

Paris: Critical Configurations of the Metropolis

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The study of every-day life would be a useless undertaking if it was not for the express purpose of transforming it.
—Guy Debord



INTRODUCTION

Each year, Georgia Tech sends 15-30 undergraduates to Paris, France for two semesters of Architectural studies. Enrolled jointly at Tech and the École d'Architecture Paris La Villette, students have access to courses offered through both Schools. A radical departure from the 'contemporary' city of Atlanta, Paris becomes each student's introduction to a completely different mode of existence, and in many respects, their sense of inquiry and analysis is perhaps much keener because of Paris' newness.

As an introduction to some critical figures and theories related to 'public' and 'private' space in Paris (and other cities), the intent of the seminar was to explore relations between space, power, and politics through an evaluation of some topical issues surrounding 'place specific' architectural and urban production. As the city of Paris affords many opportunities for such an investigation, written and graphic research focused on specific aspects of the urban environment: everyday occurrences, definitions of public, private and social, monuments, and other temporal structures, to consider the relation between space, identity and power in Paris and other metropolitan enclaves. Case studies encompassed speculation at multiple scales on topics such as: imaginary cities/hidden spaces, mapping/bodies, advertising and media, 'other' spaces, strategies/tactics, memory and the uncanny, etc. Each week's reading merged with site specific visits and analysis in order to encourage active decipherment of the Parisian surroundings (see

assignments and syllabus.) Cross media references include Painting, Sculpture, Film & Television, the Internet, Literature and Performance Art.

Students were asked to record their impressions and analysis through mixed media journals, hunting/gathering (detournement, bricolage) urban drifting (dérive), and measured drawing (analytique).

The pedagogical objectives of the seminar are most clearly outlined in the assignments the students were asked to develop. Each assignment is listed below. Supporting readings and other references may be found in the bibliography.

ASSIGNMENT ONE

The catalog of forms is endless: until every shape has found its city, new cities will continue to be born. When the forms exhaust their variety and come apart, the end of cities begins.
—Italo Calvino

Based on our discussion and site visit today, your first journal entry should be a graphic/textual speculation on an imaginary place you have visited in a reverie or a dream. Scale is not of issue here; we are not necessarily designing cities. Your speculation may be a room, or an atmosphere, or a state of mind . . . this assignment should be considered the first entry into the journal you will construct for this class and it should be considered a work of art.



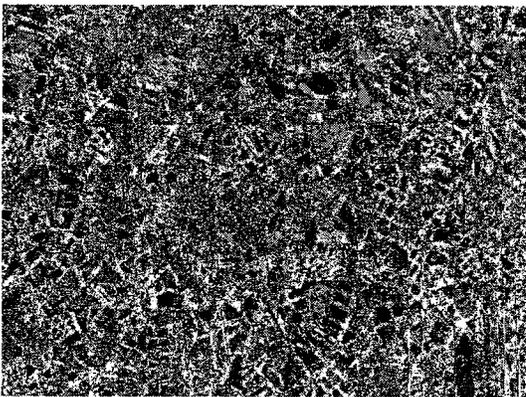
T. al Haddad



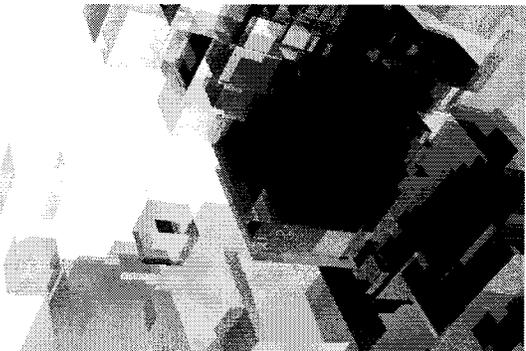
M. Rivas



K. Dougherty



M. Gamble



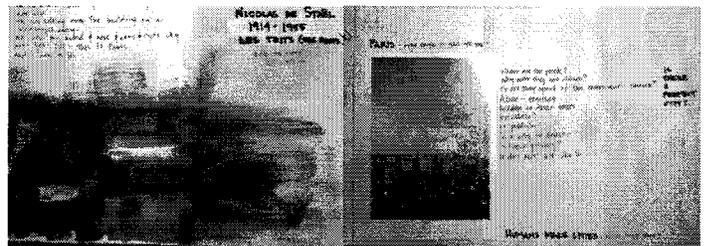
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ASSIGNMENT TWO

