

Aerial States

Joseph Heathcott

Aerial States Cartographies of the Megacity

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This project uses Google Earth images to examine the sprawling landscapes of Mexico City. The urban fabric emerges over time as one of the great artifacts of human creativity. The warp and weft of streets, the tissue of buildings and open spaces, the cross-cutting incisions of highways and rail lines: these elements combine in a dazzling variety of ways to produce the urban fabric. It is a constant process of negotiation between public authority and private interest, between aesthetic visions and everyday needs. The goal is to discern the varied formal logics that generate one of the world's largest conurbations.

The cartographic view deployed in this project is not uncomplicated. The vertical apprehension of cities embraced by planners has long legitimated claims to authority, truth, and temporal power. Google satellite views have reinforced such presumptions, particularly given the company's entangled relations with the U.S. Geospatial Intelligence Agency. Nevertheless, aerial photographs provide a useful source for artists, designers, and citizens to study metropolitan forms and landscapes. The vertical lens is particularly valuable for its capacity to illuminate spatial relations that are otherwise difficult to trace on the ground, but which nonetheless shape everyday human experience.

The exhibition showcases four subroutines grounded in different modes of inquiry: metropolitan mood-grids; polychromatic filaments; transitions and ghost forms; and extraordinary land uses. To produce the pieces, I captured and stitched together very large images (4950 pixels width) from Google Earth and rendered them using Photoshop, playing with gradient, density, color curves, and contrast. The result is a kind of metropolitan meta-quilt, with the urban fabric recursing and resolving into a new representational form--a city constantly in the making.





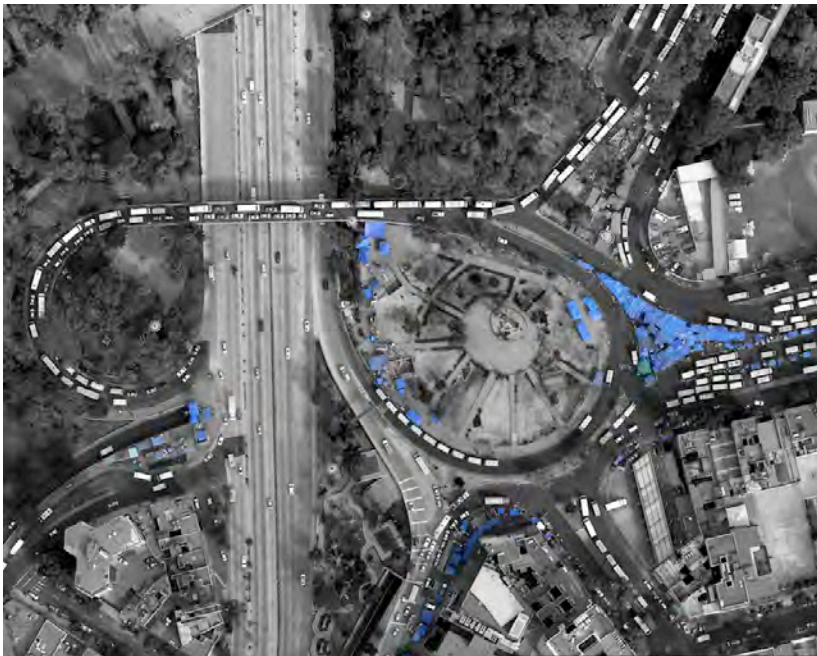
Metropolitan Mood-Grids

This subroutine uses color and contrast manipulations in order to expose the tremendous variation in the urban fabric, at times subtle, at times intensely dramatic.

Top left. Airport and surrounding barrios.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.

Top right. Las Peñas.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.

Bottom. Colonia Federal.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.



