

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Learning from Las Vegas is one of the seminal work of architecture literature that sits proudly on the shelves of every post-graduate student since its first edition in 1971. Since then, in a very Vegas-like reification of the sign, the object of the book in itself has become an icon with its very recognizable blue cover.

But as often, this work has changed a lot over its long process of writing, editing and publishing. Both in its visual styling and in its written tone. As we approach the 50th anniversary of this classic, we dove deep in Venturi & Scott-Brown's archive to present to you (an approximation of) the original pages of the book.

The texts and the drawings were drafted every evening by the two Yale professors in their hotel room in the Stardust. This is powerful material, raw from any of the formal academisation that their student, Steven Izenour, has brought in latter drafts.

We believe that this is the closest to the essence of Learning from Las Vegas and should then be seen as the ultimate edition of the book.

1.

Taking pictures of Parking Lots or Learning from Las Vegas

This is fall 68. We are currently going 15 mph above the speed limit on the road 93 in a rented black Cadillac with a Kodak 35mm camera strapped on the hood. My wife Denise, normally seated next to me, has half of her body out of the window, trying to take somehow not too blurry pictures of the billboards we pass along the way. On the backseats of the car, three students of ours are still trying to make sense of what's going on.

We were headed straight to Vegas, on a trip completey funded by Yales, in order to take pictures of the casinos and their parking lots. Nothing made sense. The school booked us rooms in the Stardust, one of the finest establishments of the city. Tomorrow, we were to meet Playboy Magazine owner and sex guru Hugh Hefner to make sure he was still lending us his personal helicopter to take aerial pictures of the parking lots that cover the Nevada desert.



Student setting up the camera on the car

3.

Photographs of Casinos and the Proletarian Revolution in Yale.

The plan was fairly simple. We were to take our 9 students on this trip to Vegas in order to document the architecture of the Strip, the main road that crosses Vegas and leads to all the casinos and hotels. We left Reno yesterday with a very precise protocol set up. First a picture of the sign from the road, then one of the parking lot as we left the car and finally as many as felt necessary inside the casinos. We were looking for a pattern, an order in this seemingly random chaos.

«You know you can't take pictures inside the casinos right prof?»

What? Who said that? I turned around to see the three student that got to ride the Cadillac with us. One of them was slightly bent forward with a concerned look on its face.

«You know that? They won't let us in with the big camera...»

Fuck. I didn't think of that at all. Of course the bastards wouldn't let twelve weirdos with a camera and no obvious will to spend any dime in their lair.

I turned to Denise.

«We'll sneak in then» she responded very calmly, her head still outside the window.

«What?»

«I mean of course we won't be able to hide the Kodak under our jacket but the small Nikons will do. Come on Bob, they don't search you you know».

The three students snickered in the backseat.

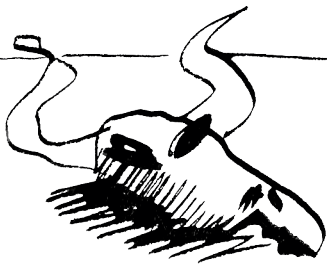
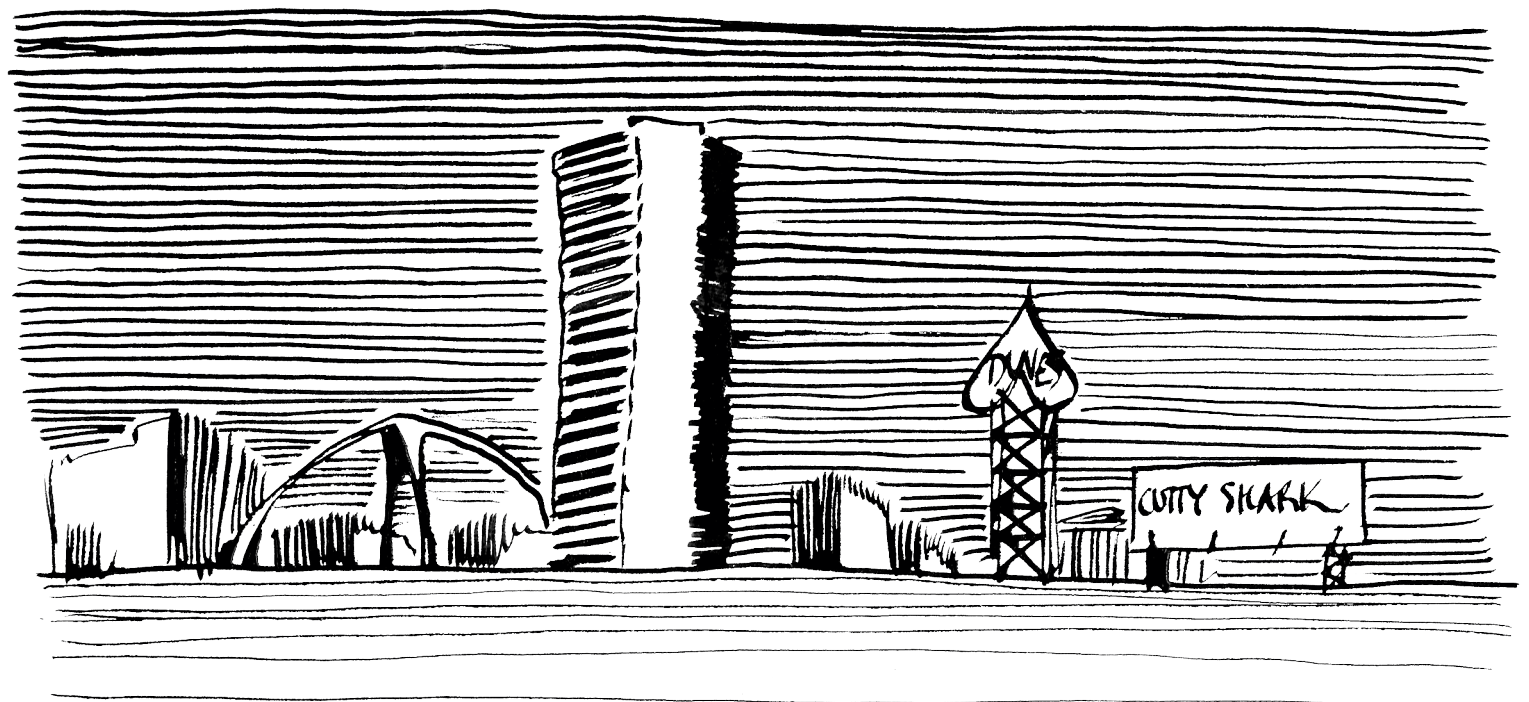
«Haha yeah of course...». I was turning red. This wasn't in the plan.