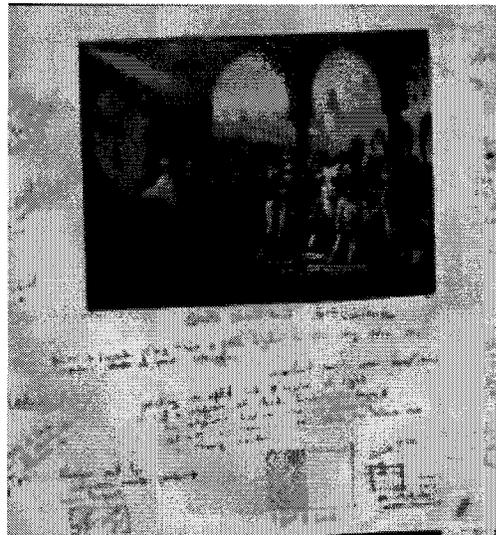
Now the great function of the city is . . . to permit, indeed to encourage and incite the greatest possible number of meetings, encounters, challenges, between all persons, classes and groups, providing as it were, a stage upon which the drama of social life may be enacted, with the actors taking their turns as spectators, and the spectators as actors.

—Lewis Mumford

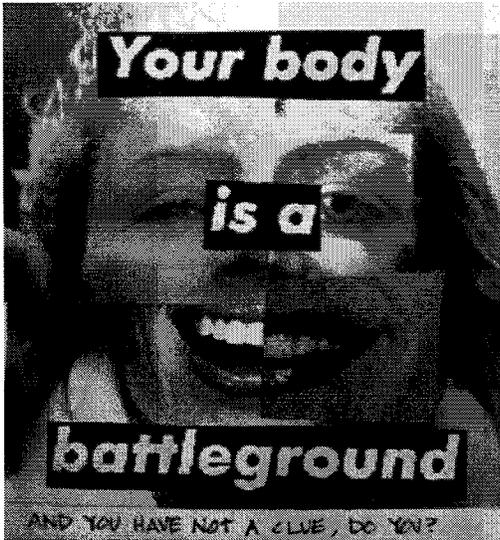
Locate one of the following artist in the Louvre or Pompidou: Ingres, Nolde, Kirchner, Seurat, Manet, Grosz, Goya, or other paintings with scenes which address social contexts and the city. Analyze the painting specifically in terms of the situation, representation of social class and gender, identify the specific space in the city if possible via landmarks, titles etc. Situate the painting historically. Include an images and a series of diagrams in your journal.



C. Neiman



C. Neimann



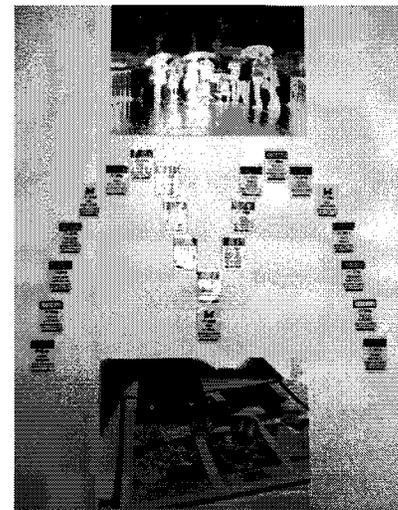
M. Bearak



(ill 10) K. Dougherty



M. Gamble



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ASSIGNMENT THREE

Unpacking the Media

Today, we are everywhere surrounded by the remarkable conspicuousness of consumption and affluence, established by the multiplication of objects, services and material goods. This now constitutes a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species. J e a n Baudrillard

