Situating Eidetic Photomontage
In Contemporary Landscape Architecture

Blake Belanger and Ellen Urton

ABSTRACT Photomontage is a pervasive method of representation in landscape architecture used frequently in both educational and professional settings. Despite the proliferation of and widespread technical proficiency for creating photomontage, there has been relatively little discussion about the important nuances that distinguish photo-realistic simulations from conceptual collage compositions. By examining the breadth of contemporary work and its theoretical and historical basis, the authors delve deeply into an analysis of the most abstract and conceptual type of photomontage, which they term eidetic photomontage. As a means of addressing criticisms of eidetic photomontage they draw examples from landscape architecture professionals and students to identify common compositional strategies and communicative strengths. The article concludes with a discussion of how eidetic photomontage is valuable to landscape architects for enriching creative process, inviting dialogue, and exploring highly speculative proposals.

KEYWORDS Photomontage, eidetic, collage, representation, visual communication, Photoshop, Dada

INTRODUCTION Representing design ideas through photomontage is an established technique for graphic communication in landscape architecture. Professionals, educators, and students create hybrid images using both analog and digital processes, resulting in a wide range of final products. While the technical knowledge required to make such images is common, there is a gap in the theoretical dialogue regarding photomontage. In particular, there have been few attempts to define and understand the unique value of photomontage as a mode of visual communication.

Photomontage is a broad term describing any image composed of extractions from photographs, and possibly various other media, which when combined take on new meaning not present in any individual element. The graphic character and quality of photomontage images vary dramatically because these compositions can be created using analog and/or digital techniques. Widespread adoption of Adobe Photoshop and lesser-known image manipulation programs propelled photomontage into mainstream graphic communication, both within and beyond the design disciplines. The frequency of photomontage in contemporary culture suggests that many people are comfortable reading, interpreting, and creating information using these images, positioning photomontage squarely in the contemporary visual milieu. Much of the photomontage intended for public audiences is aimed at emulating a visual scene—a photo-realistic representation of a moment in time depicting a potential future reality. Moving beyond the pictorial, many practitioners and educators leverage the creative, experiential, and evocative potential of photomontage. The authors refer to this more conceptual and evocative category as eidetic photomontage. To help position eidetic photomontage within landscape architecture,
academics and practitioners need a more precise vocabulary to understand and apply its compositional and communicative potential.

The intent of this article is to advance dialogue about photomontage in general and eidetic photomontage in particular. The article lays a foundation for delving into the more sophisticated and perhaps more relevant questions about the agency of photomontage in the creative design process. Through eidetic techniques, photomontage is not merely restricted to a role of representation, but performs a generative function in ideation and conceptualization. The promise of photomontage rests not only with a finished product but also with its power to catalyze ideas.

The authors first establish both the legacy and widespread contemporary use of photomontage and find that what little research exists on photomontage in the design professions is generally critical. To analyze applications of photomontage in landscape architecture, the authors surveyed hundreds of photomontage images, and by plotting their findings on a chart, they locate eidetic photomontage as the most abstract and highly conceptual type. From the initial image analysis, the authors describe and define eidetic photomontage to inform a second, more in-depth review of over 70 eidetic images. Following this focused evaluation, the authors further identify eight compositional and affective characteristics. The article concludes with a summary, focusing on the agency of eidetic photomontage in landscape architectural design and practice. In making the case that this graphic form is frequently used and inadequately understood, the authors assert that eidetic photomontage provides many opportunities for the landscape architecture profession.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Dada Art Movement and Speculative Design

The origin of photomontage in contemporary visual culture can be traced back to the collage artwork of the early twentieth-century Dada art movement (Figure 1). Emerging from a framework of political instability and war, the Dada movement began in Berlin around 1916. Dadaists perceived a division between art and everyday life, and considered most art irrelevant and elitist. Motivated to bridge this gap, their work was intended to reunite art with the concerns of people’s ordinary existence. To expose their ideas to the broadest possible audience, the Dadaists aspired to make artwork
that was both accessible and easily reproduced. Manipulating photographs and images from popular media accomplished these goals (Evans and Gohl 1986). Some Dadaists, including Raoul Hausmann, Georg Grosz, John Heartfield, and Hannah Hoch sought to distinguish their work from collage, and therefore coined the term “photomontage” as a way to describe their new artistic method (Ades 1976). The supremacy of the message within their work constituted Dadaists’ paramount concern. More invested in affecting change than in creating static objects of art, they produced agenda-driven pieces intended to provoke thought and open dialogues. Without the intention to represent a singular place or object, Dada artists conveyed an imaginative concept or idea.