«Or maybe we could ask for special permission if we explain that we are doing an academical work here?»

«Bob, don't be a god damn narc already okay, this isn't Rome» Denise snapped.

«Yeah prof, the proletarian locomotive don't ask for permission, nor forgiveness» added one student that kept quiet until now.

«The what now?»



View of the Strip from the desert

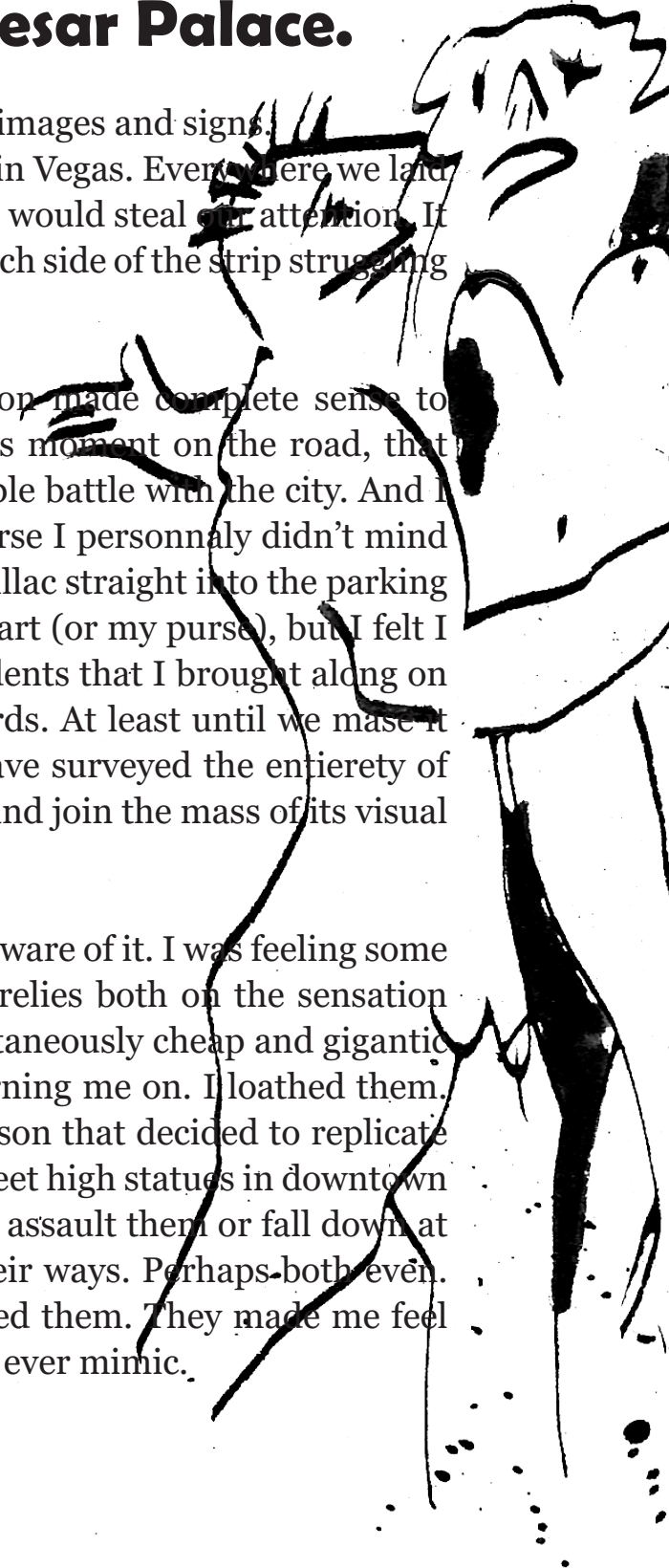
5.

The War of the Words ... And How we got trapped in Caesar Palace.

We were drunk. Drunk on words, images and signs. There was no resting space for our eyes in Vegas. Everywhere we laid our sight, aggressive blinking lightbulbs would steal our attention. It was like the city was at war with itself, each side of the strip struggling to conquer us, to leer us in its traps.

