

VISUALIZING CHANGE IN RADICAL CITIES AND POWER OF IMAGERY IN URBAN TRANSFORMATION

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IMAGINING

RADICAL CITIES

VISUAL NARRATIVES

ARCHITECTURAL VISUALIZATION

ARCHITECTURAL PEDAGOGY

Cities have consistently served as fertile grounds for the emergence and growth of radical ideas, political transformations, and social movements, with urban landscapes nurturing visionary concepts, idealism, and revolutionary ideologies. This research delves into the captivating world of radical cities, exploring the power of image and visual narratives to communicate and comprehend urban activism within diverse contexts. By analyzing various case studies and student works, we aim to create, study, and reimagine vivid portrayals of urban activism, radical urbanism, and

future socio-spatial developments. The focus lies on developing innovative visual modalities and collaborative critical pedagogical approaches that engage with the complexities of radical cities across North America, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and beyond. In this study, we explore the potential of image and visual narratives to decode and understand pivotal societal transitions in radical cities. By employing imaginative and critical pedagogy, we aspire to foster a more profound comprehension of urban activism and its impact on shaping the cities of the future.

INTRODUCTION

Cities have consistently served as fertile grounds for the emergence and growth of radical ideas, political transformations, and social movements (Swyngedouw, 2014). Their urban landscapes have nurtured visionary concepts, idealism, and revolutionary ideologies that have shaped the cities of the future (Lukas, 2019). This research delves into the fascinating world of radical cities, exploring the power of imagery and visual narratives to comprehend and communicate urban activism within diverse contexts (Mehan, 2023a; 2023b). By analyzing various case studies and student works (McPeek & Morthland 2010), our aim is to create, study, and reimagine vivid portrayals of urban activism, radical urbanism, and future socio-spatial developments (Mehan, 2022; Zamani & Mehan, 2019). The focus lies on developing innovative visual modalities and collaborative critical pedagogical approaches that engage with the complexities of radical cities across North America, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and beyond (Mehan and Mostafavi, 2023). In this study, we examine the potential of image and visual narratives to decode and understand pivotal societal transitions in radical cities (McGuirk, 2014). By employing imaginative and critical pedagogy, we aspire to foster a deeper comprehension of urban activism and its impact on the transformation of urban landscapes (Mostafavi & Mehan, 2023; Novak et al., 2023). As we navi-

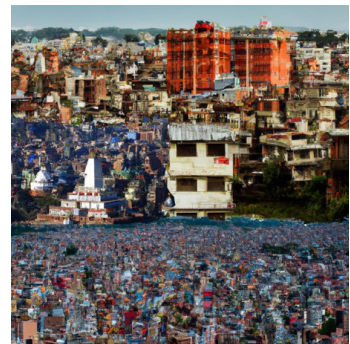
Fig. 1 a) Olivares, *Cuban Immigration*, 2022, Poster using the image trace tool in Adobe Illustrator; b) Rodriguez, *Utopian Forth Worth*, 2022, AI-generated photo using words such as gentrification, culture, Hispanic, displacement, Mexican, history, and Forth Worth; c) Khatiwada, *Environmental Crisis in Kathmandu, Nepal*, 2022, collaging technique.



a)



b)



c)

gate the captivating realm of radical cities, we recognize the importance of visual narratives in illuminating the intricacies of urban activism (Mehan & Mostafavi, 2022; Mehan, 2020). Through this research, we seek to contribute to the ongoing discourse on urban transformation by harnessing the power of imagery and employing critical pedagogy to engage with the dynamic evolution of our cities (Mehan & Mehan, 2022).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research, rooted in the media elective course *Radical Cities over Time and through Space: Re-narrating Urban Activism* taught at Huckabee College of Architecture, Texas Tech University in the Fall of 2022, explores the captivating world of radical cities and the power of image and visual narratives to communicate and comprehend urban activism within diverse contexts. The course encourages students to delve into various case studies and create, study, and reimagine vivid portrayals of urban activism, radical urbanism, and future socio-spatial developments (Varış Husar et al., 2023).