In the 1960s, landscape architects and architects operating on the fringe of speculative investigation appropriated Dadaist principles. Offices such as Superstudio and Archigram proposed highly speculative urbanistic ideas, expressing their visions through a variety of conceptual representational techniques. For example, Superstudio used photomontage to convey fascination with the grid as a rhizome-like infrastructural system facilitating information flows. In \textit{The Continuous Monument Project}, a visionary mixed-media photomontage series, Superstudio arranged photographic image fragments of people, vegetation and other elements onto an abstract ground surface composed of a white plane with a black grid superimposed. By abstracting the ground plane, the images bring attention to the notion of urban development through continuous infrastructure and modularity. In an equally cerebral composition, “MOMA Environment,” Superstudio uses only image fragments to juxtapose a forest contained within a box, placed at the mouth of the San Francisco Bay and penetrated by the Golden Gate Bridge (Lang and Menking 2003).

Similarly, Superstudio’s contemporary Archigram created conjectural “Instant City” proposals depicting event spaces and large-scale urban installations delivered to locations through advanced—and perhaps fanciful—technological means (Wall 1999). Their evocative photomontage “Instant City Airship, The Airship in Lancashire,” depicts a massive dirigible transplanting urban structures and iconic pop-cultural images to a seemingly provincial village in a mountainous terrain (Figure 2). Archigram relied heavily on comic-style drawings and photomontage to transmit ideas, which, according to architecture professor and urban designer David Walters, was...
“urgent, and communicated in terse, staccato bursts of text and images after the fashion of an aerogram or telegram” (Walters 1994, 2). Through these media, the radical architectural theorists created stunning graphics that defied “any attempt at conventional reading” (Walters 1994, 2).

**Use in Contemporary Practice**

Today, firms use many different photomontage techniques that include combining 3D models with photographic elements, image collage, and mixed media compositions. Other offices balance photomontage with more traditional media, such as watercolor painting and colored pencil renderings. Landscape architects commonly use photomontage to create perspective drawings representing an imagined scene. In addition, designers also use photomontage in their creative process to investigate conceptual ideas and explore design potential.

Across the breadth of photomontage used in landscape architecture, there exists tremendous variety of graphic style, and an array of compositional strategies. While current literature lacks a consistent vocabulary to describe categories of photomontage, different types of compositions that perform widely ranging functions for designers are generalized simply as “photomontage” or occasionally “collage.” Today, professional landscape architectural photomontage work abounds. Periodicals such as *Topos* and *Scape* contain many examples of photomontage in every issue, and compendiums of professional representation typically include photomontage as part of its composition. In her concluding remarks, Amoroso proclaims “Collage-montage is now the standard medium and visual representation type in the field of landscape architecture” (Amoroso 2012, 250).

**Contemporary Academic Applications**

The prevalence of photomontage in landscape architecture education is evident in a variety of contexts, including texts on representation and landscape theory, as well as art exhibitions, most notably a 2013 Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum exhibition called “Composite Landscapes.” This exhibit showcased a variety of photomontage works, many from landscape architects and architects from both professional practice and academia (Shannon 2013). Perhaps the most current and influential text on contemporary landscape representation, *Representing Landscapes: A Visual Collection of Landscape Architectural Drawings*, was compiled by Nadia Amoroso (2012). A collection of over 400 examples of representation in landscape architecture, it is comprised of student work submitted by professors from over twenty universities worldwide. Intended to encompass a broad range of modes of representation in digital, analog, and mixed media, the compendium includes plans, perspective drawings, sections, 3D computer models, physical models, maps, and diagrams. Considering the variety of images included, it is stunning that one of every four figures in the book is some type of photomontage or includes photomontage as part of its composition. In her concluding remarks, Amoroso proclaims “Collage-montage is now the standard medium and visual representation type in the field of landscape architecture” (Amoroso 2012, 250).