This military strategy comparison made complete sense to me. It seemed painfully obvious, at this moment on the road, that we had unknowingly engaged in a terrible battle with the city. And I couldn't foresee who would win. Of course I personally didn't mind losing control and driving the black cadillac straight into the parking lot of the winner of the battle for my heart (or my purse), but I felt I had a moral obligation towards my students that I brought along on this trip. We had to fight off the billboards. At least until we made it to the outskirts of the city. Once we'd have surveyed the entirety of the Strip, perhaps then we could let go and join the mass of its visual victims.

We were drunk but we were fully aware of it. I was feeling some unique kind of pictorial high, one that relies both on the sensation and its own acknowledgment. The simultaneously cheap and gigantic brass statues of naked romans were turning me on. I loathed them. If I could laid my hands on the one person that decided to replicate the rapt of the Sabines with neon lit 12 feet high statues in downtown Vegas, I didn't know if I would savagely assault them or fall down at their feet and beg them to teach me their ways. Perhaps both even. I loved these statues. I loved that I hated them. They made me feel things like no white concrete post could ever mimic.

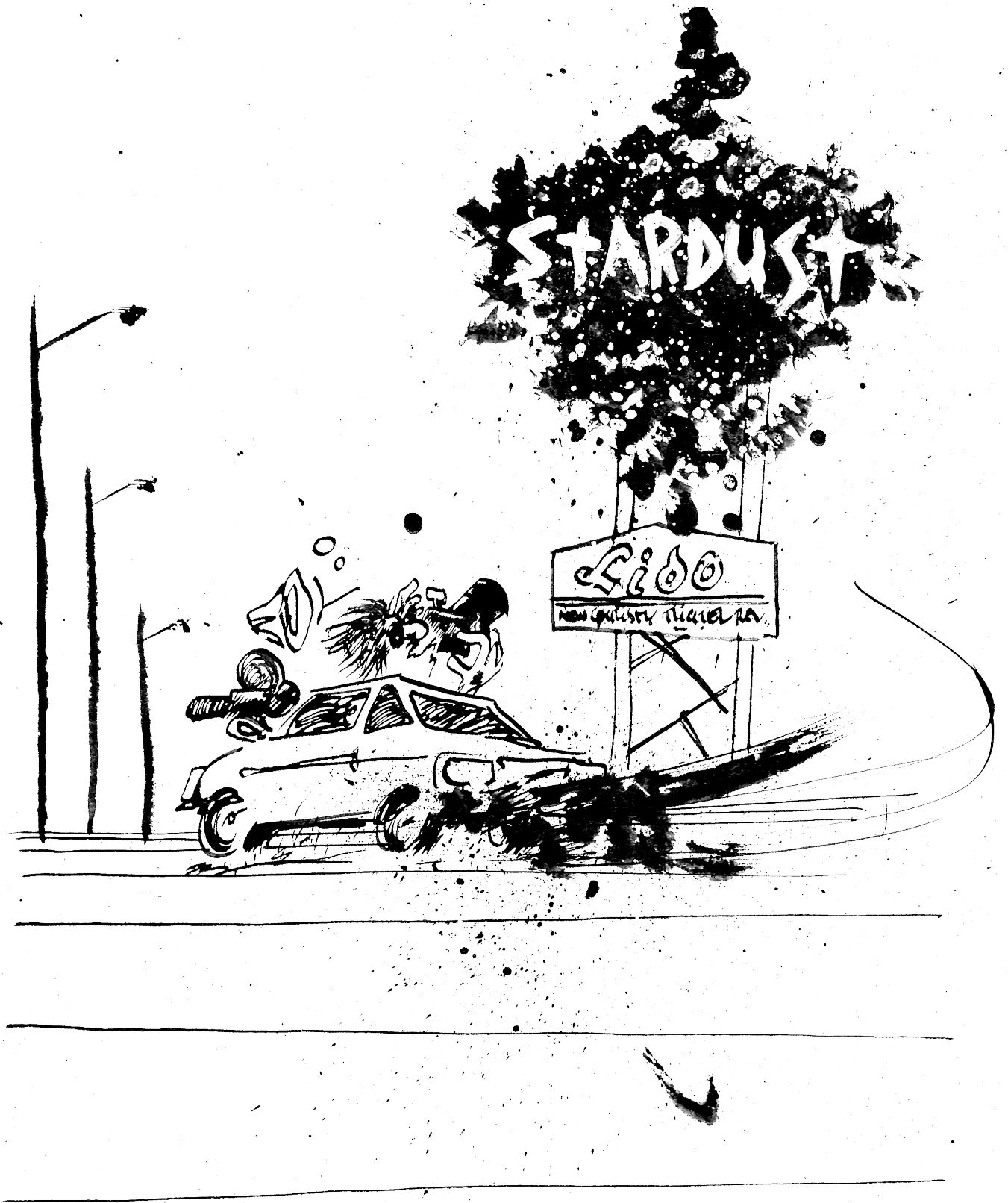


Sprague



ANDY WILLIAMS
LENNON SISTERS

on the Casuarina Palace



Stardust's luncheon

8.

Anatomy of a Billboard ... White Lies and Light Bursts

We were driving on the Strip for what seemed to be the 30th day of a year round exploration mission in a foreign land. But it was actually wednesday and we were in Las Vegas since this very monday. Something here was making the time flow very weirdly. We couldn't grasp it. The constant lighting didn't help. There isn't really day and night in Vegas in the traditional sense of presence or absence of light. What changed between 8 AM or 8 PM was the origin of it. At night the signs and the facades of the buildings lit up, covered in thousands of colorized lightbulbs.

