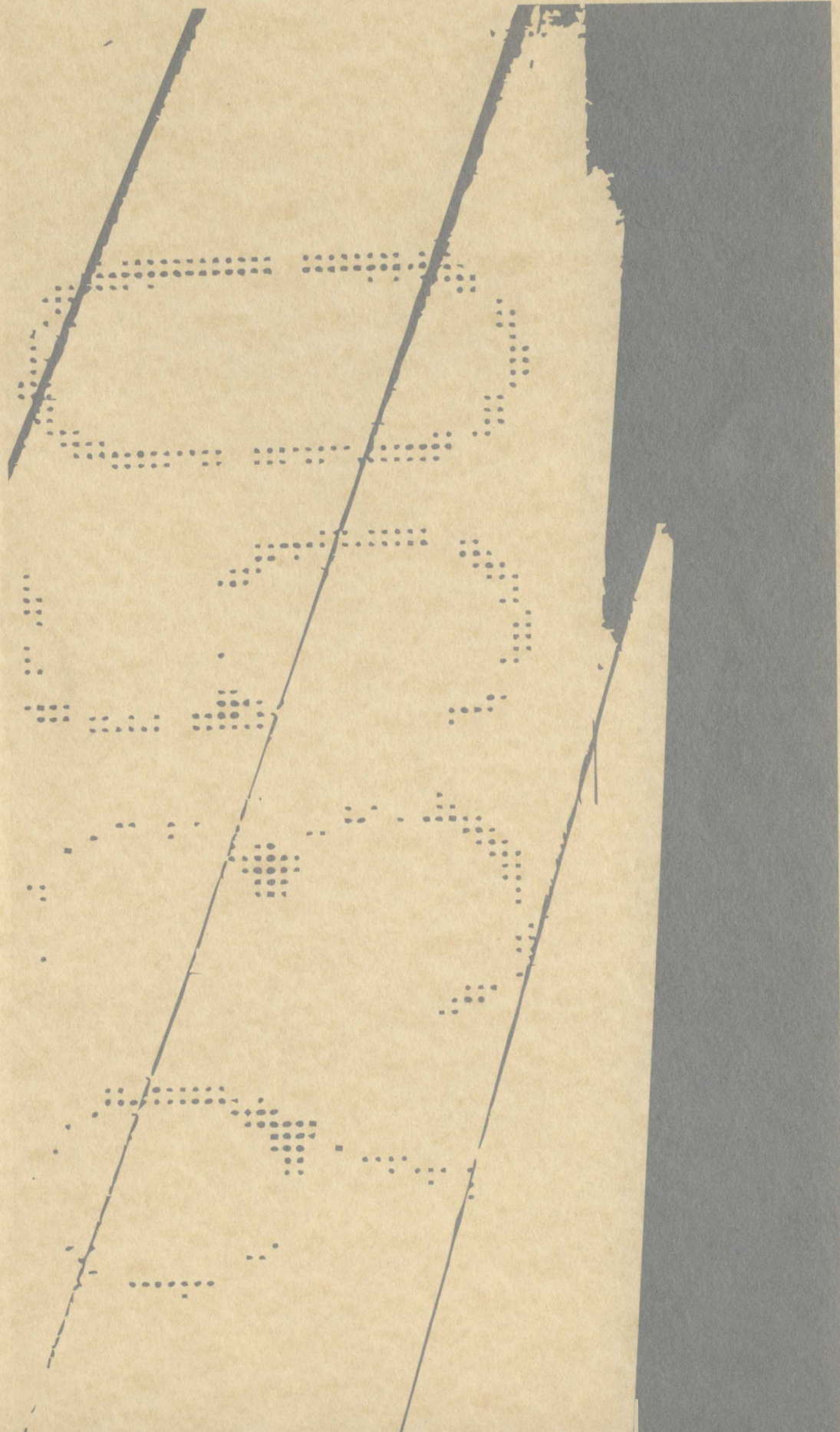


Boulevard, The Word We Got Used To

Kristopher Shi

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For Zhu and all our boy-scout walks

Boulevard, The Word We Got Used To



IT WAS ALWAYS STARTED WITH A WALK.

This would have been the summer of 2024 when we hadn't owned a car, like every immigrant has the inner fear of making a purchase too chunky to be slipped into pockets or suitcases and moved along with at any called second. With no grace a private car could provide, walk—walk to the destination you desire—in the land of Los Angeles, could be violently biblical as the sunniness, the sunkist architectures, the burnt road spreading endless miles ahead of us were melted into time that then became indefinitely gigantic. It's a punished vastness, inside of which, we were seen so little.