The course structure is centred around several assignments related to each student's chosen radical city, focusing on developing innovative visual modalities and collaborative critical pedagogical approaches. Students use various methods and approaches to engage with the complexities of radical cities across North America, Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe, and beyond. These include visualization techniques, illustrative tools, collaborative manifesto writings, creative expression, AI-generated images, educational and community-building events, online virtual platforms, and social media (Bina et al., 2020) (Figure 1). Throughout the course, students compile their assignments in a portfolio, part of the final deliverable. Additionally, students are asked to reflect on their portfolios by writing an opinion-based narration text, elaborating on their selected radical cities and the reasoning behind their choices. This process enables students to

employ imaginative and critical pedagogy, fostering a more profound comprehension of urban activism and its impact on shaping the cities of the future.

By analyzing various case studies and student works, this research explores the potential of image and visual narratives to decode and understand pivotal societal transitions in radical cities, contributing to a more profound comprehension of urban activism and its role in urban transformation.

VISUALIZING NARRATIVES AND DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN URBAN STUDIES PEDAGOGY

In contemporary architecture and urban studies, imagery and visual representation are essential tools for conveying information, promoting projects, and creating visual impact and meaning in the built environment (Carrasco Hortal et al., 2022; Schuster, 2021). To explore and represent the experiences and perspectives of urban activists, pedagogical practices employ educational and learning-based approaches that engage others in understanding these issues (Yip et al., 2019). A critical method in this process involves visual narratives and digital storytelling techniques, which empower participants to craft engaging multimedia representations of their experiences, ideas, and viewpoints on urban activism and radical cities (Lambert, 2013; Ohler, 2013).

At the beginning of the course, students identified and presented their radical city, delving into the histories and stories of specific cities, places, or neighborhoods concerning broader urban activism and social change. Using visual narratives and digital storytelling, students addressed essential questions related to their case studies, such as the reasons for their selection, the catalysts for change, the moments of change, the key individuals involved, connections to other radical cities, and the visualization of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia themes (Harvey, 2000; Soja, 1996). Various sources, including blogs, newspapers, historical archives,

articles, and social media, supported their selections, with some students even incorporating personal experiences with their chosen radical cities (Jenkins et al., 2016).

Throughout the course, students participated in group critiques, writing workshops, theory seminars, invited lectures, presentations, and desk critiques to refine their understanding and representations of radical cities (Kvan, 2001; Pallasmaa, 2009). They submitted posters visualizing their selected radical cities using their preferred visualization methods and crafted short manifestos to support their visual presentations (Borden, 2001; Fraser, 2019). By engaging in visual narratives and digital storytelling, students connected with the complexities of urban activism and radical cities, fostering a deeper understanding of these issues through collaborative and imaginative approaches (Robin, 2008).

In the final part of the course, the focus shifted to selected radical city projects, thematically clustered into various groups. Each project began with a short manifesto or narration describing the radical city, addressing the six previously mentioned questions, and accompanied by posters visualizing the selected radical cities from different perspectives (Thompson, 2012). Students also collaborated on a group poster submission, comparing radical cities across different contexts and geographies based on related themes and clusters (Fainstein & Markusen, 2012). The course's case studies section will highlight selected students' manifestos and individual and group posters, focusing on three different projects across various contexts and geographies, such as Feminist Radical Cities, Latin American Radical Megapolises, Revolutionary Radical Cities, and North American Urban Activism (Moss, 2017; Mercer, 1994). By emphasizing visual narratives and digital storytelling techniques in architectural pedagogy, students actively understand and represent the complexities of urban activism and radical cities in a contemporary context (McLellan, 2006; Sandercock, 2003).

