painted on the sides of my canvases for a few years to accentuate the idea that this was a three-dimensional thing.<sup>72</sup>

This quote emphasizes the intermedial quality of Ruscha's art.

Furthermore, like the Bechers, who focused on industrial architecture as iconic monuments, Ruscha also uses monumental and iconic objects: the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox trademark, for instance, or the Los Angeles County Museum of Art that he painted in his eponymous painting. In his interview with Pindell, he even explained his obsession with certain objects that he depicts like swimming pools, parking lots, or the film studio logo as being simply some areas he could concentrate on at a given period in his life.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Ruscha himself stated that

---

<sup>70</sup> “Who Are Hilla and Bernd Becher?,” Tate.

<sup>71</sup> “Who Are Hilla and Bernd Becher?,” Tate.

<sup>72</sup> Ed Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal*, ed. Alexandra Schwartz (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2002): 303.

<sup>73</sup> Pindell, “Words with Ruscha”: 127.

films form a significant part of his life, although when it comes to film-watching experiences, he is turned off and irritated by advertisement.<sup>74</sup> This is peculiar since Ruscha himself studied commercial art and later practiced it while working in an advertising agency. However, he has admitted that he is occasionally inspired by commercial typography's lettering.<sup>75</sup>

If I'm influenced by movies, it's from way down underneath, not just on the surface. A lot of my paintings are anonymous backdrops for the drama of worlds. In a way they're words in front of the old Paramount mountain... And the backgrounds are of no particular character. They're just meant to support the drama, like the "Hollywood" sign being held up by sticks.<sup>76</sup>

Ruscha's use of the moving image medium seems to be rooted in film theory itself, the one suggested by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in the 1980s, in his seminal book *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983). Since *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* directly references the cinematic medium, it is important to establish how on the fundamental level this work is related to film through Deleuze's film theory-philosophy. In one of the most seminal essays from *Cinema 1*, called *Image-Movement and its Three Varieties: Second Commentary about Bergson*, the French thinker dwells on Henri Bergson's philosophical theory on movement-images to apply it to cinema. Bergson's theory of images revolves around the idea that "there is no favored state of natural perception and that language, sight, cinema are each simply 'snapshots' of a passing reality."<sup>77</sup> Although Bergson himself was critical of cinema saying that it misconceives movement, Deleuze uses Bergson's philosophy as the basis for his general film theory premise

---

<sup>74</sup> Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal*: 255.

<sup>75</sup> Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal*: 255.

<sup>76</sup> Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal*: 277-78.

<sup>77</sup> Nick Oberly, "Theories of Media," The University of Chicago, Winter 2003.

that the image is equivalent to movement.<sup>78</sup> Henceforth, all matter, everything visible that moves, namely every moving thing, can be perceived as an image – even an atom, let alone human beings and other inanimate objects. Deleuze thus talks about an infinite aggregate of images that constitutes a plane of immanence, which can be also understood as the infinite and omnipresent universe of images, meaning the universe of cinema. From this perspective, the idea presented in Ed Ruscha’s *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* can be seen as germane to that of Deleuze’s image-movement. The painting alludes to movement through the logo’s tail of lights, the conventional graphic signs for motion, and the very fact it is a light projection. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo is in these ways image-movement, as well as directly citing the ubiquitous cinematic universe Deleuze references, and “representing” the cinematic medium on canvas. Having said that, *Large Trademark* in and of itself cannot be perceived as a cinematic image because it is a static representation that is suggestive of image-movement, in the way photography is.

Deleuze further establishes a tripartite system for categorizing cinematic images: *image-perception*, *image-action*, *image-affectivity*. Starting off with image-perception, Deleuze explains it as the image-movement when it is related to a center of indetermination, meaning the perception of sight, that relates movement to moving objects.<sup>79</sup> In this context, perception is the subjective uncentered perception that distinguishes itself from the thing by simple elimination or subtraction.<sup>80</sup> Image-perception is an example of subjective perception that frames reality and, therefore, is best expressed in the filmic medium. The next level of image-movement is image-action, which relates movement to actions in a material, tangible way. In practical terms, image-

---

<sup>78</sup> Oberly, “Theories of Media.”

<sup>79</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Image-Movement and Its Three Varieties: Second Commentary about Bergson,” trans. Charles J. Stivale, *SubStance* 13, no. 44–45 (1984): 87.