We would start our spare days with such biblical walk. The route would be carefully delineated at home, on the map above the thrifted IKEA pine table, since the distance between Eagle Rock and Mar Vista was unaffordable by foot. The destination was solid as one, oftenly a neighborhood we hadn't been to, only one for a single day. And within each of them, we found it rarely insufficient for the activities we considered doing: a bar, a barber shop, a grocer, an esoteric yard sale hosted by the locals or the people who chose to be locals with their prophetic intentions. "Anti-melting pot", one year later I obtained the word from a restaurant critique by Jonathan Gold, is the descriptive word for the islands of neighborhoods we commanded our boat-by-foot to, contiguously but somehow isolatedly floating in L.A. And I write about it, the city of hundreds of cities.

The apartment we settled in, if there is such a thing as destiny here, was at Miracle Mile on the very middle part of Wilshire Boulevard, as the articles love to call, "the Spine of Los Angeles." The Spine would run toward



everywhere for the need to look further, like any new settler would like to do. And we were one of them, marching from this hollowed-out neighborhood of museums and office complexes—maybe it is too transitional in between infamous Beverly Hills and Hancock Park to be called a neighborhood. But anyways, we marched off from here, here on the Spine, the mile of the miracle, the name always so hilariously jubilant and hopeful to think of, walking past the liminality of the sunkist but doubtably vacant complexes, which bleared away whatever glamour the name implied.

As in the implication, it never failed to come to us walking, or, we, coming from the remembered but still irrelevant past, were so longing for a strange sort of knowledge establishing on where we now lived, the city of hundreds of cities, it seems big, that we must connect things on the roads with others to make them relevant, like a detective game—or maybe it indeed is a game—believing it or not, if there is such a thing as destiny here.

I still remember it was under a white-hot sun. And it was the day we were walking down Vermont Avenue, when an abandoned furniture mall called “101” stood in front of us, simply “101,” bold in black on a white banner, seeming to await deciphering. Like a key breaks in the right lock, because he, who was by my side, has gone by “101” as his nickname since childhood, for the reason that has been lost or doesn’t even matter, we both knew what it meant, what this moment meant without speaking about it: he met his alias.

We were stopped walking by a surreal insistence, that we must register it by standing still, and stopping all the fiddlings with his old camera in his hands. The heated sun made itself heard, buzzing like bees. Then white hot, as in white noise. And it sounded perfectly suitable for the moment when you get wrapped around by what makes you relevant to the now. We were in this wrap of implicational meetup.

Yet I think it could be banal as millions of store signs happen to be a passer-by’s name or nickname, but this is what we chose to remember: the city revealed itself from its bare impersonality to us.

And Vermont. Not so far when I was having school in New York, rolling in the small apartment in Bed-Stuy. I heard it snowing, my roommate would go skiing with families in wintertime. There is always an image of people driving Subaru station wagons up there, with snow chains on tires, but I’ve never been. Perhaps that was why Subaru became our first car in L.A.—the name picked us, after we had been walking for one year and finally suppressed the fear of chunkiness. Vermont, down on it, how could you mischievously appear in my life this way?

In which through a boy-scout walk that was plotted in the island of Little Armenia, led to that lost mall corner, we met you hard and unmoored, so near yet so truth-inverted that it was actually white-hot in summer.

But we couldn’t have estimated it would make sense this way, as 101 and I stood on our feet on Vermont Avenue, below which the camphor roots nurtured by the generous Californian sun, pressed at their fullest strength, breaking the asphalt into uneven slabs. When I look back, it is absurd that the unevenness of the storefront sidewalks took most hold of our imagining in our first year in L.A., and when driving, we drive, with the grace, past—that is another kind of mercy and another story to tell—past things demanding a still registration.

The avenue was populated by furniture specialty stores abandoned like “101,” or nearly abandoned with dusted shopping windows obscuring what had taken place, stenciled names faded into their backgrounds by the bleaching sun, as if the two of us were to resolve this great absence of anything, as if being absent were the ultimate attendance, while we should’ve been erased, and the fleeting cars could be spared from this slow erasure.

This could be worrisome, as traveling in the American notion seems always outbound, starting the engine, camping a day or two in far-off mountains by brook, perching above the great landscape where a commune of hundreds of men gathers in watchfulness, in prayer for their empowered counterparts. In Vermont, my roommate called me from the top of their cabin, ‘the conquest in a white land’, described he with a tranquil joy. Erase, which is to say, melt into the holistic gigantism. If there is indeed a way against it, 101 and I were hoaxed *inbound* to it. The discarded IKEA mattress, the migratory flocks resembling our trek to Hermosa Beach, the busker playing the song Matthew did on guitar. Matthew, what was the song? Are you from Burbank, or Reseda? I couldn’t remember. I wanted to call him to confirm, because I wanted to know if there is indeed a way against it, as I was also in this tranquil joy of conquest, but more chronic, more like the camphor roots. And in that instant, it was Wilshire and Vermont.

