Also by Simon Smith

North Star
LEXICON
Night Shift
Juicy Fruit
Fifteen Exits
Reverdy Road
Mercury
London Bridge
Gravesend
Simon Smith

11781 W. Sunset Boulevard

Shearsman Books
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11781 W. Sunset Blvd.
Like earlier generations of English intellectuals who taught themselves Italian in order to read Dante in the original, I learned to drive in order to read Los Angeles in the original.

— Reyner Banham

A crazy little place called ‘Be There Now’

— Steely Dan

The cars hiss by my window, like the waste down on the beach

— The Doors
Ode: Sat Nav Narrative on Flying into LAX

Hopping the Hudson Strait to Hudson
Bay hurry not toward
450 m.p.h. of ground speed dip down at
James Bay distance to LA 2513 miles local
time at present position 12.30 p.m.,
next the Great Lakes a lot of cloud down
there & not far away the flight path
curves to the pleasing earth’s curve,
eyes gritty-tired,
doggèd, filled with the hours bursting
the grit full of hours & Newcastle
Brown, Stella, some other forms of beer unidentified, & Thunder
Bay, LA in 2188 miles, a curl
of hair for the book’s pages a charm
keeps our place, & at 38,000 feet everything’s made
to look smaller
& now onto Winnipeg
using the Spacepen David bought for me all those years
ago now we're nearly in space &
four hours to go,
thinking of David makes me switch
to local time at London 6.23 p.m. & dark—
cold no doubt the 777 held above
like a mobile
or lunar module
returning Apollo 13
the stratosphere silent & moving forever
those still strapped into their business class
like to lick lips glistening
Winnipeg our event horizon
patchwork of lakes leading-edge forming vapour
breathe in & The Collected Poems
of Paul Blackburn becomes
my favourite book & all is clear
a life abandoned to the High Plains
between Cheyenne & Laramie in minutes
then on to Mount Rushmore & the Devil’s Tower
the Colorado River, the Hoover Dam & Mojave Desert
now in the blue sky above LA now
is the moment for change & everything shifts forward next
Credit Card Reader

The only reading worth knowing
step towards the people carrier
ready to meet & capture this World
a grainy figure picks out street angels
pimp or punter hard to tell behind the windshield,
when the cars growl past my window
as the lone power-tool suddenly shuts off,
the naturally benign climate to LA
full of freeways & car interiors
with fixtures hard enough to bang my head into,
granulated neighbourhoods
watch the housing projects from surveillance footage
palm & fig trees, the gated communities.
This is Rilke calling collect from Los Angeles.
My last shave, when? Wednesday?
No, Thursday, before take-off. Two days’ growth.
My friend Guy bringing Robert Crosson across from the dead,
heroic, a fine task, sleek in those black
Seismicity Editions—*Day Books*…
with Gaddafi’s execution, NATO enters its ‘over watch period,’
& we can be glad of the minimal collateral damage
& no NATO or American casualties, the causality
of which means, *erce*, ‘the most successful operation
of Modern Times,’ the casual rhetoric of the robotic U.S. military,
relaxed for National Public Radio, informs you & me,
no doubt without tie & top button undone, in his 501s
closer ‘To The People,’ voice of one, who is one of us.
Hummingbird

Sat at the window tuned to Sunday traffic
where are the drivers rushing
to their limitless gods over limitless tarmac
LA defines the horizontal—no bar, no limit
no known impediment, the grid
Rilke searching streets & corners, passing
cars like the grind of sharpening knives
Chandler’s ‘The Little Sister’

Relax beside the pool, palms, Scots pine not now but next
    the magnolias, tankers,
muscle cars, the thirst & appetite
inexhaustible for 24-hour neon artificial
sun, LA as far West as it goes before
becoming East
    again, heading towards
Santa Monica up Route 405
‘the beach is three miles that way’
the cab driver jabbed his thumb left
& West.
Windshield

iPhone pointing west on Sunset
smog swirls up from the coast
the zombie convoy of Corvettes,
Camaros, Trans-Ams—a wave
sweeps over West Sunset Blvd.
to the STOP sign, & my feet,
this long haul long hop deep
breath, crossing the concrete
the red hand held up, eight
seconds
Commute

home space —> work space
in-car time-space the distance
to the office with my name on it
‘SIMON SMITH H-462-44’
something something vacant
lot something something
Garnett’s photos of Lakewood living
space, ‘pragmatic solutions
to the problems of shelter;’
like printed circuitry
a white Mustang ('66?) rolls up
Sunset from Santa Monica
& the beach, the traffic
rolls with it, sucked up on rollers
Los Angeles River

Untroubled by birdsong
a big nowhere, 200,000 or more
windshields shimmer leaping
salmon upstream of I-405
built by robots, driven by utility
the cops airborne & mobile,
Bell Huey & Vaughan Williams’
‘Flos Campi’ housed
in a thousand automobiles
drifting up Sunset string
& voices to a thousand
exact copies without interference,
the Statue of Liberty 125 years young
today in the comfort of eeef-eeemm
Eyewitness News

‘President Obama visited West Sunset Boulevard today,’ good to know he has friends in the neighbourhood. We slept through the motorcade & chopper patrol at our bedroom window & mid-afternoon dusk—blue, orange, mauve, dove grey, sun strong, shadows black, the blue-print or printed circuit of a city tell me we’ve entered a TV comedy, cop show, LA film noir, news bulletin, porn or snuff movie, call me on 1 310 440 8323 when you know.