

Sections - Driving/Drawing

The projects which will be presented extend the human body into the city via the car as an audio/video apparatus, an instrument for reading and measuring the city in movement. The documents are choreographed as sections through the city in which the section cut (the line drawn) is the trajectory of driving/drawing. A conventional orthographic projection drawing such as a vertical section cut or a plan drawing bisects a building, object or site allowing us to view inside and understand relationships across or below a drawn line. In the case of *The Car as an A/V Apparatus*, a section cut drawing is reinterpreted. The idea is to also look inside but in this case the process of driving is the act of drawing. The car, imagined as a large instrument inscribes a line also on a territory while revealing through video images and sounds, the qualities of the spaces it traverses. The driving/drawing is full scale both in terms of space and in terms of time. Full scale in that it encompasses the expanse of space and time that it traverses in real time as an act of experiencing, as a way of understanding spaces of transition. This experience is a "process of appropriation of the topographical system" as described by Michel de Certeau in his essay *Walking the City*. He argues that the plan-like image of a city as seen from above is nothing else but a "viewpoint... a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices" (1). While de Certeau is referring to walking and to the experience of being immersed bodily as a pedestrian in a place in *The Car as an A/V Apparatus* we are talking about driving but the idea is still the same. In this case the exploration of the city is also through a bodily experience and an immersed experience but as an expansion of the human body into a scale of great distances via the automobile as an interface. The car as mediator translates intricate body movements and sensory engagements into acts which displace, move, maneuver our body through space, in this case a much larger space - a context defined by distance and time and a scale of movement and displacement so common of our cities today.

Trui Vetter in *'Night on Earth': Urban Practices and the Blindness of Metatheory* describes the taxi ride in Jim Jarmush's 1992 film *Night on Earth* as a "paradoxically mobile point of stability" within the film containing and transmitting networks of relationships. She states: "The random encounters that take place in this confined space between places, which is usually invisible to all but its occupants, are fleeting and transitory, yet meaningful and

Mapping the City in Movement: The Car as an A/V Apparatus

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This paper explores the methodology of mapping the city in movement at the scale of the automobile through a series of audio/video mappings of our transitory spaces. The work looks for qualities and characteristics of our car culture through the exploitation of digital audio/video cameras - devices which allows us to explicitly record movement and change in time. The paper presents a series of audio/video mappings of the city in movement. In these studies the digital audio/video camera, a device which allows us to explicitly record movement and change in time, is used as an investigative tool and as an extension of our bodies in order to observe, capture and measure otherwise imperceptible moments of our moving and fast paced experience of place. The projects include one of my projects as well as student projects from a studio taught at Clemson University. The work also evolves from the discussions of an undergraduate/graduate seminar/studio entitled *A/V Mappings and Notations* also taught at Clemson University. The importance of *The Car as an A/V Apparatus* studies is that they allow us to uncover characteristics of place that are particular to the infrastructure of our car cities and most importantly to the experience of inhabiting the transitory spaces of these cities in movement. The discoveries that these mappings reveal are meant to inform us of the potential for more specifically intervening in these cities with proposals which uncover positive characteristics of our driving culture and better engage it with pedestrian movement. The attempt is to discover beneficial ways to incorporate these two drastically different yet intricately connected scales - characteristics so common of our cities but often in discord and unexplored for their potential.



in some cases life-changing" (2). She, like de Certeau argues for a more immersed experience of place and against the all encompassing view from afar, as removed, singular and totalizing.

Car as an A/V Apparatus is an investigation in drawing which maps adjacencies not by physical proximity but also by adjacencies of time and distance as connected by the activity of driving and the physical moving space of the car.

The Trajectories - Expanding the Body into the City

In the making of these full-scale life size drawings, cameras are mounted to the car prior to driving. The location(s) of camera(s) are determined by the specifics of each investigation. What is choreographed is the set up of the car as an audio/video apparatus and of the trajectory of driving. The apparatus itself, the body/car/camera, in its trajectory captures, studies, measures, draws/drives. This as an extension of the human body allows us to immerse ourselves in a study of place as related to our movement and corporeal experience.

More importantly as body/car/camera, the apparatus captures the city at the scale of driving (corpor/car) a scale which expands our body into the scale of a larger space of great distances, movements, speeds, and durations. As sections through the city these studies in their own way dissect the space(s) of the car/city as a way to understand organizational patterns of our car culture in time.

The investigation starts with a study envisioned in collaboration with my colleague and also partner Doug Hecker for a reading of Atlanta, Georgia, a city based almost entirely on the car.