Earlier that day, costal grey. From the window of our living room, facing south on the shared backyard, we could see a set of iron-cast chairs under a magenta parasol, a few lemon trees in their early growth. There was always a lady sitting there with her grotesque shades on, doing nothing but smoking cigarettes as if the camera was rolling on a scene with no final take. As we looked out the window that day, she happened to be looking up at something. Through a faint, almost imperceptible nod, I was conjured into a sudden curiosity about her. “This building

was the first apartment on Wilshire in the 1920s,” said the manager with a wordless glint, on the lease-signing day, handing over a pamphlet to us, probably self-published, bluntly titled *The History of Wilshire Boulevard*. I wondered if the lady would have witnessed it for her permanent sitting, even at nights, like she was part of these comical Mediterranean props since the foundation was laid. If she did, she could have made such unknown pamphlets, that they were seemingly circulated only inside this old building, witnessing, again, us taking in this little piece of information and failing to confirm via any LA County libraries. If she did, she could be the building, webbing us in, *inbound*, to itself, at the moment we wrote down our address on the first envelope we sent out to Matthew, whose home I checked, was up in Burbank, CA 91505.

Her name is Pina. After drawing out today’s route (take bus 217 to Vermont & Prospect Ave and walk the avenue down), we went downstairs to the yard. Maybe she was awaiting a snippet of conversation, so she waved at us with self-introduction, pulling the chairs over and snuffing the cigarette between fingers. Later it turned out she lived in the little bungalow of which the rear windows were faced ours, moved in decades ago from Cannes, France, for the reason she explained as simply as “I don’t like the people there.” It seemed the grandiosity of the film festival choked off this resort and her people—we had no means of knowing more details. Maybe she knew, at the very beginning, this conversation was destined to be snippety, not too personal to make a moment, a newly lit cigarette called it, but through the slender smog, she said the words, as the manager we had never seen again said, “Your building was the first apartment on Wilshire.”

In 1896, a special municipal committee took shape, as Los Angeles’s streets remained a tangle of duplicated names and unnavigable confusions. In the fantasy of Manhattan’s coordinate grid the committee attempted to re-survey the young map. But that small bounded island far to the east, after all, was too finite—ultimately too unexpandable—to serve as a model. Hills and ravines stunted the mapping-out of the consecutively numbered avenues; nostalgias governed certain subdivisions to resist being overwritten into a solidary whole. And the city, then still with Miracle Mile as a swampy tar-pit waiting to be speculated upon, would sprawl on and on at its seemingly irrational will, which the committee tried to leash, but left behind only scars of broken names.

Till now, I still can’t recall what we said to Pina’s words that recurred at the shared yard, how we then hopped on the Bus 217 at Wilshire and Fairfax, with a quiet astonishment as it was kept, and how the grey turned white-

hot as we grasped the map, colliding our footsteps with its geometry. In the end it becomes pure phonetic, as if pounds of written archives—of trials on contiguity, of earnest committees—weighed nothing but, “w-ll-sheer”, as in the last word of Pina’s, as is just what was spoken and heard, and nothing more.

It was Wilshire and Vermont again. At the intersection, we agreed that today’s walk would end here, and we’d find a restaurant for dinner nearby in Koreatown. We turned right onto the Spine, westward, along it there was each building of crustiness, occasionally of a lonely welcome.

I slid the envelope into a USPS collection box when I noticed a billboard above. “I was very into the concept of binaries,” he started, unprompted, “the binary system of zeros and ones. 101. Like all can be decoded down to the base of two figures, in a discrete, self-invented but supernatural-ish fashion...” I didn’t quite lodge his further words about mathematics, somehow, as the billboard intervened in the sequence of things. It proudly announced: Air France would launch direct flights from Los Angeles to Nice, France starting the summer of 2024—“Cannes, finally without connections.”

It was always started with a walk. It would start with a walk, when I am writing down these words, in which all was pure phonetic, nothing less and more, one and zero. And it would end with exhaustion. As far as I can remember.

Jan 2026



in the last, the city's master plan was revised in the early 1970s, and a special committee, the Wilshire Committee, was created. It was called it, but through the decade-long, the city's master plan, as the manager we had never seen before, said, "Your building was the first apartment on Wilshire." The committee was created in 1970, and it was the first of its kind. In 1970, a special municipal committee took shape, as Los Angeles' streets remained a tangle of duplicated names and unrecognizable confusion. In the fantasy of city planners' coordination and the committee attempted to re-survey the young map. But this effort bounded along for to the east, after all, was too late—ultimately too unresponsible—to serve as a model. Hills and valleys started the mapping-out of the consecutively numbered avenues; postulates governed certain subdivisions to exist being overwritten into a solitary whole. And the city, then still with Miracle Mile as a swampy tar-pit waiting to be speculated upon, would spend up and go at its seemingly irrational will, which the committee tried to leash, but left behind only scars of broken orders.

