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**METROPOLITAN MONTAGES:  
[Re]presenting and Intervening  
in the Everyday City**

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## METROPOLITAN MONTAGES: [Re]presenting and Intervening in the Everyday City



Image a Day photos by Zeleste Ortigosa

*“‘Everyday’ speaks to this element of ordinary human experience and itself conveys many complicated meanings. At a common-sense level, everyday describes the lived experience shared by urban residents, the banal and ordinary routines we know all too well – commuting, working, relaxing, moving through the city streets and sidewalks, shopping, buying and eating food, running errands. Even in this descriptive incarnation, the everyday city has rarely been the focus of attention for architects or urban designers, despite the fact that an amazing number of social, spatial, and aesthetic meanings can be found in the repeated activities and conditions that constitute our daily, weekly, and yearly routines. The utterly ordinary reveals a fabric of space and time defined by a complex realm of social practices – a conjuncture of accident, desire, and habit.”* Margaret Crawford

*“What thrilled me so deeply was an ordinary suburban street, filled with lights and shadows which transfigured it. Several trees stood about, and there was in the foreground a puddle reflecting invisible house facades and a place of the sky. Then a breeze moved the shadows, and the facades with the sky below began to waver. The trembling upper world in the dirty puddle – this image has never left me.”* Sigfried Kracauer

“Metropolitan Montages: Representing and Intervening in the Everyday City”<sup>1</sup> explores the use of photographic and filmic techniques as well as empirical observation as alternative modes to represent and intervene within everyday public spaces. Through working in-between the digitalization of images, sound, and software, and the analog operations of cutting, pasting and splicing, montage images and movies are created to [re]present lived experiences of the everyday city. Through these [re]presentations, ideas of possible interventions within the everyday city are proposed through new composite montages and movies. Whether driving, walking, or riding, our lived experiences of the everyday city are increasingly difficult to [re]describe or [re]present in a lucid, articulate manner. Furthermore, montage images of proposed interventions provide a more visceral understanding of how an intervention may potentially transform a space into place through multiple possibilities of inhabitation. Photographic and filmic montage techniques afford an objectivity, as well as subjectivity, both of which are ideal when representing the paradoxical, surreal, and sublime nature of the everyday. These fleeting moments of attempting to find the extraordinary out of the ordinary are ways of understanding, developing empathy, and coming to terms with our evolving globalized everyday landscape.

### **AN IMAGE A DAY: documenting the everyday city**

*“A photograph is usually looked at – seldom looked into.”*

Ansel Adams

*“The problem is not to make political films, but to make films politically”*

Jean Luc Godard

In the first exercise the students were asked to take an image a day documenting their everyday life in the city. Social Practices such as working, driving, shopping, playing, waiting, and socializing dominate our everyday experience, and thus our environments. From home to highway, from work to bars, from malls to church, and everywhere in-between, were to be explored and documented. While taking an image a day, they were asked to start observing, analyzing, and critiquing the spaces they and others experience within the everyday city. This exercise set the stage and provided content for their montage movies and intervention proposals. Towards the end of the semester they were asked to choose a space or spaces to further document through photomontage, video and/or montage movies, in an effort to more fully understand it before proposing an intervention or interventions. Critical text accompanied the image a day exercise. The text could be from personal observations, to interviews or people encountered, to found texts, or passages from assigned readings. The point was to contextualize the image, to respond and reflect upon each moment they were documenting. They were asked to keep in mind that the image a day should not be a tourist’s or an architect’s artistic visual document of the city, but from an inhabitant’s, an everyday user’s perspective. It was to be embedded in the real, not the ideal. It was an attempt to engage the beautiful and the ugly, the extraordinary and the ordinary, the day and the night, the public and the private, the planned and the accidental.



### Image a Day

photos by Sean Farrell, Olga Herrero and Jeff Harris

### CASE STUDIES: engaging the everyday city

*"That there is no architecture without action or without program, and that architecture's importance resides in its ability to accelerate society's transformation through a careful agencing of spaces and events."*

Bernard Tschumi

*"Perhaps the synthesis of landscape, architectural and urbanistic skills into a hybrid form of practices may allow for the invention of newly supple and reflexive built fabrics, new landscapes... The [urban] surface is not merely the venue for formal experiments but the agent for evolving new forms of social life."*

Alex Wall

In the second exercise the students were asked to examine case studies of built or un-built interventions that explore issues of public space and the everyday. Most interventions were looking to everyday habits of the user as catalyst for program, space, form and/or artistic intervention. In addition to engaging the daily lived experience of the user in the city, most of the projects attempted to stitch together left over urban spaces and landscapes produced by insular and object centric city development. New ecologies and hybridized typologies of architecture,

Some comparisons between city and favela

	City	Favela
Monthly salary	.....\$701	...\$205
Residents per house	...3.5	.....3.98
Rooms in the house	...4.8	.....4.06
Making \$1200 or +	.....0.61%	...15.1%
Making \$240 or less	...35.5%	...72.3%
15 years of school	...1.07%	...16.7%
Illiterate people	.....6.1%	...15.2%
Inadequate sewage	.....8.9%	...36.74%
Inadequate water	.....3.9%	...15.41%
Bad trash collection	.....4.3%	...21.23%



...Rocinha  
Rocinha is a favela located within the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro. It is built on a steep hillside overlooking the city, just one kilometer from the beach.