Denise started counting and describing every sign that we came across. Perhaps it was to replicate the passing of time. Here only the passing of miles seemed to matter. The road was our timeline and each sign was a second. No time, just space.

«Alladin Hotel and Casino» she stated while taking notes almost aimlessly «tripartite, with a fat lamp on top»

«If the big ass Aladdin letter weren't enough» I muttered

«They aren't, that's why they are repeated three times»

«Right»

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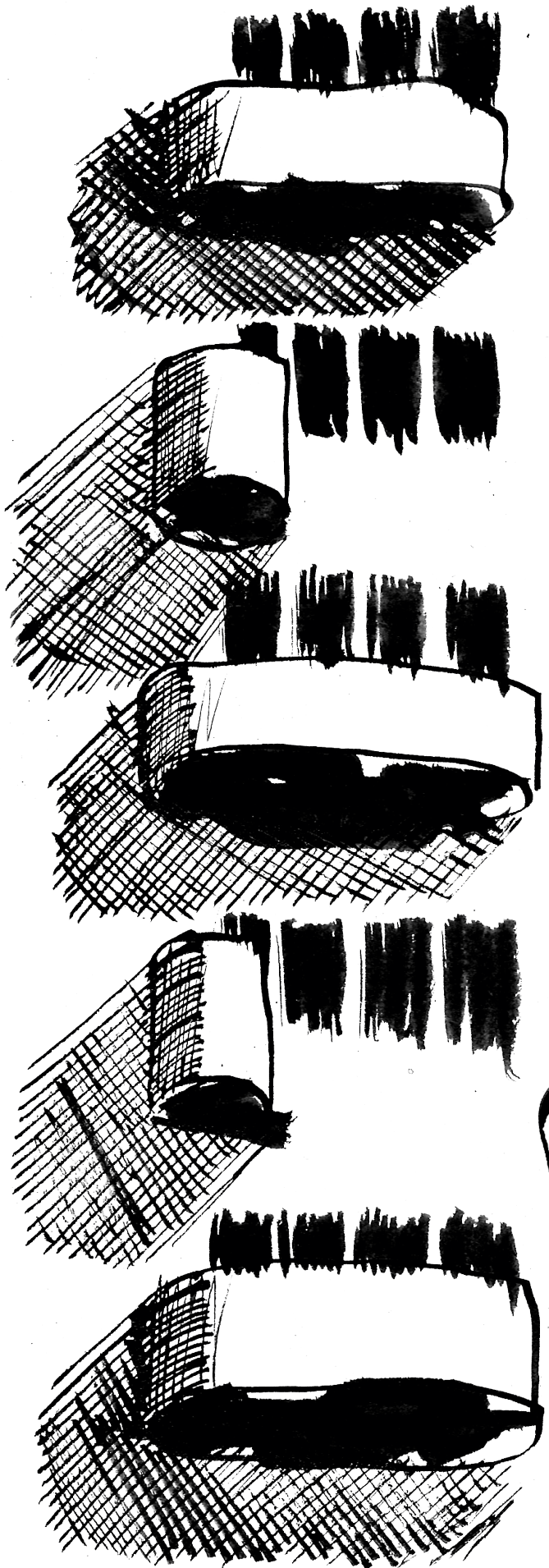
«Stardust Hotel, Some cloud of stars, almost ottoman in its design»

«Lido ? I wish that's short for Lidocaïne, I could use some right now»

«Focus on the sign, I can't make out what the program of tonight's show is»

«Yeah I don't think they really care whether you do or not. The thing is no one goes to a casino in order to watch a show. You happen to stumble upon some performers there, you never do it intentionnaly.»

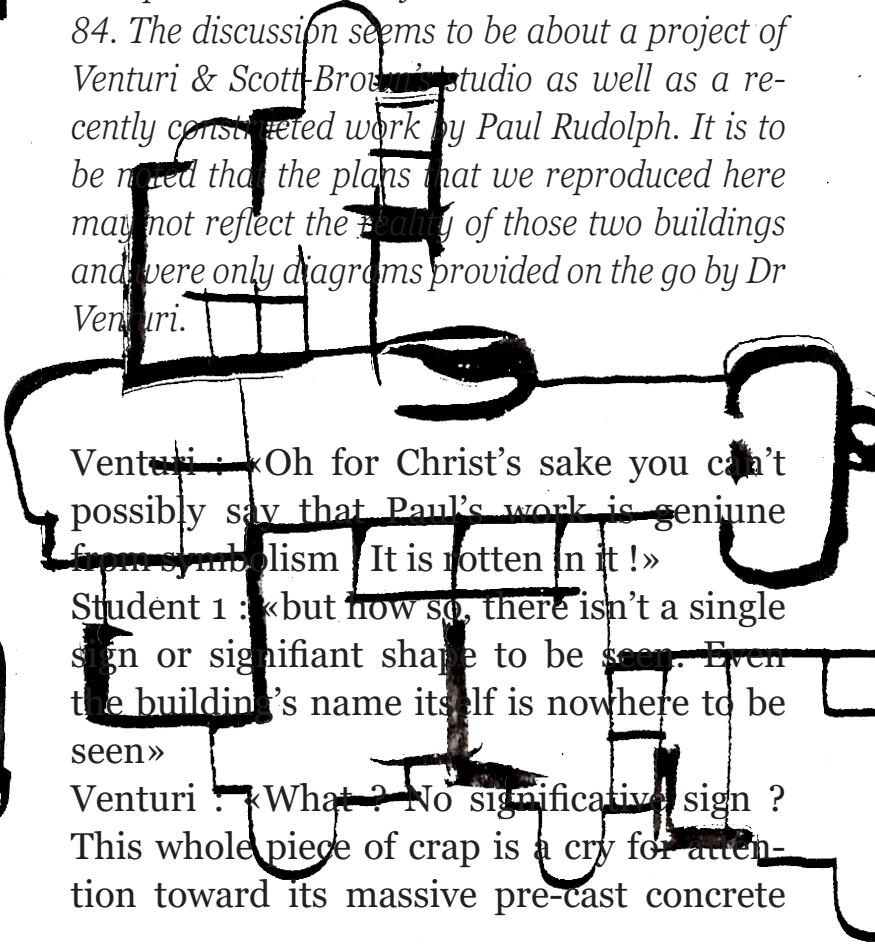
« People go the the Stardust for the Stardust, that's the only information they need to get while in their cars.» Denise noted.