The next section presents a diverse range of case studies that exemplify the application of visual narratives and

digital storytelling techniques in understanding and representing radical cities. These case studies encompass various geographical locations and thematic focuses, illustrating the versatility and impact of such pedagogical practices in urban studies (Luigini & Menchetelli, 2021; Luigini & Panciroli, 2019). The selected case studies include Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as a Latin American Radical Megapolis; Kathmandu, Nepal, as a Radical Spiritual City; Barcelona, Spain, as a Feminist Radical City; and Havana, Cuba, as a Revolutionary Radical City. Each case study delves into the complexities of the respective city, highlighting urban activism, social issues, historical context, and unique cultural aspects through visual narratives and manifestos. The case studies demonstrate the potential of employing visual narratives and digital storytelling techniques in architectural pedagogy to foster a deeper understanding and representation of urban activism and radical cities in a contemporary context.

CASE STUDIES: MANIFESTOS AND POSTERS.

Latin American Radical Megapolis: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Rio de Janeiro is well-known for its vibrant culture, yet it is also home to a hidden city within the city that stands apart from the norm. Emma Sheets, a student, has learned that Rio's dazzling lights and lively celebrations cast a shadow over this hidden city. In these slums, people live in favelas and face daily oppression due to the lack of governmental support. The government is aware of these social oppressions but has yet to implement practical solutions, with some measures even worsening the situation and causing increased distress, anger, and rebellion.

In her manifestos and poster visualizations, Emma delves into the origin of oppression in the favelas, the mega-events that sparked outrage among the community, and the feelings of worthlessness experienced by the residents. She also discusses the challenges the younger generation faces



Fig. 2 Emma Sheets, *Fame vs Civilians: Which is more Valuable in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, 2021*. a) *Radical Rio Poster*; b) *Origin of Oppression*; c) *Mega-Events*; d) *Left in the Dark*; e) *City Within City*; f) *The Worth of the Younger Generation*.

growing up in favelas, highlighting the importance of raising awareness and advocating for change. By examining the complex dynamics within Rio de Janeiro, Emma brings attention to the need for a more inclusive and compassionate approach to urban development that benefits all members of society, especially the marginalized and oppressed living in the favelas.

In Poster 2a, titled *Radical Rio*, the student Emma Sheet highlights the contrasts within Rio de Janeiro, a city famous for its vibrant culture, yet simultaneously overshadowing a hidden city of slums. These slums, known as favelas, are home to people who face daily oppression due to the lack of government assistance. Although the government is aware of the social oppressions, it has not taken effective action to address them. In fact, some measures that superficially appear helpful worsen the situation, causing distress, anger, and in-

creased rebellion. The favela life is plagued by crime, drugs, and unsafe living conditions, including a lack of running water, abandoned public transit, and littered streets. These circumstances lead the residents to believe they are not worthy of the assistance they desperately need (Figure 2a).

In Poster 2b, *Origins of Oppression*, the reasons behind the dismal conditions in favelas are explored. Factors such as heritage, architecture, and challenges faced by the community provide insight into the situation. Rio's heritage began with the reconstruction of mountains and beaches, which led to the development of a metropolis around existing neighborhoods. These neighborhoods eventually deteriorated and became the slums known today. The outdated architecture and engineering systems failed, leaving behind rusted pipes and crumbling walls that contribute to the ongoing challenges.

During the preparations for the 2016 Rio Olympics, civilians started protesting the government's prioritization of the event over the welfare of favela residents. The oppression continued to manifest as visitors were catered to with new stadiums and stages, while those living in the favelas remained in squalid conditions (Figure 2b).

In Poster 2c, *Mega-events*, the impact of large-scale events such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup on the community is examined. While these events are typically associated with celebration, they have caused outrage among the locals. President Bolsonaro's leadership has consistently caused distress, but the mega-events brought about different frustration. Government funds were spent on stadiums and advertising for tourists, while the needs of the local people were largely ignored. Mega-events often draw attention to only certain aspects of the host city, obscuring its underlying issues. In the case of the Rio Olympics, stadiums and fields were built at the expense of demolishing favelas and relocating families. Although the relocation may seem kind, the affected families were forced out of their homes and placed in similar living situations. The government's actions made it clear that the mega-events took precedence over the local

population's well-being. Consequently, the global audience was directed to focus on a false reality, leaving them unaware of the social oppressions faced by the community (Figure 2c).