<sup>80</sup> Deleuze, “Image-Movement and Its Three Varieties”: 87.

action implies interactions between characters and their positions.<sup>81</sup> The last element of Deleuze's image-movement theory is image-affectivity which describes a coincidence of subject and object, and the way a subject perceives and experiences itself from the inside.<sup>82</sup> Image-related affectivity is, therefore, primarily related to emotional experience and occupies the gap in the relationships between image-perception and image-action.

The philosopher also lists examples of how each of these kinds of image-movement is represented in cinema, although he states that no film is ever made of a single kind of image and that editing is a combination of all three.<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, Deleuze argues that a movie always favors one image-movement category over the others, since editing styles can be perceptive, active, or affective. In this light, the movie-related storyworld in *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* correlates to image-perception: Deleuze emphasizes that the long shot corresponds to an image-perception.<sup>84</sup> To that end, Ruscha's *Trademark* activates the totality of the cinematic medium and a way of perceiving this cinematic totality, or *mise-en-scène*, through its very format – a cinematic long shot which, according to Deleuze, functions as image-perception.<sup>85</sup> Deleuze's theory further prompts us to examine the 1962 painting's cinematic quality given that image-perception is one of the most inherently cinematic forms of image-movement due to its ability to represent the subjective perception which frames reality.<sup>86</sup> This implies that *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* further aims to underline the subjective experience of perceiving the film studio logo rather than merely copying reality. In addition, Deleuze explains that an image-perception appears when an image forms a center in the universe of image-

---

<sup>81</sup> Oberly, "Theories of Media."

<sup>82</sup> Deleuze, "Image-Movement and Its Three Varieties": 88.

<sup>83</sup> Deleuze, "Image-Movement and Its Three Varieties": 92.

<sup>84</sup> Deleuze, "Image-Movement and Its Three Varieties": 92.

<sup>85</sup> Deleuze, "Image-Movement and Its Three Varieties": 92.

<sup>86</sup> Oberly, "Theories of Media."

movement; this universe curves inward and the image becomes organized by the surrounding universe.<sup>87</sup> The image-perception then forms a horizon by going from a curvature-shaped universe to the center. This takes on yet another meaning in Ruscha's work since it prominently features a horizon line which can be metaphorically used for explaining the whole storyworld within the painting: the image-movement embodied in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo, which is organized in a horizontal format and separates our vision from the objective reality that is the original onscreen logo and recasting it as the subjective perception of the painted trademark.

In other essays, Deleuze cites Rudolf Arnheim's argument that cinema is not a mere reproduction of physical reality since it is, first and foremost, an art. Arnheim highlights various discrepancies between the filmic image and the perception of physical reality -- such as the fact that the filmic image suffers from a reduction of depth, a distortion of perspective, and an accentuation of perspective overlapping.<sup>88</sup> According to Arnheim's film theory, as explained by Deleuze, "the true task of cinema is to exploit these very 'defects' and turn them into an advantage, just as painting exploits the fact that it is a two-dimensional, enclosed object."<sup>89</sup> This is where Ruscha's *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* becomes singularly effective since the artwork adheres to the media of both painting and film. *Trademark* plays with the representation of reality since it supposedly suggests an unaltered depiction of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox icon. However, the painting reinterprets the logo compositionally since it is depicted in a drastically different setting than the one it appears on screen in the 1960s. Compared with the 1960s film studio logo, it is clear that Ruscha's painting is more of a symbolic than straightforward rendering. This is evident from the fact that the only elements of the onscreen logo that are

---

<sup>87</sup> Deleuze, "Image-Movement and Its Three Varieties": 87.

<sup>88</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "The Film Medium: Image and Sound," in *Film Theory & Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, Seventh Edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 242-43.

<sup>89</sup> Deleuze, "The Film Medium: Image and Sound": 243.

present in the 1962 painting are the font of the lettering, the freely arranged spotlights, and the three-dimensional quality of the logo itself. Lastly, Ruscha's version of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox icon is different from the onscreen trademark because it leaves a tail suggestive of motion as opposed to the static volume of the onscreen 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox emblem.

