

# Cultural Daily

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## “Los Angeles Plays Itself,” 2

John Bailey · Thursday, August 25th, 2011

America’s greatest cities often have monikers: “The Big Apple,” “Mile High City,” “Baghdad by the Bay,” “Big D,” “The Windy City,” “Gateway to the West,” “The Big Easy.” Most of these are booster-ish. And what about Los Angeles? “LaLa Land,” “Lotus Land,” “Tinseltown,” (allowing for the city’s conflation with its dominant industry). Only one such name for Los Angeles, which casts a nod toward its Hispanic origins, “The City of the Angels,” seems exempt from condescension; but in the movies, the pervasive attitude toward Los Angeles is one of sour self-loathing.

Perhaps this dark vision of Los Angeles reflects the simple fact that it’s at the end of the highway west, Route 66’s dead end of dreams at Ocean Avenue, overlooking the beach below its cliffs, a psychic terminus kept vibrant by moving toward the retreating rainbow of illusion that finally sinks into the horizon of the Pacific: the palisades of Santa Monica as the cliffs of dashed dreams. What better revenge for filmmakers than to destroy, at least on celluloid, the city that causes such despair?

It is said that Los Angeles is the city that creates many pop culture trends before the rest of the country. It is also the city that seems to have such a low boiling point of its masscult image that it positively delights in its own cinematic immolation. Maybe, Los Angeles filmmakers relish this destruction because, as Thom Andersen says, it is simply “there,” the most readily available piece of urban geography, easy to exploit, as it has been since the 20th century’s early decades....

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