3. A Truly Ugly Architecture and a Fiercely Heroic One

EDITOR'S NOTE :

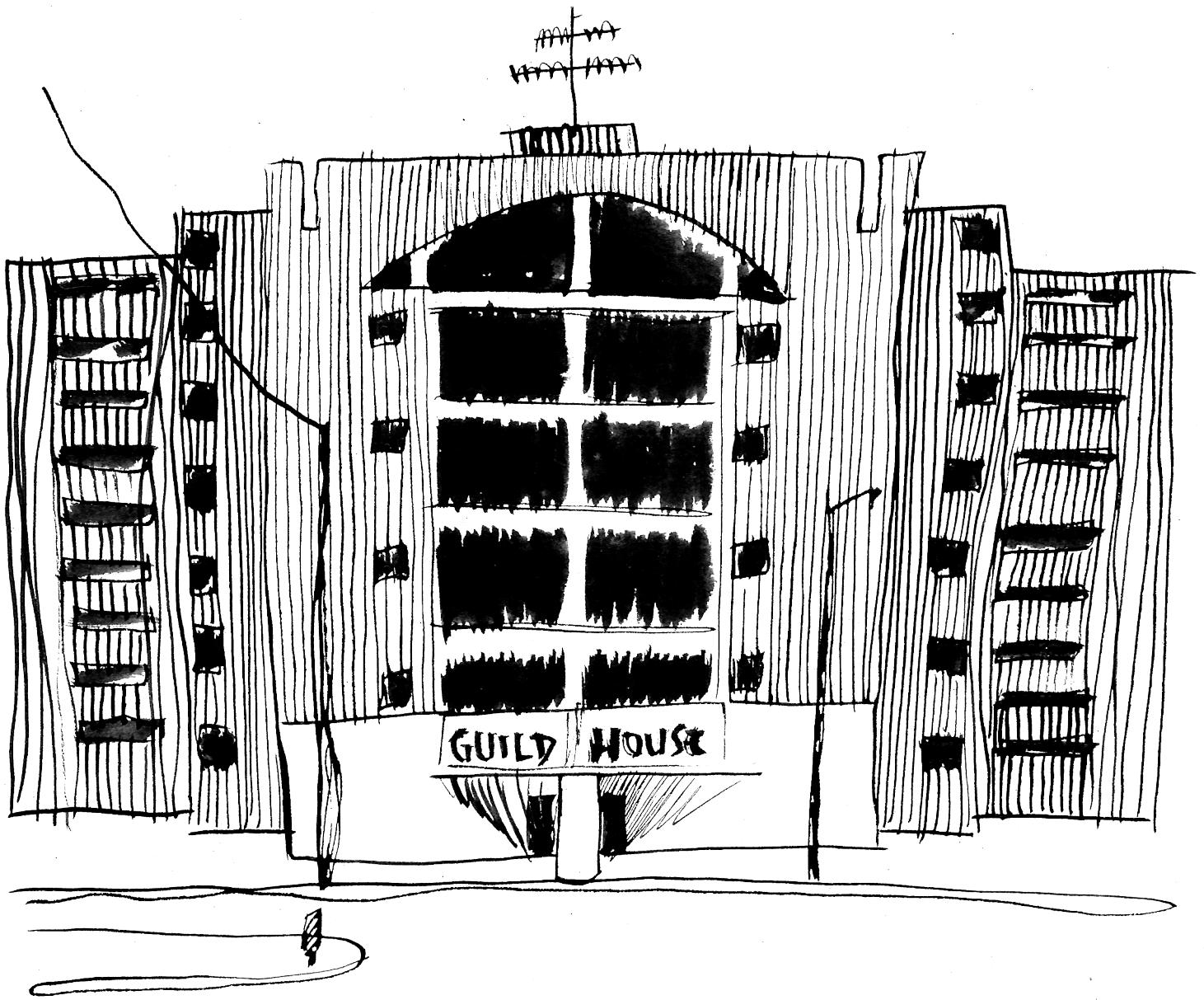
At this point in the chronology, Dr. Venturi appears to have broken down completely ; the original manuscript is so splintered we were forced to seek out the original tape recording and transcribe it verbatim. According to the tape, this section follows an episode involving Venturi, Scott-Brown and a few of their students at a diner in North Vegas. Given the drawings that were made at that time on paper napkins we concluded the scene took place at a table of the Red Lobster on road 84. The discussion seems to be about a project of Venturi & Scott-Brown's studio as well as a recently constructed work by Paul Rudolph. It is to be noted that the plans that we reproduced here may not reflect the reality of those two buildings and were only diagrams provided on the go by Dr Venturi.