Another cinematic feature that is present in *Large Trademark* is the distortion of perspective. This distortion is achieved, first and foremost, through the use of diagonals. A diagonal is one of Ruscha's most used compositional devices that also prominently features in *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, as well as other iconic paintings like *Standard Station*, *Hollywood*, as well as his 1980s silhouette paintings. Ruscha in one of his interviews explained that for him diagonals are more of a formal problem or assignment that he takes on: "The diagonal comes out of the idea of motion and speed, as well perspective. When you divide the canvas like that you always have the suggestion of speed and depth."<sup>90</sup> Moreover Ruscha himself explained that the cinematic effect that is produced by the horizontal-landscape format, as in *Large Trademark*, and makes the viewer travel physically from one end of the canvas to the other: "I've been influenced by movies, particularly the panoramic-ness of the wide screen. The wide screen says something about my work."<sup>91</sup> The artist also reflected that most of the proportions of his paintings are affected by the concept of the panorama by saying that he is "a victim of the horizontal line and the landscape."<sup>92</sup> In *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* one can see that the horizon line is low, almost bordering on the painting's frame itself. Regarding this Ruscha notes: "I try to focus on where the sky meets the ground so that you have a stretched-out version, something panoramic – a Panavision format. I find myself always coming back to the horizontal

---

<sup>90</sup> Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal*: 291.

<sup>91</sup> Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal*: 291.

<sup>92</sup> Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal*: 307.

idea.”<sup>93</sup> Horizontality as a format is indeed the prevalent painting format in Ruscha’s art practice, as seen from multiple *Trademark* and *Hollywood* paintings, and it is simultaneously a feature that connects his art to the cinematic medium which inherently, at least since the 1960s’ widespread establishment of CinemaScope, follows the horizontal format.

Lastly, Deleuze discusses the meaning of cinema’s aesthetic possibilities and whether they can be simply defined by the physical or technical properties of the filmic medium. Here, he refers to an American philosopher Stanley Cavell who, unlike other film theorists, emphasizes that a medium is merely a means of expression and an articulation of certain ideas. Deleuze restates Cavell’s point of view that only art itself, regardless of the specific medium, can define its own aesthetic possibilities. This, in turn, further emphasizes the cinematic quality of Ed Ruscha’s *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* which utilizes the aesthetic qualities of cinema while remaining a still, two-dimensional oil painting. In his essay “Photograph and Screen” from the book *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1971), Cavell dwells on the specific dilemma of what is the exact semantic difference between a painting, a photograph, and a moving image, that is, film.<sup>94</sup> According to the philosopher, the main difference lies in that a painting does not have a continuous world outside of its frame since the frame acts as its very limit. Unlike a painting that creates a world within itself, the photograph is a picture of a world since it crops preexisting reality to a certain limit rather than creating it from scratch, as painting does. Photography chooses a portion of the world it aims to represent, as does cinema by means of cutting, masking, and enlarging from an indefinitely larger field, leaving other parts of the world cut out from the image. Ruscha’s *Trademark* thus acts as an intermediary between the

---

<sup>93</sup> Ruscha, *Leave Any Information at the Signal*: 307.

<sup>94</sup> Stanley Cavell, “Photograph and Screen (from *The World Viewed*),” in *Film Theory & Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, Seventh Edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 304–5.

worlds of painting, cinema, and photography because, as in this 1962 oil painting, it creates a cinema-themed storyworld within its frame while alluding to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox's storyworld that the audience is used to seeing in front of them, onscreen. Therefore, *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, in Cavell's terms, suggests a world existing beyond its frame by using the aesthetic properties of a cinematic medium.

The primary difference between a photograph, a painting, and a moving image is that the latter exists on a screen in a projected form, states Cavell. Gilles Deleuze also cites Gerald Mast who proposes that what is distinctively cinematic is the projection of images onto a screen through the use of light, which makes film drastically different from theater, television, and painting. Ruscha similarly exploits this in so far as his painting literally recalls the projected image: it follows the large-scale, horizontal format and depicts light sources (features characteristic of projections and moving images in general), while still emphasizing the flatness inherent to the medium of painting. However, the difference between film's projected image and a two-dimensional painting is that cinema, according to Cavell, being the projected image of cinema is the image of the world, and of a world that exists beyond the frame. Ruscha's *Trademark*, however confined within the medium of painting, also reproduces the world – but one evocative of the filmic medium. Therefore, in the case of this 1962 oil painting, the filmic medium acts as the storyworld in and of itself by alluding to cinema in terms of form and subject matter.