We proposed *By-Pass*, an audio/video mapping which examines the auto-centric urbanism of Atlanta by fully engaging the planning idea of bypassing the city. We proposed an exhaustive 24-hour car trajectory on the arterial roads that never connect to the center of the city and which constantly defer arrival. By mounting multiple audio/video cameras to the car, the car will be blurred into a mobile video apparatus which captures a day in the city. The camera will be positioned looking out at the passing landscape, activities in other cars; looking in at the speedometer, radio channels, and gear shift. We anticipate capturing snippets of life on the move via choreographed viewing apertures - the windshield, the rear and side mirrors. While we have not executed the shot, there are a few recent experiments which were carried out by my students that I would like to describe and which I think present some of the outcomes that might be possible with this kind of

exploration. I presented the idea of the section cut as a driving trajectory to my fourth year group last semester. This was interpreted by them in various manners and the approaches varied. However issues regarding the intricate relationship between body/car/city prevailed in all of the explorations. The studies begin to reveal systems of interconnected relationships and ephemeral dynamics of place via the car as mediator. Using video helped them to visualize the temporal quality of this kind of city. I have tried to organize these studies in the following manner: *Inside/Outside - the Ambiguous Space of Driving*, *Pauses - Transitory Spaces of Necessity*, and *Car/City - Interactive Space*.

Inside/Outside - the Ambiguous Space of Driving

In *A Cross-Section* one of the student's project which most resembles an architectural section drawing, the driver takes a segment of the strip city with it at the speed of the car and on the plane of the driver as it traverses the city. A *Cross-Section* is a moving section in which the plane of the document is constantly moving forward. The driver which appears near the middle of a horizontally elongated document of parallel vanishing spaces is represented as a silhouette framed by the back of the front car seats and the front windshield. This figure which turns the steering wheel so slightly and vibrates to the motor of the car pushes the strip city with it at the speed in which it drives. The study is actually constructed by walking the city exhaustibly four times, each time covering a segment of the strip; two vast and empty sidewalks, a linear network of unconnected drive-through zones and parking lots, and a railroad track which ran parallel to the street. Through video editing, the student connected the individual parallel views next to each other exposing adjacencies imperceptible during a normal drive yet informed by the act of driving in that particular zone. Like on a typical section drawing, he presented adjacent yet disjointed spaces alongside each other on a line - in this case on a moving line.

In *Inter[sur]face*, a reading of the city at night, the car is manifested as a kind of interface of relationships between the city outside and the inside of the car through a playful fluctuating pattern of sounds and images between the interior space of the car and exterior space of the city as well as the juxtaposition of these two spaces. Upon viewing this document we are delighted by moments which appear and disappear and moments which overlap at times via the reflective and transparent surfaces of

the car. The drive and its components build up like a musical fugue on the car as a receptor. As the car moves, colorful views fluctuate from glimpses of the inside of the car to glimpses of signage and buildings outside - *the Inter[sur]face* condition of this kind of space, the line which delineates an adjacency that all who drive have experienced. *Inter[sur]face* is a vivid manifestation of a condition that most of us inhabit daily in our commutes, an ambiguous space yet a delightfully complex space which expands and contracts and which can possibly best defined or rather captured on a surface - the surface of the car and viewed from inside and from outside. Is this surface, as it moves, the plane of the section cut as interpreted by this particular student? Nonetheless, it manifests a spatial condition so common of our transitory spaces. This condition also occurs with audio in the experience as the sounds of the cabin combine and separate with the sounds of the city outside.

The Car and City - Interactive Space

In *Signals and Maneuvers Car and City* the student chose to concentrate on the dialogue between car, cars and city via the signals of the car and the signage of the city as a kind of language. She collected the footage by carefully positioning the camera within her automobile in a place where she could collect relevant information within the car, behind the car and ahead of the car while driving. The video was then edited. Parts were cropped, enlarged and repositioned to emphasize her findings; the pauses, maneuvers and signals of hers, other cars and the city while they communicated with each other in their trajectories. Her document, an abstract imagery of blinking lights, textured surfaces, pauses, movements, turns, stops, amplified the infrastructure of the city in a rhythmic display of light and texture. Her close ups included tailgate lights, traffic lights, turning signals - a cacophony of lights directing and signaling car movement and revealing the road infrastructure of the city.

In *Automoscope* the car and driver are turned into a moving viewing instrument in which the car and driver's interdependence is brought to light. A camera is mounted within the inner-workings of the car, somehow beneath the space of the driver looking out through eye like openings - the grille. Another camera is mounted within the car's cabin back seat framing the eyes of the driver via the eye shaped opening of the rear mirror. In this audio/video notation, the city is seen from down low through two elongated frames while the driver's eyes move from left

to right, front to back. Guided by red, yellow and green lights which overlap all frames on the audio/video document, *Automoscope* travels the city quietly yet perceptive and aware of its surroundings. This particular student gave persona to the car but most importantly brought to bear the correlative relationship we have with our automobiles as extensions of our bodies. When watching this document we are not sure if it is the car that is driving the driver or the driver which is driving the car.

