



MONTAGE

“The Rubbishes of Life”: Entropy in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* and the Work of Ed Ruscha

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It’s my view of the world. And it might be slightly pessimistic, but even so, they’re like exercises for me. I see the change in things even more now...I’m as interested in some of the less obvious things.

-Ed Ruscha¹

The people who were in that all-night movie were the end. Beat Negroes who’d come up from Alabama to work in car factories on a rumor; old white bums; young longhaired hipsters who’d reached the end of the road and were drinking wine; whores, ordinary couples, and housewives with nothing to do, nowhere to go, nobody to believe in. If you sifted all Detroit in a wire basket the beater solid core of dregs couldn’t be better gathered.

-Sal Paradise²

Inspired by Beat culture and the romanticism of Jack Kerouac’s travels across North America, the artist Ed Ruscha hitchhiked from Oklahoma City to Los Angeles in August of 1956, where he took up residency.³ Citing the influence of the narrator’s peripatetic cross-country jaunts, Ruscha traversed and chronicled in photographs his trips to and from Oklahoma. Recently, Gagosian Gallery has published Ruscha’s book, *On the Road: An Artist Book of the Classic Novel by Jack Kerouac* (2009); therein the artist combines Kerouac’s original writing with photographs that were commissioned, appropriated, or taken by Ruscha.⁴ In the Beat quest for a purified raggedness of life, entropy had a central role in the pilgrimage through downward social mobility, the emphatic journey’s process with the false starts and wrong turns, and even the emphasis placed on the markable decline of America. The consequences of entropy influence the novel’s overall sense of loss, as the narrator tags along after Dean Moriarty in an attempt to find “IT,” a form of entropic equilibrium and isolating pleasure that is infused in the text. Several historians have hinted at the roles of entropy in Ruscha’s work, but to a greater extent the semiotic implications

Note: Montage articles, and the images contained therein, are for educational purposes only.

1. Mary Richards, *Ed Ruscha: ER* (London, UK: Tate Publishing, 2008), 107.
2. Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York, NY; Vitoria, Australia; Ontario, Canada; Auckland, New Zealand; London, England, 1991: Penguin Books), 243-244.
3. I wish to warmly extend my gratitude to Dr. Kim Paice for her helpful criticism, meaningful suggestions and most of all, her enthusiasm, which helped to ensure the completion of this paper.
4. Gagosian Gallery, London, “Ed Ruscha: On the Road: An Artist Book of the Classic Novel by Jack Kerouac,” press release, 22 Sept. 2009, http://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/2009-10-12_ed-ruscha/ (accessed 8 Mar. 2010)