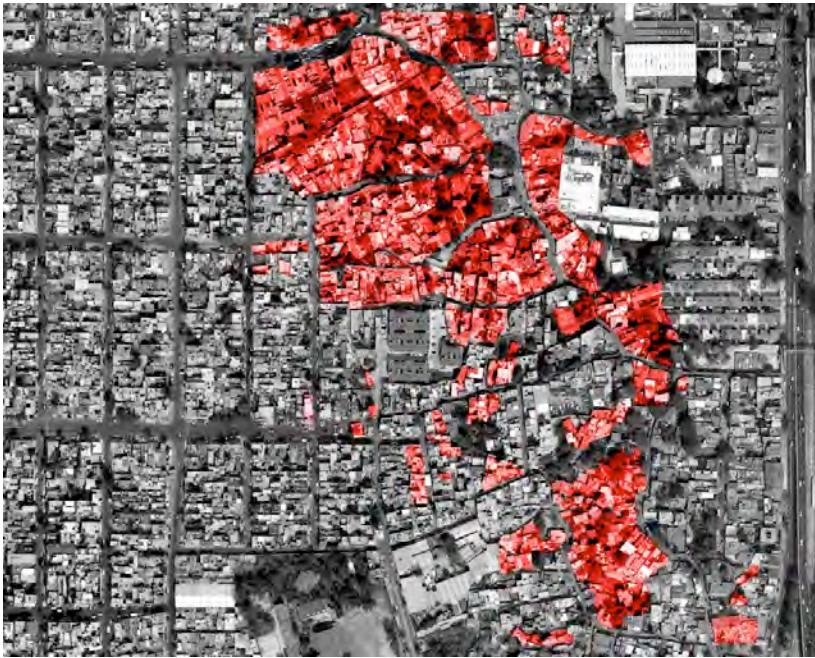
Polychromatic Filaments

The traditional street markets of Mexico City take shape in the nodes, interstices, and paths of the urban landscape. This subroutine explores their variation on theme.

Top left. Street Market at Tulyehualco.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.

Top right. Street Market at Moctezuma.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.

Bottom. Street Market at Chapultepec.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.



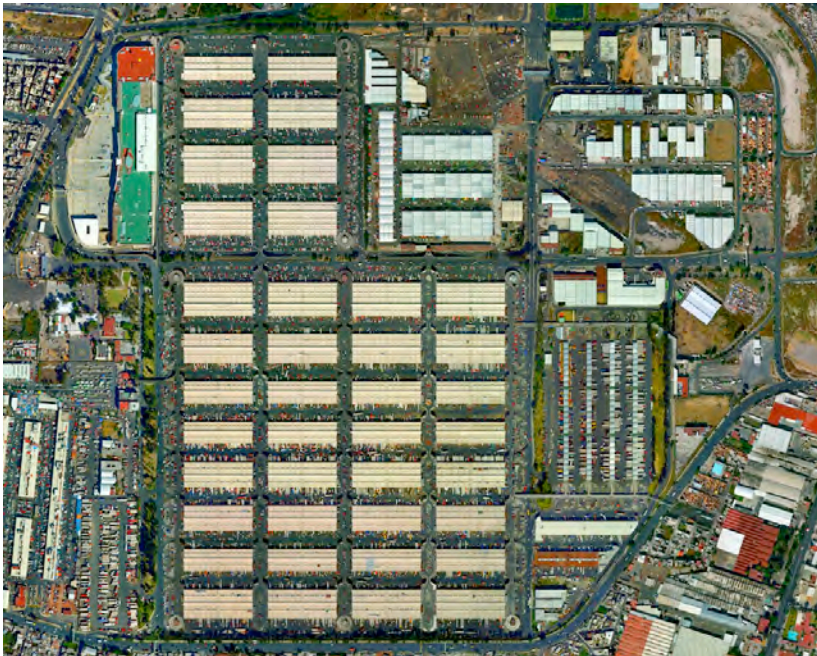
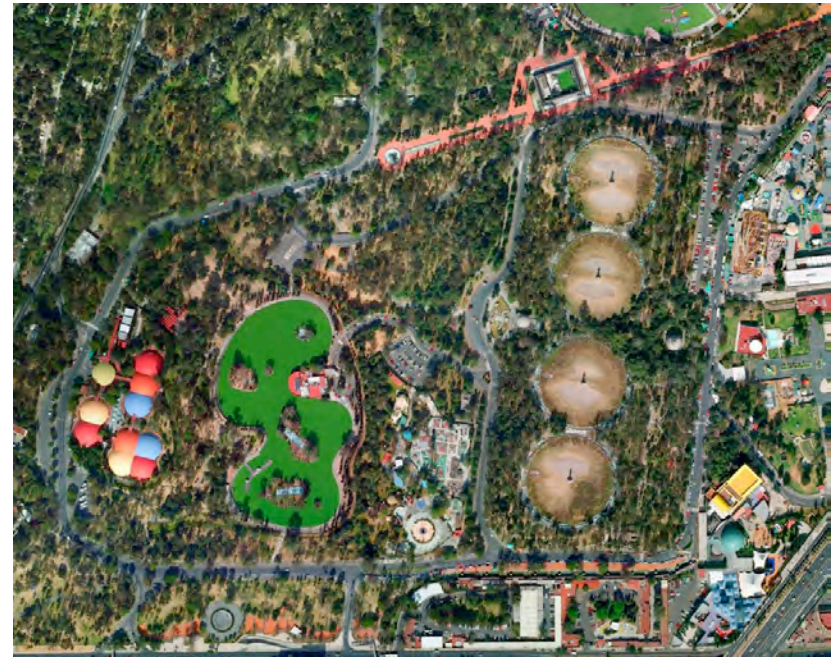
Transitions and Ghost Forms