Pimp Ride is a more extroverted interpretation of the social space of the car. It focused on the activities and conversations occurring by various occupants within the car and the expansion of this activity into the street of the city both while moving at slow speeds or as stationary during activities like camping, tailgating, etc.

Pauses - Transitory Spaces of Necessity

I have grouped several projects under a category I decided to title *Pauses - Transitory Spaces of Necessity*. Most of these audio/video documents look at the condition of the quick transaction which occurs while driving - activities which are necessary and which occur on the run from within the confines of the car. Activities which in most cases do not happen any other way as this is the structure of most of our cities. These include bank transactions, eating, and shopping - all of these activities of necessity occurring on the way somewhere else as in a state of transition via the drive-thru infrastructure of our cities. One study in particular titled *2 ½ minute* transaction cuts a *section* through the fast food restaurant *McDonald's*. The document diligently manifests the inner workings of the establishment at the moments of exchange between the teller and the driver, at the moment in which the restaurant and the car connect, at the moment at which food is ordered, paid for, prepared, dispatched, and eaten while the car circumvents from the strip road around the building and back onto the strip. Other studies feed the car also while the driver also eats; efficiently everyone's needs are taken care of at our highway gas stations.

Conclusion

The exercise of looking at moving image through the eyes of architectural drawing and at the speed of a car, through the framed view of car apertures yielded imaginative readings of place but most importantly helped the students [the investigators] to be precise in both a quantitative and qualitative manner in the observation and representation of the environment under study - their cities in movement. The studies which I like



to refer to as mappings merge the vocabularies of drawing and video as a way to more precisely see and possibly understand the infrastructure of our car culture. The medium of video is of the vocabulary of the car - a language of speed, revolutions, pauses, imagery - a language of movement and time. As Mitchell Schwarzer states in *Zoomscape Architecture in Motion and Media*, "We have become used to seeing architecture through abrupt shifts of viewpoint and via unexpected juxtapositions. Vehicles zoom our sight across great distances at tremendous velocities. Cameras zoom our sight beyond the capacities of our bodies, and usually rupture the continuum of space and time" (3).

What are the possibilities that this medium allows us to see and understand about our cities. What does this way of seeing and thinking lead us to? A few of these audio/video immersive studies have been taken to the level of proposals for the city by students who took my seminar in conjunction with their thesis studio taught by colleague Doug Hecker. The outcome are projects which engage and activate the in between space of waiting and moving and where adjacencies are not necessarily physical yet they exist and are meaningful. In a project entitled *Transit Hives*, the student activates pedestrian activity at the strip and connects various disjointed spaces via transit by engaging the Asheville Transit Authority (ATA) and creating a reciprocal relationship between pedestrian activity and the bus system. This project reactivated pedestrian space by rethinking vehicle movement, in this case the bus and its route as a place and not simply as a trajectory, as an interactive communicative device and not simply as a transporter. Rather than just the strategy of mitigating the generally negative aspects of car culture which is usually the case, the qualities of inhabiting the city in motion - the ephemera of car space, is thought of as having a direct positive impact on the experience of our cities by bringing vibrancy to normally vacant spaces. In this project the student reactivates an expanse of space at the scale of the car yet of the tactility of the body as a place of layered activities of these two drastically different scales. The expanse of walking and the expanse of driving are brought into a reciprocal relationship with magnificent effects rather than into conflict and/or disengagement.

Car as an A/V Apparatus allows for a kind of possession of space. This immersive audio/visual approach in movement helps us to analyze our transitory urbanism as well as to

imagine the possibilities and communicate them. As realistic yet analytical, this medium and approach helps us to engage more fully with the actual experience of place and not simply with formal characteristics of our cities. As Schwarzer expands; "we are experiencing architecture within a technologically expanded field - not just as objects in continuous space, but also as variable assemblages in intermittent space" (4). By using a medium and an approach which explicitly addresses movement and time, a visualization of perceptions and the specifics of the experience are facilitated and manifested. Fresh and constructive approaches for our cities should evolve from such understanding.

Students whose work was presented:

Mason Edge, Donna Horne, Marc Leverant, Cole Stamm, Mike Stopka, Addison Woodrum, Simons Young

Notes:

1 de Certeau, Michel. *Walking in the City.* In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Trans. by Steven Rendall. California: University of California Press, 1988, p. 93

2 Veters, Trui. 'Night on Earth': Urban Practices and the Blindness of Metatheory. In *The Urban Condition: Space, Community, and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis* 343- 357. Rotterdam: OIO Publishers, 1999, p. 349

3 Schwarzer, Mitchell. *Zoomscape Architecture in Motion and Media.* Princeton Architectural Press, New York 2004, p. 12

4 Ibid., p. 21