Yet another important aspect that connects the realms of painting and film in Ruscha's *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* is the concept of reality. In Deleuze's philosophical worldview, "filmic reality means ways of perceptually defining what reality has the possibility to

be.”<sup>95</sup> Unlike other philosophers and film theorists, he argues that natural and cinematographic perceptions construct reality in the same way since, Deleuze continues, the cinema and our faculties create or synthesize reality identically.<sup>96</sup> This, in turns, means that reality and cinematic reality are equally valid in their own rights. Deleuze further argues that cinema is not just an example of perception but a demonstration of a superior perception since a camera-projector provides a more accomplished version of reality than humans are capable of perceiving.<sup>97</sup> This relates to Deleuze’s theory of image-movement and particularly of image-perception that, this thesis argues, *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* embodies. Furthermore, Deleuze’s views on reality contradict other film theorists such as Cavell, for whom cinema crops a certain part of reality while leaving out the rest of the world outside of the image. Deleuze, instead, claims that cinema produces reality, that cinema is not a mere copy or illusion.<sup>98</sup> Further, for Deleuze, cinematic images are reality, even if a culturally constructed one.<sup>99</sup> The philosopher describes image-movement as an “organic” regime where “the real that is assumed is recognizable” and for which: “It is clear that this system includes the unreal ... but as contrast.”<sup>100</sup> This, in turn, means that there is a contrast between the real and the unreal within the image-movement.<sup>101</sup>

This Deleuzian contrast is what explains *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*’ union of cinematic reality and deadpan aesthetics. The oil painting deals thus with the double-edged representation of reality. First of all, Ruscha’s painting allegiance with the deadpan presents an objective and factual visual record of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo and endows it with a high level

---

<sup>95</sup> Richard Rushton, “Cinema Produces Reality,” in *The Reality of Film: Theories of Filmic Reality* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011): 128.

<sup>96</sup> Rushton, “Cinema Produces Reality”: 129.

<sup>97</sup> Rushton, “Cinema Produces Reality”: 129.

<sup>98</sup> Rushton, “Cinema Produces Reality”: 130.

<sup>99</sup> Rushton, “Cinema Produces Reality”: 131.

<sup>100</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Athlone, 1989): 126-27.

<sup>101</sup> Rushton, “Cinema Produces Reality”: 131.

of naturalism and verisimilitude. With the deadpan's absence of affect and emotional input, the focus is thus put on objectivity which, in turn, is conceptually connected to cinematic reality.<sup>102</sup> Since Ruscha's painting possesses a certain deaestheticized quality, inherent in the deadpan, in its overall style as well as the representation of movement, it seems to formally adopt and represent the reality of Deleuzian image-movement. At the same time, *Large Trademark* displays a dichotomy between image-movement's the real and the unreal by virtue of depicting movement and being immovable at the same time. Since, according to Deleuze, image-movement presents reality only when the subject matter is in movement, *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* represents cinema's the real and the unreal at the same time. On the hand, it does depict the movement through the 20th Century Fox logo with the tail leaves it leaves in motion while protruding from the distance and the movement of spotlights themselves. On the other, the *Trademark* painting is a two-dimensional, static image that uses its medium's inherent illusionism to convey movement, even if a cinematic one.

This conceptual contradiction is deeply rooted in deadpan aesthetics since the painting presents a sort of formal documentation of the trademark in motion in an emotionless and affectless way. What is more, the Bechers, the deadpan aesthetic photographers who were famous for their grid-like systems formed out of multiple photographs they referred to as "typologies" also produced what they called a "development" – a series in which one particular individual structure is presented in a sequence of rotating views.<sup>103</sup> The focus of "developments" was put on the singularity of each edifice which ultimately channels Ruscha's systematic exploration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox logo that he depicted in at least six known versions. The

---

<sup>102</sup> Lančarič, "The Theoretical and Philosophical Basis of the Deadpan Aesthetics": 108.

<sup>103</sup> Hal Foster et al., eds., *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, Third Edition (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016): 597.