Take some time to review the websites in the syllabus. For your next journal entry, focus on advertising in the public realm, physical and digital. You might identify a neighborhood [your own] a highly trafficked public area [metro station, etc.] or a website. Identify at least three sources of advertising /propaganda which target specific social groups (one should reflect a target audience which is marginalized.) Identify traits associated with each social group only through the advertisement first, and then expand the analysis to include your own commentary. Speculate on subliminal intents. What is the 'media', How fast does it change? How does the media shape and influence the formation of different social classes? Which groups are consistently excluded from 'mainstream' advertising? To what degree does advertising influence your clothing, musical taste, opinions? Who controls these media outlets, does the media discriminate or contribute to false assumptions or constructions regarding social groups?



(ill 12) C. Chan

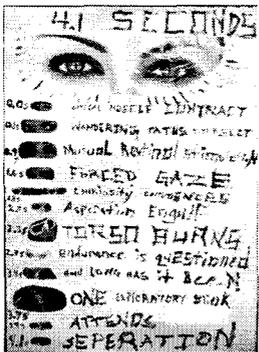
ASSIGNMENT FOUR

Masking

Man is at least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell the truth.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Critic as Artist: A Dialogue, Part II*

Mark B. and Katy M.'s "tactical" appropriation of advertisements – through re-inscription (Mark) to reconfiguration and condensing (Katy) relate specifically to one of the themes set forth by de Certeau: "making do" is the "art of the weak" or ways in which the repressed or overwhelmed seek double meaning, displacement, drifts, or multiple use of the same material. "Strategic" power structures outlined by de Certeau "suffer" once "tactical" appropriations are set into play. In essence, "making do" is a masking or a camouflage, whether explicit or implicit, against a dominant mode of production, an aggressive social, economic or political structure, a dominant enclave, etc. "Making do" can be very place or situation specific. Barbara Kruger's work operates successfully in this capacity. Andy Warhol's early work is an excellent (and complex) example of "tactical" appropriation and masking. In your journals, construct a mask, ruse or diversion against some external "strategic" structure. It may be a text, a physical object, a trajectory through the city, armor, an event, etc.