The population of Rocinha is estimated to be anywhere from 60,000 to 150,000 though some believe more than 400,000 people live in the favela.

Urban fabric  
Cities without maps

Favelas are units of irregular self-constructed housing that are unlicensed and occupied illegally. Shanty town residences are built randomly, although ad hoc networks of stairways, sidewalks, and simple through them.



Most favelas are inaccessible by car.



"Experiencing the city also implies creating a range of representations that express the different vocabularies of modernity. These maps of urban living and 'stories of the streets' are in continual dispute."

-Michel De Certeau "L'invention du quotidien, la arts de faire"



The squatter community was busier than the legal community next to it. It had more life. In the Favela, the people are like a big family, the street is part of the house, of their life.



"I could live in a fancy neighborhood, like Copacabana" Jose explained. "But I like it here. Here I can live with my philosophy of life".

Urban population living in slums



Case study analysis of the Favelas of Brazil by Andrea Pomar Capó

landscape, infrastructure and urbanism have recently emerged through weaving together varying agendas of inhabitation, mobility, and reclamation. The common thread throughout the case studies investigated was the attempt to create "place" or an "identity" out of overlooked, "derelict", or underutilized public spaces within the everyday city. The list of case studies given to the students was simply a point of departure. They were also encouraged to research local case studies within the Dallas Fort Worth area. Furthermore, the interventions or spaces researched did not have to be designed by "A" list architects – they could be "incidental" or "un-designed", especially if they chose to examine spaces within the local metropolitan area such as sidewalks or parking lots. The case study research included critical texts, descriptions, quotes, and/or observations from the architect/designer, critics, and the students themselves. They were also asked to produce and document diagrams, process sketches, graphs, charts, plans, sections, and most importantly montage images of the built or un-built work. For many of the case studies examined utilize photomontage or filmic techniques versus just abstract line drawings. This shift in representation and visualization techniques is evidenced of the renewed value in communicating ideas and images of inhabitation and lived experience of space and place within the everyday city.



Photomontage by Jon Orosco

### **METROPOLITAN MONTAGES: [re]presenting the everyday city**

*"The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems, in which each body is an element signed by many others elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of space: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other."*

Michel de Certeau

*"A story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end...but not necessarily in that order."*

Jean Luc Godard

In the third exercise the students were asked to utilize their "image a day" content to compose an extra large photomontage of spaces or space[s] they intended to propose an intervention. It was to be considered as a composite of interconnected images that articulated their lived experience of the space[s]. In addition, utilizing the same content, the students were asked to compose a montage movie. The movement, time, and sound dimension demonstrated another level of experience. These movies attempted to articulate a more lucid, lived texture of the



Photomontage by Robert Casaus



Photomontage by Zeleste Ortigosa



Photomontage by Jason McDonald

space[s], therefore providing a heightened awareness of possible interventions. Sound could be recorded from the space itself, or “found” from voiceovers, interviews, or music that expresses the experience or emotion of the space[s]. Movements, re-framings, and transitions, could be cropped, zoomed in, dissolved, sped up or slowed down, depending on what experience the student wanted to convey. These alterations and transformations added a layer of subjectivity and criticality to the objectivity of the camera lens.

### **URBAN INTERVENTIONS: creating place within the everyday city**

In the final exercise, through utilizing the content from the readings, case studies, the image a day, photomontage, and montage movie exercises, the students were asked to intervene within a public space of their everyday city. The intervention could be architectural/artistic/landscape elements such as new seating, surface treatments, shading devices, plantings, sculpture, media, etc., whatever they thought as an inhabitant and designer could improve the everyday life of the public space. They were also to consider the different times of the day, seasons, and users – perhaps the space transforms vis a vis different scenarios or narratives, much like alternate plots or characters in a film. The overall agenda of the urban intervention exercise was to conscientiously create “place” out of under utilized derelict space, and to propose this intervention from an informed, bottom up process captured through daily experience and empirical observation. The final proposals were represented primarily through before and after photomontages.