In this subroutine, digital traces reveal hidden dimensions of the landscape, such as buried rivers, abandoned street corridors, and transitions between different grid forms.

Top left. Grid transitions, Santa Ursula Coapa.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.

Top right. Trace of the Rio San Buenaventura.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.

Bottom. Abandoned Corridors, Naucalpan de Juárez.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.



Extraordinary Land Uses

The vast bulk of the urban fabric is composed of homes. However, multiple commercial, industrial, and institutional forms also well up across the landscape in this subroutine.

Top left. Penitenciaría Santa Martha.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.

Top right. Fairground at Chapultepec.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.

Bottom. Central de Abasto Wholesale Markets.
Digital print, 16" x 20", 2018.

Metropolitan Mood Grids

6 pieces, 16" x 20"
Silver C-prints on Fuji gloss paper
Mounted on 0.25" beveled black gatorboard w/float

2 pieces, 32" x 40"
Silver C-prints on Fuji gloss paper
Mounted on 0.25" beveled black gatorboard

Polychromatic Filaments

12 pieces, 16" x 20"
Silver C-prints on Fuji gloss paper
Mounted on 0.25" beveled black gatorboard w/float

Contents

Transitions and Ghost Forms

8 pieces, 16" x 20"
Silver C-prints on Fuji gloss paper
Mounted on 0.25" beveled black gatorboard w/float

Extraordinary Land Uses

6 pieces, 16" x 20"
Silver C-prints on Fuji gloss paper
Mounted on 0.25" beveled black gatorboard w/float

2 pieces, 32" x 40"
Silver C-prints on Fuji gloss paper
Mounted on 0.25" beveled black gatorboard

About the Artist

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Joseph Heathcott is a writer, artist, curator, and educator based in New York. His work explores metropolitan forms and urban imaginaries within a global perspective. He has served as the U.S. Fulbright Distinguished Chair to the United Kingdom at the University of the Arts in London, Senior Visiting Scholar at the London School of Economics, and Mellon Distinguished Fellow in the School of Architecture at Princeton University.

Hailing from the rustbelt, Heathcott learned camera work at an early age using his father's U.S. Army issued 35mm Mamiya Sekor TL500. He pursued photography and printmaking as a student in the 1980s, and spent several years after college creating agit-prop for political groups and protest events. While in graduate school, he worked as a radio producer, museum collections specialist, and community organizer. He earned his Ph.D. in 2001 from Indiana University, and currently teaches at The New School in New York.

Heathcott's published creative work can be found in a wide range of venues, including Domus, Urban Omnibus, The Guardian, On Site Review, Bosporus Art Quarterly, Camera Obscura, Dark Matter, XCP Streetnotes, 34th Parallel, Antioch Quarterly, Public Phenomenon, and Metropolis magazine. His juried work has been shown most recently at the Colorado Photographic Arts Center, Site:Brooklyn Gallery, Barrett Art Center in Poughkeepsie, Oceana Gallery in San Francisco, Black Box Gallery in Portland, and The Studio Door in San Diego. He has curated exhibitions at MIT (Vertical City), Town Hall Gallery in Stuttgart, Germany (Post-Acropolis Metropolis), the Lily Rare Books Library at Indiana University (Cities Illuminated), and the Queens Museum of Art (BQ Borderlands).