Venturi : «Oh for Christ's sake you can't possibly say that Paul's work is genuine from symbolism ! It is rotten in it !»

Student 1 : «but now so, there isn't a single sign or signifiant shape to be seen. Even the building's name itself is nowhere to be seen»

Venturi : «What ? No signficative sign ? This whole piece of crap is a cry for attention toward its massive pre-cast concrete

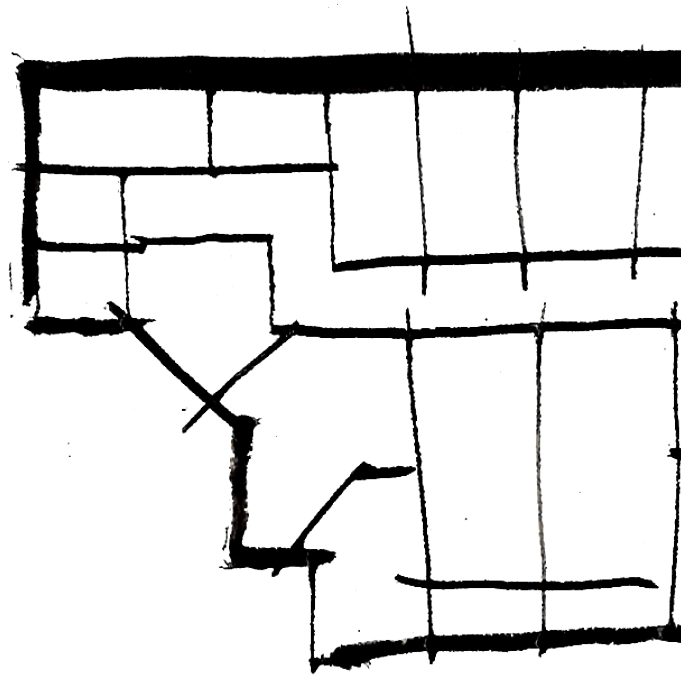


structure. The building is basically an add for their cement contractor.

Scott-Brown : «I think what Robert is trying to say is that not only ionic columns and golden letters are to be considered signs. Visible masonry joints on an otherwise flush concrete structure are ones for instance.»

Venturi : «Our signs are denotative ones, they are pure, they are obvious, hell even obnoxious perhaps, but they don't pretend to be genuine or new. They are old, dated, ugly and unwelcomed !»

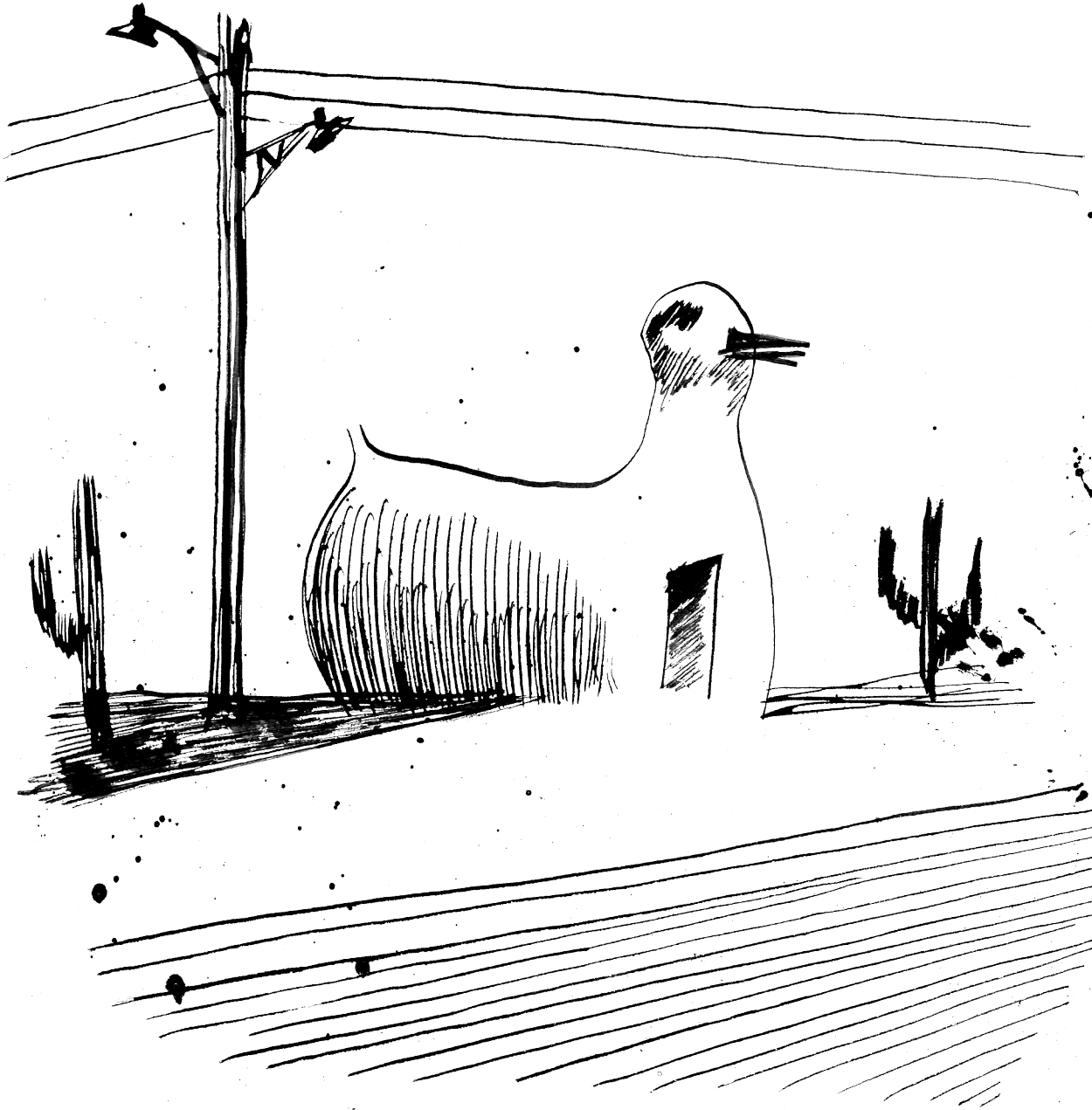
Student 2 : «And that's good because... ?»