In conclusion the course work provided students with alternative modes of [re]presenting the everyday city, as well as how to propose an intervention based on empirical observations. Photographic and filmic montage techniques afford an objectivity, as well as subjectivity, both of which are ideal when representing the paradoxical, surreal, and sublime nature of the everyday. These fleeting moments of attempting to find the extraordinary out of the ordinary are ways of understanding, developing empathy, and coming to terms with our evolving globalized landscape. Therefore, the work attempts to examine latent potential within these overlooked everyday spaces and to explore how one may embrace or transform them, rather than simply deny them.

### **Note**

- 1 The research presented here is from a course titled “The Everyday City”. The course was set up into several phases/exercises. We began the course reading and discussing philosophies on the everyday from Henri Lefebvre to Michel de Certeau as well as screening films and photography that demonstrate interesting uses of public spaces in the city. The “beginning” phase situated the student’s case study analysis, image a day and montage movie exercises, as well as the public spaces intervention proposals.

### **References**

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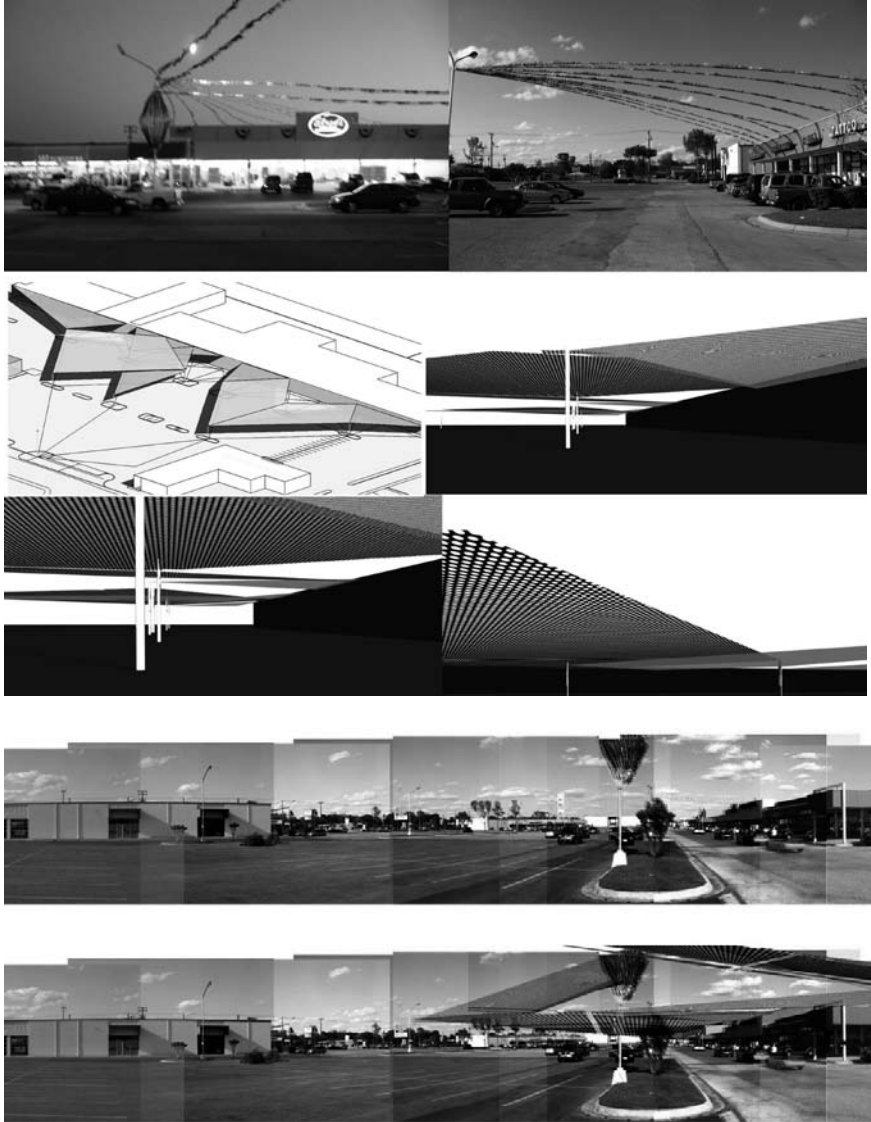


**Intervention of mass customized bus stops by Luis Spinola**

The proposal creates place and identity through reflecting local demographic and interacting with the public through bold customizable screen prints, lighting, and planters, as well as electronic weather, time, date, and bus map displays.



**Components of mass customized bus stops of Luis Spinola.**



**Before and after photomontages of super-shading device intervention by Sean Farrell**

The proposal attempts to create a sense of scale, place, refuge, and identity out of an existing vast "sea of asphalt" parking lot. Inspiration came directly from the existing streamers tied to the columns and lighting. Image a day exercise that inspired the intervention as well as digital renderings of the moiré affects of the overlapping fabric structure.