“developmental” quality of the deadpan aesthetic that is shared between Bechers and Ruscha also alludes to movement and the world existing beyond the image depicted, be it a photograph, a painting, or a cinematic shot. What is more, deadpan aesthetics exemplifies in *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, similarly to the Bechers’ photography, alter the ontological realism of the medium of painting into a basis of an artistic nature.<sup>104</sup> *Large Trademark*’s alleged documental and forensic quality allowed Ruscha to distance himself from the subject in a typically deadpan manner which, combined with the absence of affect, creates an impression of reflecting on the world from an objective point of view. The painting creates further dichotomy not just between movement and stillness, the real and the unreal, but also between documentary realism and artistic manipulation of the film studio logo that itself was originally designed by means of visual and digital arts. This exact sensibility enables *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* to enter Deleuze’s cinematic reality by putting the film-themed world within the 1962 oil painting on par with the realities that exist in the world out there as they do in cinema.

---

<sup>104</sup> Lančarič, “The Theoretical and Philosophical Basis of the Deadpan Aesthetics”: 114.

## 5. Conclusion

Whereas deadpan aesthetics have been discussed almost exclusively in connection to the artist's photographic books, Hollywood as both the cinema, a cultural phenomenon, and the film industry has always been seen as an interweaving setting for Ed Ruscha's personal and artistic sensibilities. This thesis unites the deadpan and the cinematic, two concepts associated with Ruscha, to understand *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*.

Therefore, unlike most literature that discusses Ruscha, this thesis attempts to find the connection between film and deadpan aesthetics in Ruscha's art using his 1962 oil painting *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* as a case study. This thesis demonstrates an overarching deadpan quality in Ruscha's art, and not just in his photographic books. This research analyzed *Trademark* through the prism of one of the main film theorists Gilles Deleuze, specifically through his image-movement theory. This thesis hopes to have demonstrated how two concepts associated with Ed Ruscha, namely deadpan aesthetics and cinema are inextricable in his *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*.

## Bibliography

- Allan, Ken D. "Ed Ruscha, Pop Art, and Spectatorship in 1960s Los Angeles." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 3 (September 2010): 231–49.
- Alloway, Lawrence. "Artists and Photographs." *Studio International* 179, no. 921 (April 1970): 162–64.
- Boaden, James. "Ed Ruscha: London." *The Burlington Magazine* 152, no. 1282 (January 2010): 54–55.
- Cavell, Stanley. "Photograph and Screen (from *The World Viewed*)." In *Film Theory & Criticism*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, Seventh Edition., 304–5. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Cotton, Charlotte. "Deadpan." In *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, 81–113. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. London: Athlone, 1989.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Image-Movement and Its Three Varieties: Second Commentary about Bergson." Translated by Charles J. Stivale. *SubStance* 13, no. 44–45 (1984): 81–95.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3684776>.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "The Film Medium: Image and Sound." In *Film Theory & Criticism*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, Seventh Edition., 241–45. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Elder, R. Bruce. "The Structural Film: Ruptures Amd Continuities in Avant-Garde Art." In *Neo-Avant-Garde*, edited by David Hopkins, 20: 119–42. Avant-Garde Critical Studies. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006.
- Foster, Hal, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, and David Joselit, eds. *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. Third Edition. London: Thames & Hudson, 2016.
- Garland, Sarah. "Picturing Distance: Ed Ruscha's Los Angeles Photobooks." *Journal of American Studies* 54, no. 3 (July 2020): 470–91. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875819000975>.
- Hatch, Kevin. "'Something Else': Ed Ruscha's Photographic Books." *October* 111 (Winter 2005): 107–26.
- James, David E. "Artists as Filmmakers in Los Angeles." *October* 112 (Spring 2005): 111–27.
- Lančarič, Peter. "The Theoretical and Philosophical Basis of the Deadpan Aesthetics." *European Journal of Science and Theology* 13, no. 6 (2017): 107–18.
- Oberly, Nick. "Theories of Media." The University of Chicago, Winter 2003. <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/annotations/deleuzemovement.htm>.
- Pasquariello, Lisa. "Ed Ruscha and the Language That He Used." *October* 111 (Winter 2005): 81–106.
- Pindell, Howardena. "Words with Ruscha." *The Print Collector's Newsletter* 3, no. 6 (February 1973): 125–28.
- Podalsky, Laura. "The Aesthetics of Detachment." *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 20, no. Affect, Bodies, and Circulstions in Contemporary Latin American Film (2016): 237–54.
- Quick, Jennifer. "Pasteup Pictures: Ed Ruscha's 'Every Building on the Sunset Strip.'" *The Art Bulletin* 100, no. 2 (June 2018): 125–52.