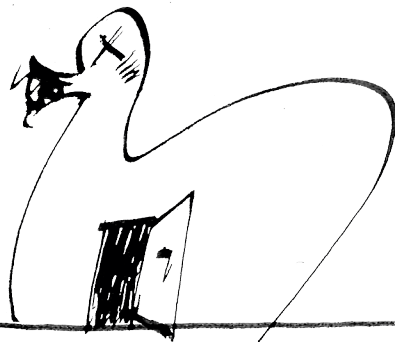
Guild House



the haunted road



Hot
drum!



the duck

6.

Finding a Monument by Buying Shitty Memorabilia

«Fuck space» Denise screamed in promptedly.
«Say what now ?» I was a bit suprised (it was only 5 PM and we were still relatively sober, at least not drunk enough to suddenly insult the three dimensional world altogether.

«We gave space too much importance».

She sounded just like those weird hobbos outside of the general store that speak gibberish with an accent in their voice that makes you believe that if you paid enough attention to their nonsense you might find some nugget of truth in it.

«There are two words in this sentence that need a bit of explaining before i can weight in on the subject.» I started to answer «Who's we and what's space ?»

«Fuck space» she just muttered.

I left her to that. I mean I kinda felt the same way driving our cadillac through the desert toward Reno Fuck space.

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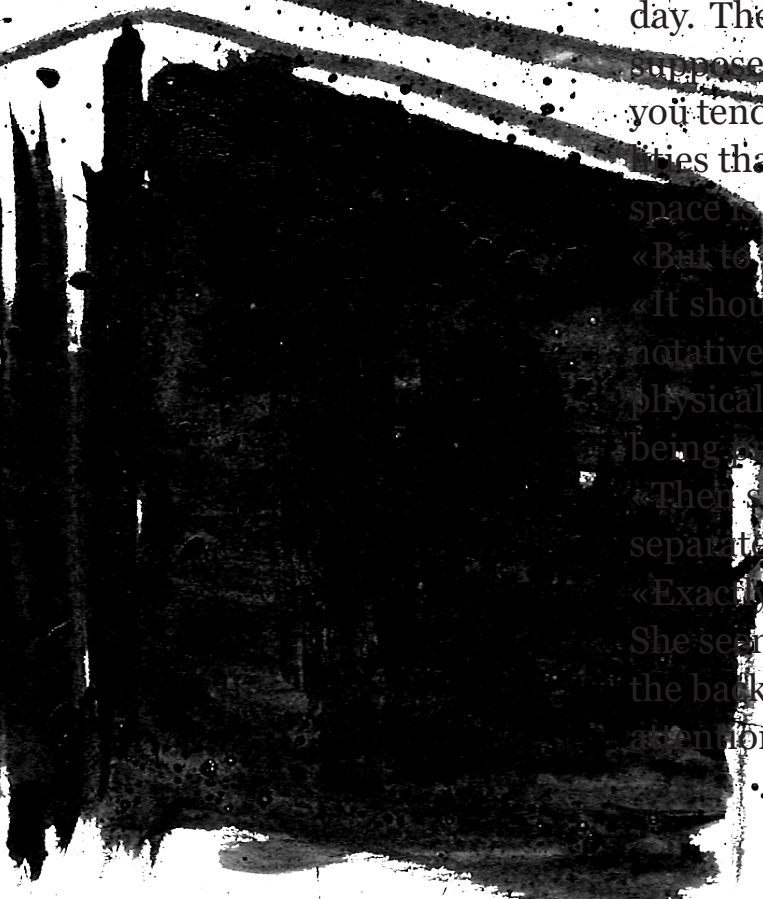
A few miles later, she reclined on her seat and turned toward me and simply added :

«It's just, you know, architecture is so much more than just space.»

«Right»

Recommendation par

MONUMENT



«It's also language, signs, colors, materials»

«Yes»

«But now it's just space. No one cares about painting and sculptures anymore». She seemed clearly upset about this whole space situation so I just let her go on with her thoughts. Visibly she had spent the last miles outside of Vegas sewing everything together in a seemingly incoherent speech.