Till now, I still can recall what we said to Flax's words that returned of the forest yard. How we then hopped on the Bus car at Wilshire and Fairfax, with a quiet excitement as it was kept, and how the grey turned white.















Wilshire
United
Methodist
Church
4350

4400

THE EBELL
OF
LOS ANGELES
FOUNDED 1894
A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

4444

CHATEAU FREMONT

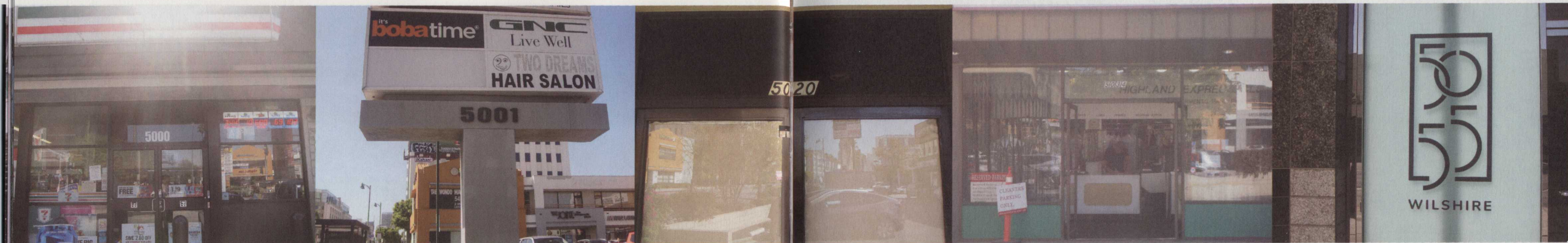
THE WILSHIRE FREMONT

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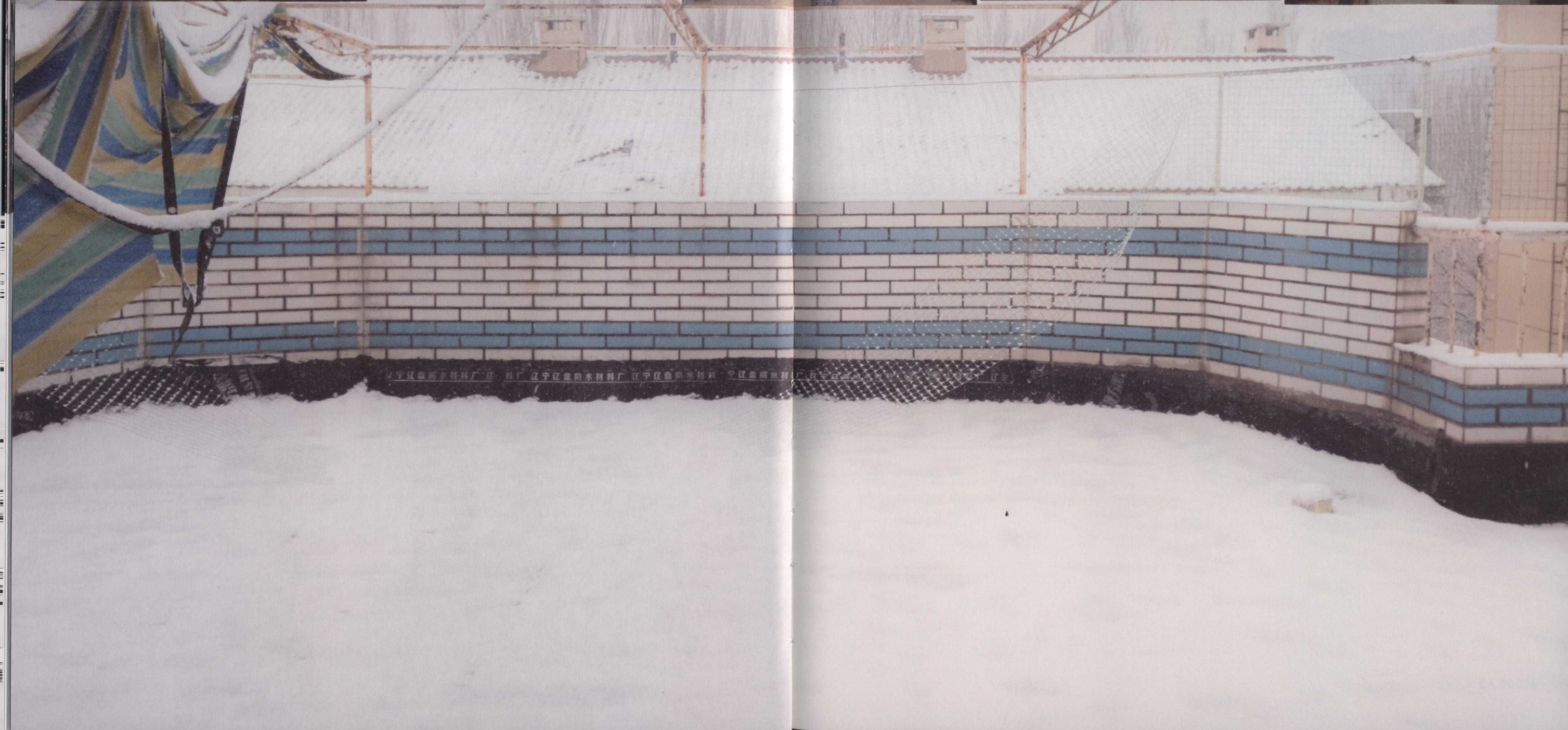
FORTY-FIVE HUNDRED