In Poster 2d, *Left in the Dark*, the plight of those living in the favelas of Rio De Janeiro is explored. These individuals, who have long felt unworthy and overlooked, now find themselves truly left in the dark, making do with what little they have. The daily challenges they face merely scratch the surface of their oppression. Their cries for help have gone unheard for years, but they finally gained some visibility during the 2016 Olympic Games. As new stadiums and fields attracted people worldwide, those living in the favelas seized the opportunity to make their voices heard. They silently protested within the stadiums, expressing their thoughts and emotions through signs. However, no meaningful action was taken to address the underlying issues once the games concluded and the tourists departed. Frustrated and still grappling with ongoing oppression, the civilians returned to the stadiums, but their protests were no longer silent this time. Stadium chairs were torn from the ground, signs were destroyed, and litter was strewn about. This destruction was a response to past oppression and a reflection of their growing discontent. These stadiums and fields, once symbols of grandeur and international attention, were left purposeless and abandoned, serving as a stark reminder of the community's unmet promises and unaddressed struggles (Figure 2d).

Poster 2e, *City within a City*, explores the challenges faced in the favelas of Rio De Janeiro. These impoverished neighborhoods are often referred to as a city within a city characterized by widespread poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and high crime rates. While police presence is intended to provide protection, the actions of a few officers have eroded trust within the community. The younger generation is particularly vulnerable, with children being lured into the drug trade and young women facing objectification and exploitation. The pervasive favela funk music further perpetuates harmful stereotypes. Despite these challenges, there is a

growing awareness through various media forms, shedding light on the undesirability of favela life and the need for more significant support and intervention (Figure 2e).

Poster 2f, *The Worth of the Younger Generation*, highlights the impact of favela life on the current community and future generations. The younger generation is particularly vulnerable, being drawn into the drug trade and facing worse objectification. These children deserve to grow up knowing they are seen, meaningful, and worthy. However, their families are caught between low-paying jobs and a desire for a better life for their children. With limited access to transportation and clean water, their daily struggles persist. While awareness of favela life has increased since the Rio Olympics, more action is needed. The government holds the key to change, with the ability to allocate resources, reinstate transit routes in the favelas, and provide the necessary support for these children to live free from fear and oppression. Rio De Janeiro must transform for the sake of its future generation (Figure 2f).

Radical Spiritual City: Kathmandu, Nepal

Nishan Khatwida, a student born and raised next to the Bagmati River, recalls a time when its waters were pure and used for everyday activities like cooking, bathing, and drinking. However, that seems like a distant dream now, as the river has become heavily polluted due to human waste and trash dumping. Despite efforts by volunteers and the government to clean up the river over the past seven years, the pollution persists. Nishan firmly believes that people are the main problem, as they continue to dirty the river despite cleaning campaigns. Engineering and construction alone cannot address this issue. During these challenges, a ray of hope emerges with the election of Balen Shah, a 32-year-old rapper who has become the first independent candidate to win in Kathmandu Metropolitan City. With a background in civil engineering and experience in various projects, Balen aims to make Kathmandu great again. His election manifesto outlines critical priorities, including improving infrastructure,

prioritizing technical education, providing comprehensive ambulance services, conducting free health check-ups for the elderly, repairing roads and drainage systems, implementing GPS tracking in public transportation, reviving old water resources, installing CCTV for security, establishing public toilets, promoting employment and entrepreneurship, and launching a tree planting campaign.

