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Course Title:

“New York Timescales | A photographic Urban Anatomy”



Photo: Zijian Wang (GSAPP student 2015-'16)

Course Description:

Architectural photography primarily deals with the relation between artifacts and their environments, or the dipole of building and landscape; cities are but a special case of this model of thought. Urban landscapes have their own seasons, circadian rhythms and sociopolitical ecosystems. From historical centers and high-density commercial developments, to suburban sprawls and post-industrial brownfields, urban landscapes enmesh past, present and future.

New York City has an almost singular presence in the history of photography; a city reflected in a mosaic of images created by true masters like Alfred Stieglitz, Berenice Abbott, Garry Winogrand, Bruce Davidson, William Klein, among others, but also less known foreign photographers who were enthralled by the magnetic

presence of NY's urbanity. These series of images that spans almost two centuries creates an undeniable visual memory, etched in our cultural consciousness.

The intention during this photographic exploration is to capture this fusion of the different elements of the city by converting it into a New (City) scape through a visual experimentation organized around the two following photographic methods:

1. Using a 35 mm camera to capture the physicality of wandering fast through the city as a physical representation of everyday life. By employing 'instant' ways of looking, multiple frames and narrative sequence collages, documenting the human action as a component of the built environment, while at the same time refraining from the picturesque and/or iconic representation of a city, which has been photographed and filmed so powerfully since the invention of Cinema and Photography. Of course, the static image cannot –and should not- compete with filmography in communicating continuous movement through space. It can, however, be employed as a tool for storytelling, where fragmented moments aggregate and reveal unseen relations, enhancing the narrative qualities of space.
2. Employing a tripod and carefully set points of view, emphasizing on the horizontality of the relation between the urban fabric and its roadways/waterways. While this is a static way of picture making, it can penetrate beneath the surface of the obvious through long exposures, resulting to images where movement of people and objects blends into a thick fluid giving the sense of a multifaceted river-like urban flow. The formative forces of the city play out dynamically, capturing the present in a dreamlike world yet without necessarily beautifying this reality.

In the first approach, the photo shoots will take place during the rush hours of the day, to capture the natural rhythm of life, the NYC attitudes and ways of living, which differ from other parts of the world. The intention is to present through expressionistic, almost abstract imagery, a new NYC lifestyle. On the other hand, with the second method where long exposure will be applied during specific moments of the day such as early morning and twilight, the intention is to capture the special beauty of silence and absence in NYC; where the city almost becomes a cinematographic set, yet still alive and real. The two approaches will produce a body of photographs that all together express the urban reality of the city where we live, leading to a small publication presenting the teamwork produced by the GSAPP students.