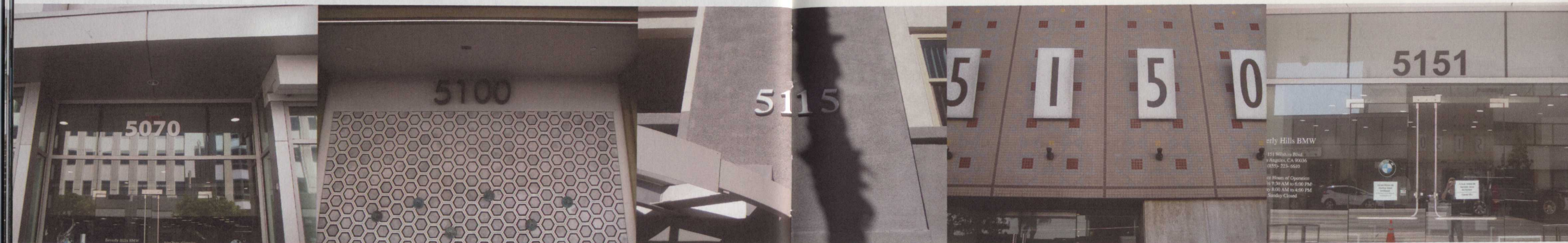












5200
Wilshire Blvd.

5201

5209

5223

5224
WILSHIRE
BLVD.











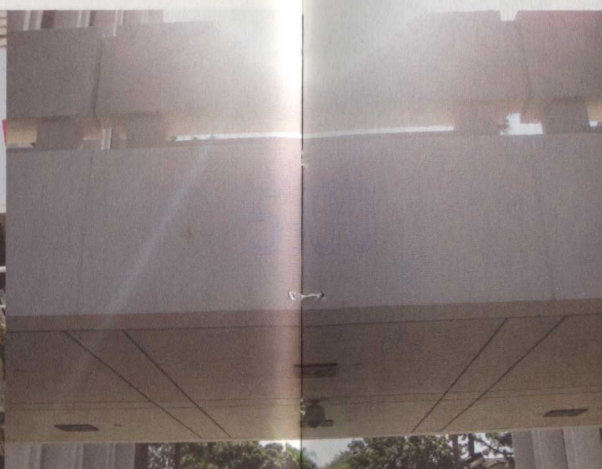