Balen's mission is to bring about positive change in Kathmandu, and he acknowledges that the road ahead will take work. He seeks guidance, support, and suggestions from the community, promising to stay connected and adjust if necessary. Determined, he embarks on a journey to change the face of Kathmandu and restore the Bagmati River to its past glory. Nishan shares the hope that the river will flow clear in the next five years and the banks will be clean, adorned with greenery, reclaiming its holiness once again.

Nishan's first poster highlights the sacredness of Nepal's holiest river, the Bagmati, originating from the Himalayas. It emphasizes the religious significance of the river, believed to possess purifying qualities. However, the poster also confronts the harsh reality of the Bagmati's heavy pollution, showcasing its journey from a pristine source to a polluted state. This visual representation underscores the urgent need for immediate action to restore the river's purity (Figure 3a).

Nishan's second poster focuses on the environmental challenges the Bagmati River faces. It visually portrays the

Fig. 3 Nishan Khatiwada, *Radical Spiritual City, Kathmandu, Nepal*, 2022. a) *Nepal's cultural Diversity*; b) *Nepal's Mountains and Rivers*; c) *Pollution and Environmental Justice in Nepal*.



sources of pollution, including solid waste, untreated sewage, and industrial effluent, which transform the river into a dark, polluted sludge. The poster also highlights the detrimental effects of unplanned urbanization, road construction, and the dwindling of natural springs due to insufficient rainwater infiltration. By contrasting the river's condition during the monsoon season with its state during the dry season, the poster emphasizes the pressing need for conservation efforts (Figure 3b).

Nishan's third poster offers a personal perspective as a local resident who grew up near the Bagmati river. Through heartfelt storytelling, Nishan shares cherished memories of utilizing the river's water for everyday activities such as cooking, bathing, and drinking. However, the poster confronts the unfortunate reality of human waste and trash being dumped into the river, shattering the dream of a clean and pure water source. While acknowledging the commendable efforts of volunteers and the government to clean the river, Nishan expresses concern about the ongoing pollution resulting from human actions (Figure 3c).

These three posters by Nishan shed light on the pollution and degradation plaguing the Bagmati River in Nepal. They also offer a glimmer of hope by showcasing the efforts of individuals like Balen Shah and advocating for community support. These posters aim to drive positive change and restore the Bagmati River to its former glory by raising awareness, inspiring action, and emphasizing preserving its purity and sacredness.

Feminist Radical City: Barcelona, Spain

In Barcelona, the chant of "Nosotras Tenemos mil razones!" resonates as thousands gather to demand an end to the silence and ignorance surrounding women's rights. The fight against gender inequality, violence, and disparity is shaping the stories of both women and men. It questions why violence is often overlooked and how a government claiming democracy dismisses such issues. The stark statistics on intimate partner violence and the infamous "Wolf Pack Case"

reveal the urgency for change. Workplace disparities, from the gender pay gap to vertical and horizontal segregation, persist. The protests and movements in Spain challenge biases, norms, and ignorance. It is crucial to listen, understand, and act to create a just and equitable society. Spain has made strides towards equality but lacks effective policies. Gender units are being implemented, but more reforms are needed. Despite challenges, there is hope for progress through listening and courageous voices.

In this impactful poster 4a created by Maci Morris, the power of collective voices is vividly depicted. It showcases a collage of signs from various marches in Barcelona, Spain, each representing a unique story and history. These signs carry powerful messages, demands, and calls for change, highlighting the diverse range of issues and experiences faced by women. The poster serves as a testament to the resilience and determination of those who refuse to be silenced. It emphasizes that these voices cannot be ignored any longer and that their stories deserve to be heard and acted upon. Through this poster, the strength and unity of the movement for women's rights shine brightly, inspiring others to stand up, speak out, and join the fight for equality (Figure 4a).