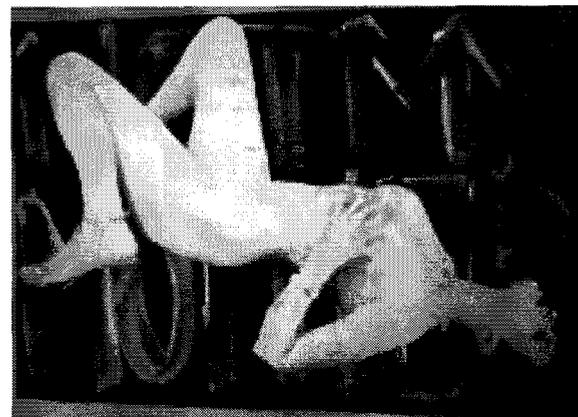
T. al Haddad



K. Dougherty



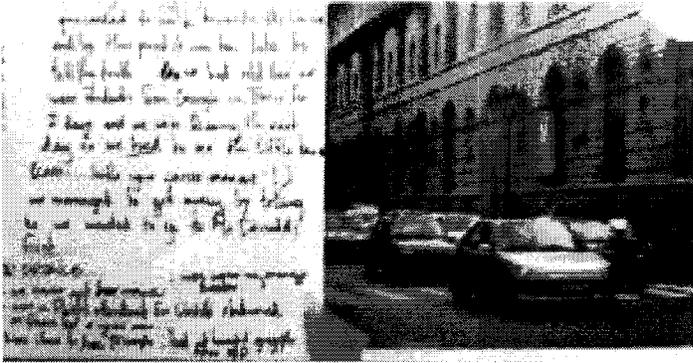
M. Rivas



K. Dougherty



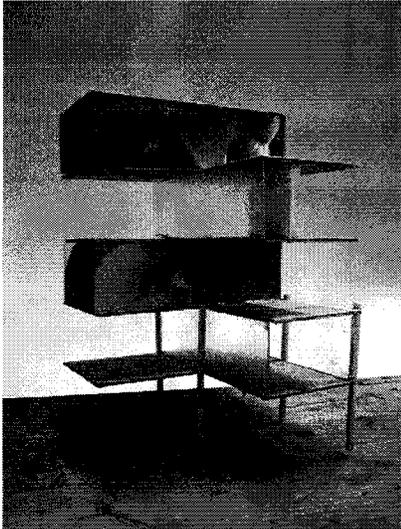
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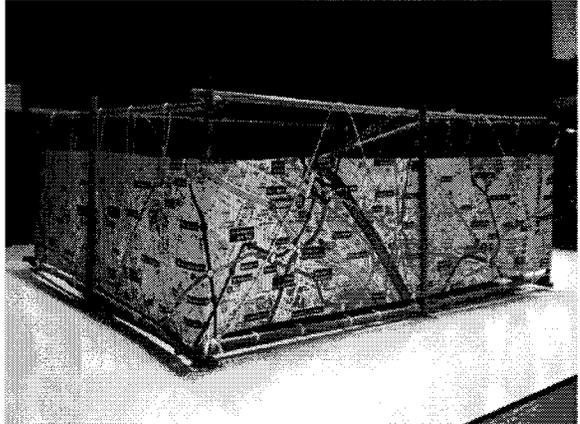
M. Weaver



R. Hosford



C. Neimann



R. Hosford

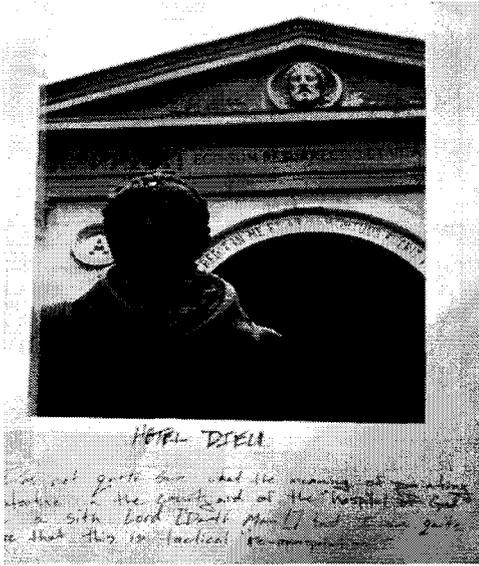
ASSIGNMENT FIVE

Mapping/Derive/Transformation

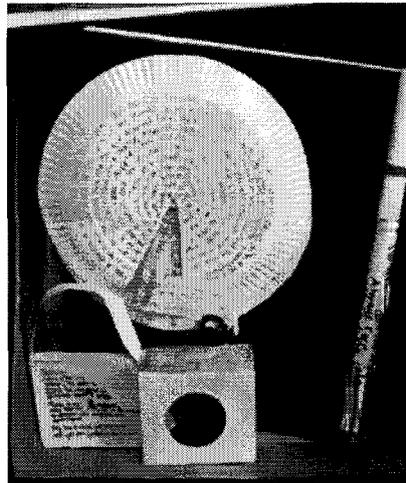
Chart the “psycho geography” of a chosen terrain. This will result in a multi-dimensional construct, which may include text, photographs, or other “things” collected from your derives. This exercise asks you to go out on an exploration, alone or in groups of two, and should be personal and poetic rather than objective and systematic. Your reconnaissance zone should result from your own interests and intuitions. The goal of the first exercise is to conduct a “derive” according to the rules set down by Guy Debord in “Theory of the Derive”. The derive is essentially a form of urban play : a way to experience the city as a source of pleasure. The main object is to observe and describe the psychological quality and structure of the place you have selected, identifying points, forces, or lines of attraction and repulsion, of greater or lesser emotional interest. Your attitude should be active and constructive as well as contemplative : identifying possibilities that are latent in the site in view of a possible transformation. The result of this charting of the “passional terrain” should be a verbal report and a conceptual model that begins to a mode of transformation relative to your site. Working through the other assignments, develop a tactical response to a condition on your site. it should be as specific as possible as regards your poetic intentions, and your narrative and metaphorical reading of the environment.