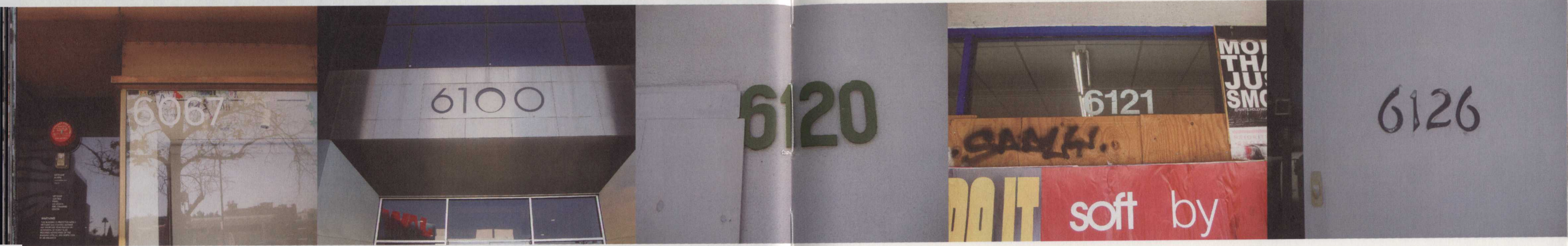


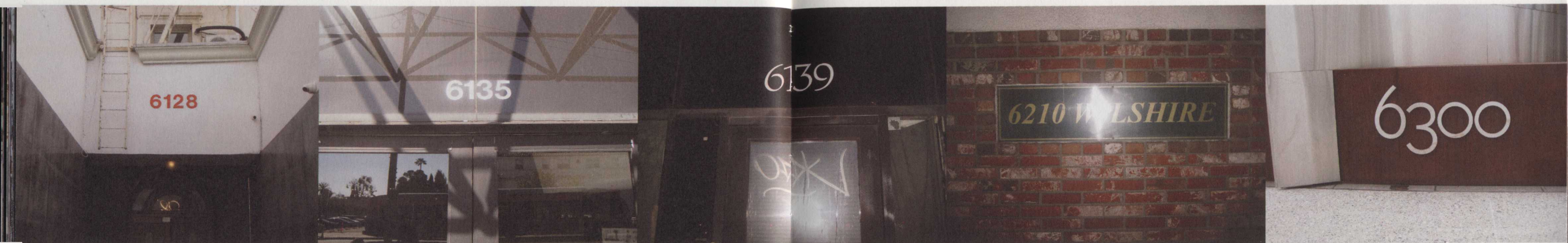










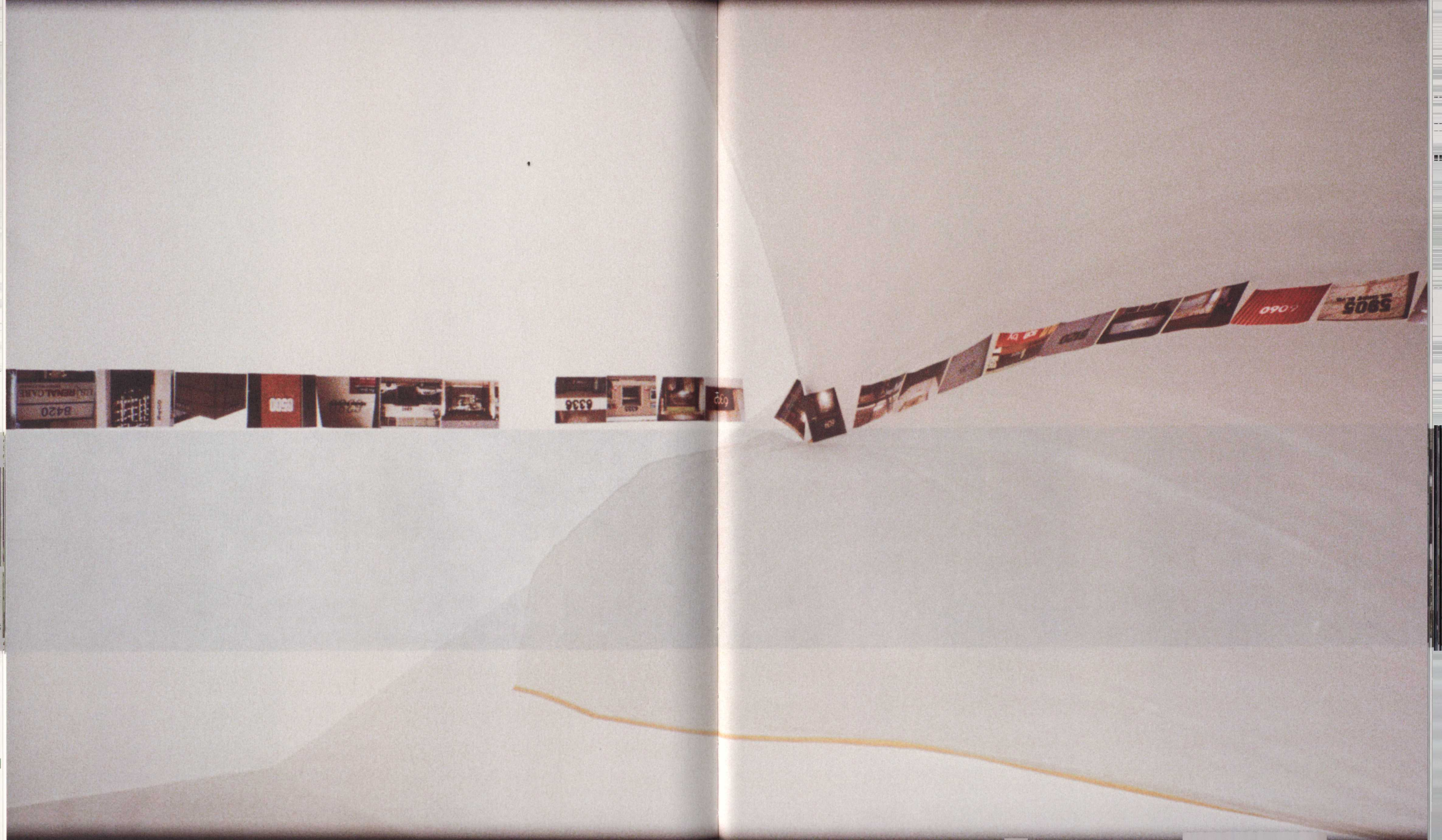




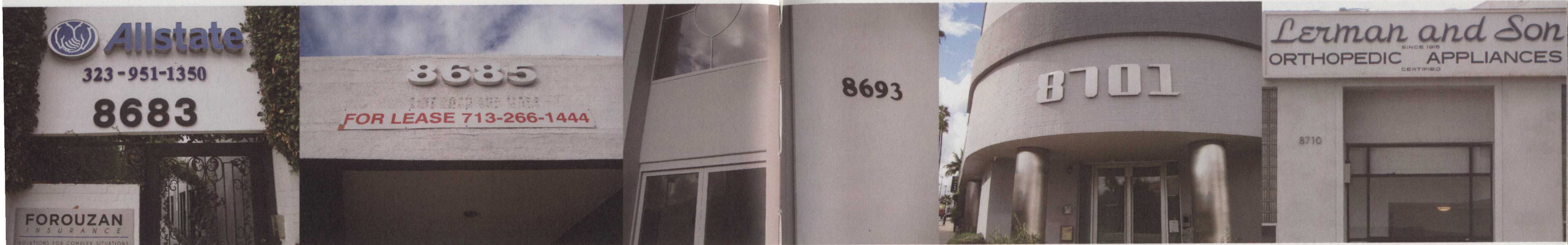


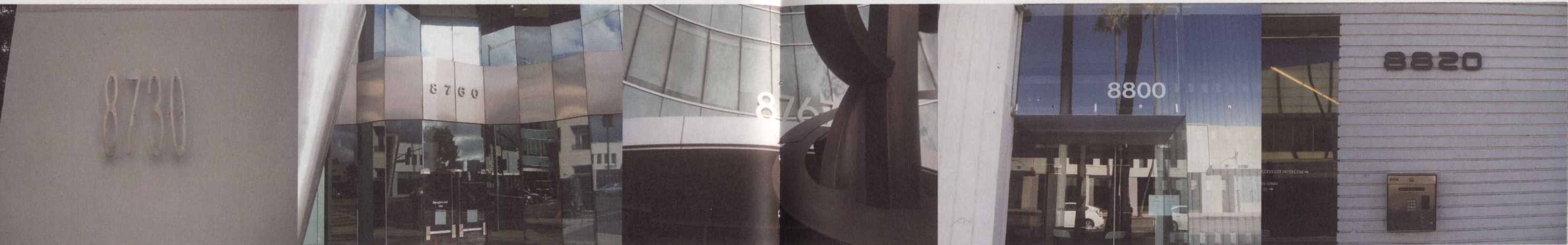