In this powerful poster 4b, titled *A Million Reasons*, Maci Morris captures the unity and determination of the women's rights movement in Barcelona, Spain. The poster displays a multitude of signs from different marches, symbolizing the

Fig. 4 Maci Morris, *Feminist Radical City, Barcelona, Spain, 2022*. a) *Voices that cannot be ignored*; b) *A million reasons*; c) *The Future of Hope*.



a)



b)



c)

diverse voices and stories of the people involved. Each sign carries its own unique message and represents the history and experiences of those who have fought for women's rights and freedom. Overlaying the photographs are quotes and cheers that have resonated throughout the movement for years. These powerful words serve as a reminder of the collective strength and determination of the people who have come together to demand equality and justice. The poster showcases the immense support and unity that exists within the movement, with thousands of people standing together in the name of women's rights. It captures the passion and energy of these gatherings, serving as a visual representation of the countless reasons why individuals are fighting for change. Through this poster, Maci Morris highlights the power of collective action and the importance of amplifying the voices of those who have been silenced for far too long. It is a call to action, inspiring viewers to join the movement and contribute their own voices to the cause of women's rights and freedom (Figure 4b).

The Future of Hope: Barcelona in All Its Glory is a captivating poster that embodies the essence of hope and transformation. It showcases Barcelona as a city that embraces change and learns from its past. The poster emphasizes the importance of listening to stories and the power they must bring about meaningful change. It represents the hopeful future that awaits when voices are heard, and action is taken (Figure 4c).

CONCLUDING NOTES

Visualizing change in radical cities and harnessing the power of imagery in urban transformation involves understanding the complexities of the built and natural environment and the social, political, and economic factors that shape these spaces.

By integrating multi-disciplinary perspectives, pedagogical approaches, and visualization techniques, urban scholars,

educators, students, and local communities can work together to foster a deeper understanding of the challenges and possibilities of creating more just and equitable urban spaces (Fischer-Nebmaier et al. 2015).

The case studies of Rio de Janeiro, Kathmandu, and Barcelona offer valuable insights into the struggles and aspirations of different cities and the movements that have emerged to address social issues and advocate for change. Each city has unique challenges and contexts, but the common thread is the power of collective voices and the urgency to transform.

In Rio de Janeiro, Emma Sheets sheds light on the hidden city within the city, the favelas, where marginalized communities face oppression and neglect. Through her manifestos and posters, she exposes the origins of oppression, mega-events impact, and the voices of those left in the dark. Emma's work emphasizes the need for inclusive urban development and compassionate approaches to address social disparities.

Nishan Khatwida, in Kathmandu, focuses on the pollution and degradation of the Bagmati River, emphasizing the responsibility of individuals and the importance of community efforts. Through his posters, he highlights the river's religious significance, environmental challenges, and personal memories that remind us of its past purity. Nishan's work inspires the restoration of the river and underscores the role of elected officials like Balen Shah in bringing positive change to the city.

Maci Morris captures the spirit of the women's rights movement in Barcelona through influential manifestos and posters. Her work amplifies the voices of thousands of people demanding equality and justice (Mehan & Tafrata, 2022). The posters showcase the diversity of experiences and the unity of the movement, inspiring others to join the fight for change. Maci's work underscores the importance of listening, understanding, and taking action to create a more equitable society.

These case studies demonstrate the power of art, activism, and imagery in raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and advocating for social justice. They remind us that change is possible when voices are heard, stories are shared, and

communities come together (Valentino, 2021). By exploring themes critical to local communities and engaging with diverse voices, actors, and stakeholders, urban living labs can be developed to educate and empower students as urban activists and critical thinkers skilled in using the power of imagery to shape the future of cities ((Mehan & Abdul Razak, 2022).

As urban scholars, educators, and activists, engaging in ongoing dialogue, exploration, and collaboration is essential to ensure that imagery's power is harnessed effectively in the quest for more inclusive, just, and equitable urban spaces. By embracing the power of collective voices, diverse perspectives, and shared visions, we can work together to build more inclusive, just, and equitable urban spaces for generations to come, using the power of imagery and visual narratives to inspire and enact transformative change in radical cities.

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