- Reynolds, Matt. "Ed Ruscha's Moving Pictures." In *Alternative Perspectives: Experimental Film in Los Angeles, 1945-1980*, edited by David E. James and Adam Hyman, 187–202. New Barnet, Herts.: John Libbey Publishing Ltd., 2015. [https://www.jstor-  
org/jcu.idm.oclc.org/stable/j.ctt16gz99w.28?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/jcu.idm.oclc.org/stable/j.ctt16gz99w.28?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).
- Richards, Mary. *Ed Ruscha*. London: Tate Publishing, 2008.
- Rugoff, Ralph. *Scene of the Crime*. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1997.
- Ruscha, Ed. *Leave Any Information at the Signal*. Edited by Alexandra Schwartz. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2002.
- Rushton, Richard. "Cinema Produces Reality." In *The Reality of Film: Theories of Filmic Reality*, 126–47. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155j85v.10>.
- Salvesen, Britt. "Ruscha and Film." *Unframed - LACMA* (blog), January 15, 2013. <https://unframed.lacma.org/2013/01/15/ruscha-and-film>.
- Schwartz, Alexandra. "An End in Itself: Ed Ruscha's Ribbon Word Drawings." In *Ed Ruscha: Ribbon Words*, 17–21. New York: Edward Tyler Nahem, 2016.
- Schwartz, Alexandra. "'Second City': Ed Ruscha and the Reception of Los Angeles Pop." *October* 111 (Winter 2005): 23–43.
- Sikov, Ed. *Film Studies: An Introduction*. Second Edition. Film and Culture. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020.
- Silberman, Robert. "Ed Ruscha and the Great American West: San Francisco." *The Burlington Magazine* 158, no. 1363 (October 2016): 853–54.
- Steinberg, Monica. "Incongruent Humor, Labor, and Public Fame in Postwar Los Angeles." *Archives of American Art Journal* 53, no. 1/2 (Spring 2014): 4–29.

Tomkins, Calvin. “Ed Ruscha’s L.A.” *The New Yorker*, June 24, 2013.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/07/01/ed-ruscha-l-a>.

Vinegar, Aron. “Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography.” *Art History* 32, no. 5 (2009):

852–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.2009.00708.x>.

Tate. “Who Are Hilla and Bernd Becher?,” [https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/bernd-becher-and-hilla-](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/bernd-becher-and-hilla-becher-718/who-are-bechers)

[becher-718/who-are-bechers](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/bernd-becher-and-hilla-becher-718/who-are-bechers).

## Appendix 1



Figure 1: Ed Ruscha, *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, 1962, oil, house paint, ink, and graphite pencil on canvas, 170 × 338.1 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art (New York).



Figure 2: Ed Ruscha, *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas*, 1963, Hood Museum of Art – Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH).



Figure 3: Ed Ruscha, *Hollywood*, 1968, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles).



Figure 4: Ed Ruscha, *Three Murders*, 1981.