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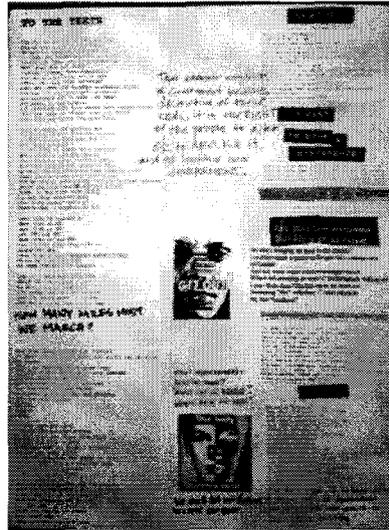
R. Hosford

SOME NOTES ON A CONCLUSION

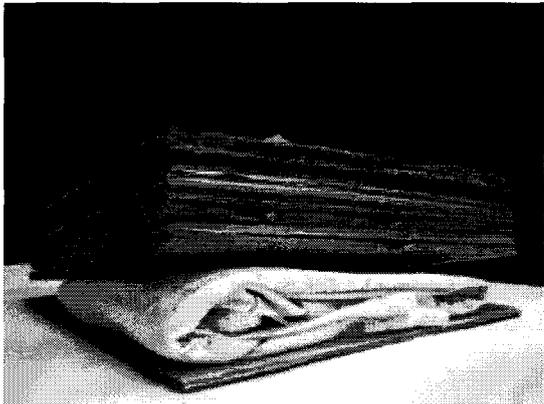
Each exercise is imagined in such a way to support the final assignment, the interrogation of a chosen urban space. Considering the fact that so many of the American students are inundated by the media in many of their day to day doings, it has been an eye opening experience for many of them to work towards questioning their surroundings. Discussions and presentations regarding Identity politics and the Situationist agenda to date have been the most rewarding. Similarly, locating the Public, Private and Social through the works of Arendt, Lyotard and Virilio led to some very provocative exchanges. In many ways, the analytical components of each assignment have proven to be much more of a challenge than expected. For example, the painting analysis, assignment two, has demanded a fair amount remedial discussion regarding how to decipher social and political contexts through painting. As an accompaniment to the design studio and the history of Parisian urban form, the students and the faculty found the seminar to be quite successful in encouraging alternate readings of the city.

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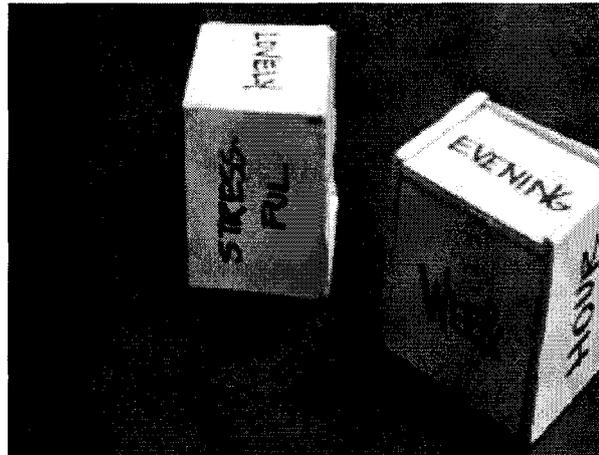
—Italo Calvino



C. Neimann



M. Bearak



K. Dougherty

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