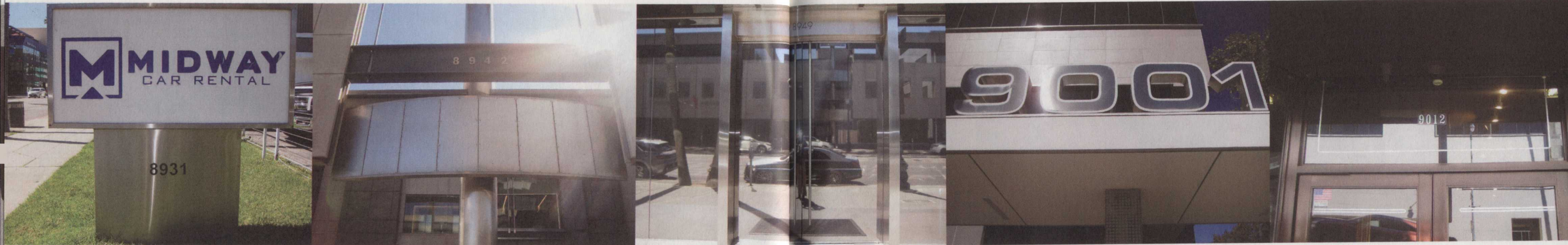














9045

9090
Wilshire

Building
Entrance



→ 9101

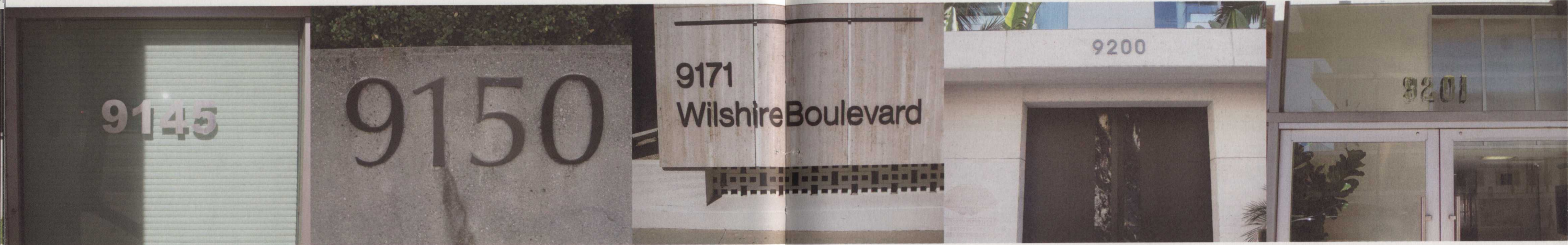
9107-9111 Wilshire Blvd.