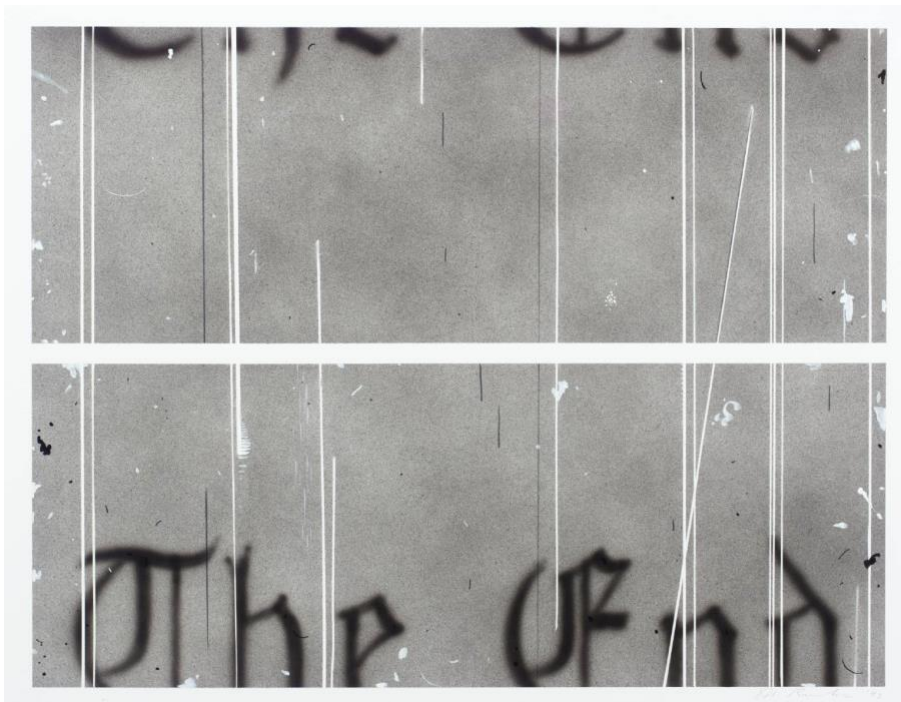


Figure 5: Ed Ruscha, *The End #1*, 1993, Tate (London).



Figure 6: Ed Ruscha, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966, Princeton University Art Museum (Princeton, NJ).

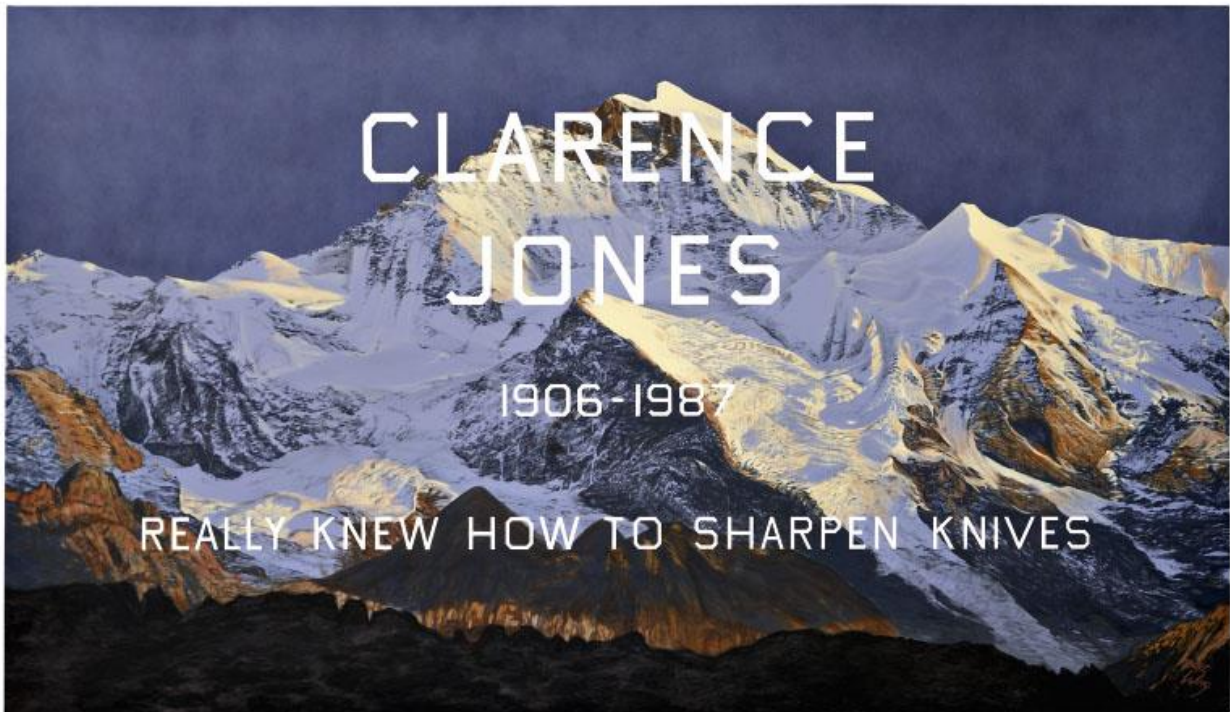


Figure 7: Ed Ruscha, *Clarence Jones*, 2001.



Figure 8: Ed Ruscha, *A Fistful of Aliens*, 1986.