«It seems like space is the alpha and the omega today. The goal and the mean of architecture. You're supposed to produce space and to qualify this space, you tend to mimic some older space who has the qualities that you want to invoke in your new space. So space is both the signifier and the signified.»

«But to do so it must become two then right?»

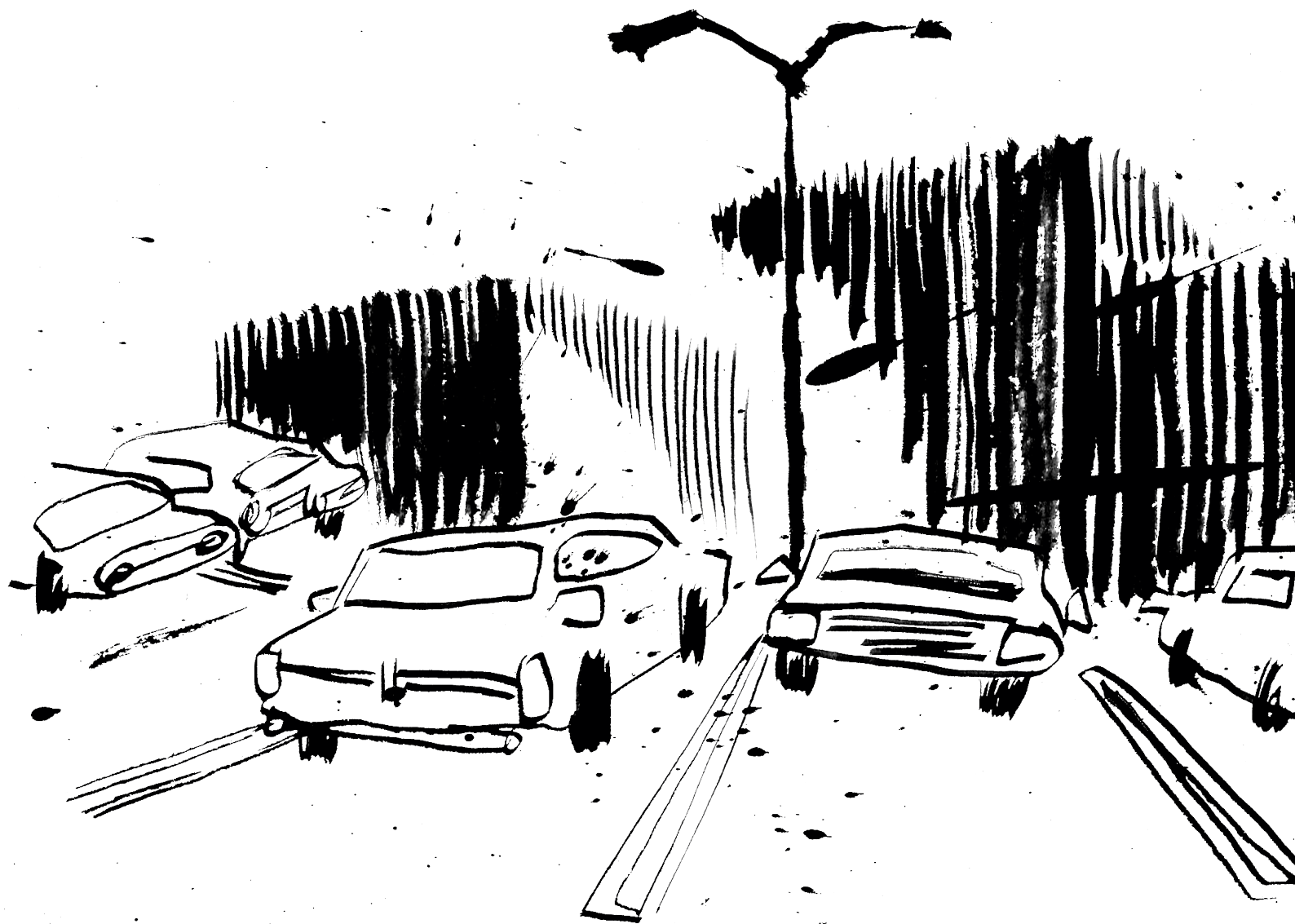
«It should but it doesn't. Space cannot be only denotative because it is always spatialized and thus physically present. It cannot simply express without being present.»

«Then space isn't a good signifier because it can't be separated from the thing it signifies since it is itself.»

«Exactly.»

She seemed ecstatic that I was finally catching on. At the back of the car, our students were starting to pay attention to what was happening in the front row.

in monument



Parkly lot of x submission megastore

8.

It's All About the Cars Isn't It ?

As we were driving toward the car rental to return our Cadillac since this was the last day of the trip, a very saddening thought took over my mind.

«Denise, I am afraid that Corb would have hated our Cadillac.»
She seemed upset about this revelation.

«Why ?»

«I don't know, but I don't think he would have liked it. It's too common and at the same time too vulgar. It's not a proper *machine à conduire* because it has so much superficial decoration on it.»

«Yeah that's kinda the point»

«I know, but I feel like he would judge us»

«I don't think Corb really liked cars, I think he liked the Car with a capital C you know.»

«The idea of the car»

«The space of the car»

We laughed.

At the back, our students sighed and put their walkmen headset on again. No insightful teaching today, only two white middle-class teachers already mourning the loss of their rental cars.

«Nixonians» one of them whispered.