Valet Parking

2.00 each 15 minutes

20.00 maximum

Cash only -
Check & Credit Cards Not Accepted







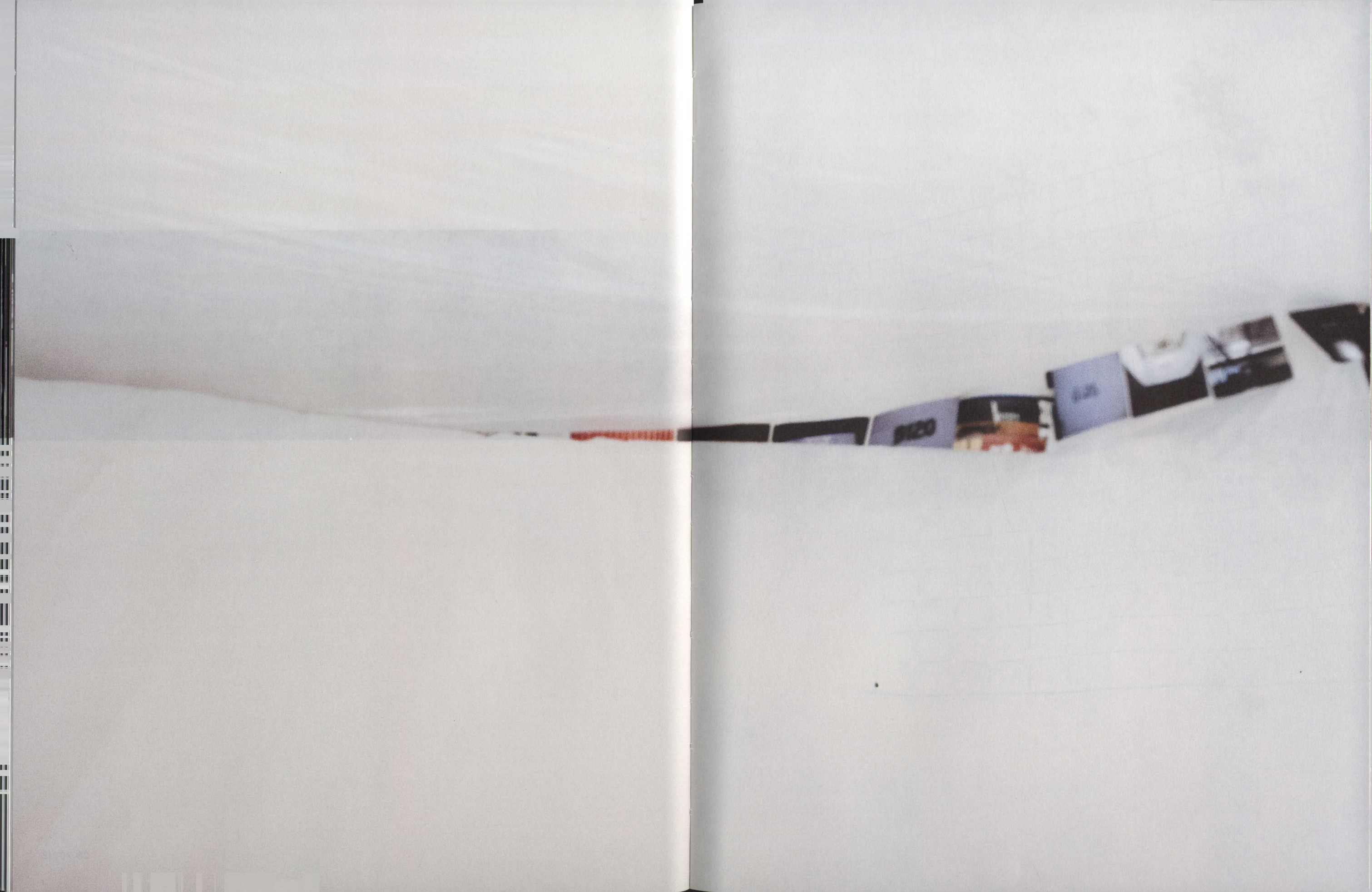




















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