A 2012 *Landscape Architecture* magazine survey of landscape architecture department chairs in the United States and Canada revealed that of all computer applications, Photoshop is most often required for student purchase, and only two software applications—Photoshop and AutoCAD—were taught at every institution responding to the survey (Smith 2012). The next generation of landscape architects is being trained to graphically communicate through Photoshop, suggesting a future rich in photomontage.
SCHOLARLY DIALOGUE AND CRITICISM

Literature Review Reveals a Gap in the Discourse
Landscape architects use photomontage as a standard form of representation and apply an abundance of methods and media to make those compositions, yet few professional publications address the nuances between different types, and its value to the discipline. Most of the existing discourse focuses on the shortcomings of photomontage. In fact, there have been surprisingly few peer-reviewed articles published in recent years pertaining to any topic of representation in landscape architecture. A recent analysis of Landscape Journal article content by Matthew Powers and Jason Walker (2009) reveals that only 6% of articles published between 1992 and 2007 address topics that would be eligible for the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (CELA) “Communication and Visualization” research track. “Articles exploring existing or new approaches and applications for communicating and facilitating design,” qualify for this track and article topics include “Photography, Music, Storytelling, Poetry, Visual simulations, Drawing, [and] Film” (Powers and Walker 2009, 100). While Landscape Journal certainly does not comprise the entire theoretical dialogue, it is worth noting that representation-focused scholarship has assumed a virtually inconsequential role in one of the discipline’s leading academic journals.

Although peer-reviewed dialogue on visual communication is disappointingly thin, its importance to the discipline is crucial. The authors of Landscape Architecture Research: Inquiry, Strategy, Design, assert, “The relationship of representation to landscape experience and the creation of systematic knowledge is profoundly complex and central to the future” of disciplinary theory (Deming and Swaffield 2011, 34). The authors cite James Corner (1992, 1999) and Lily Chi (2007) to support their argument that the current inquiry into representation is inadequate. Furthermore, within this already narrow scholarly dialogue in landscape architecture, there is even less discussion of photomontage even though this form of visual expression is pervasive.

Criticism of Photomontage
Photomontage has been criticized for muddling design proposals and for its inability to express complex narratives. Catherine Dee (2010) cautions against “candy store aesthetics,” a tendency she has observed to overcomplicate designs with excessive and competing elements. According to Dee, the prevalence of photomontage is partly to blame for this trend: “The first [condition fueling the candy-store aesthetics phenomenon] is the ready availability of imagery via the Internet and the popularity of digital collage as visual medium—the latter often used by academics to illustrate theory and practitioners to promote unrealized projects. When emulated by students, digital collage leads to a sense of landscape as an interchangeable, random palette of parts” (Dee 2010, 24). From Dee’s perspective, photomontage makes it too easy for designers—particularly developing designers—to indiscriminately pile on the pieces. Instead, she advocates for an aesthetic motivated by precision, utility, and thrift (Dee 2010).

Another critic, Sanda Iliescu (2008), asserts photomontage is motivated by a “reductive ethos,” that over-simplifies worldly complexities in favor of totalizing, singular narratives. Iliescu contends that the “cut and paste” mentality of digital collage relies too heavily on visual aspects of place, and fails to express less tangible, imaginative qualities. She advocates for a visual aesthetic more open to interpretation, embedded with multiple readings, with the capacity to bridge between “art and life” (Iliescu 2008, 68). Katie Kingery-Page and Howard Hahn (2012) parallel Iliescu’s concerns, and call for greater abstraction to avoid the pitfalls of kitsch. Iliescu and Kingery-Page and Hahn’s arguments were primarily made in reference to representational and literal examples of photomontage, rather than abstract and conceptual types of photomontage.

A significant amount of photomontage that reaches the eyes of students, professionals, clients, and stakeholders is indeed vulnerable to such criticisms. Perhaps the relative ease with which these compositions can be made is one reason for the weaknesses of some photomontage used in landscape architecture. This problem is likely exacerbated by a lack of clarity of purpose. With a fundamental understanding of Photoshop (or other image manipulation software), one can easily crop, cut, paste, resize, and arrange image extractions with little attention to conceptual implications, narrative complexity, or meaning. Conceptually ineffective photomontage is in circulation, and in many cases, published. These images dominate
the body of photomontage work from professional offices, and might exhibit a very high quality finish and be realistically believable. However, photo-realism and polish of craft cannot compensate for a dearth of creativity, nor should technical capability to create photomontage supplant thoughtfulness or a quest for deeper meaning.

James Corner (1990) makes a distinction between craft and motivation, asserting that the skill of making alone is inadequate for landscape architectural design. Motivation, on the other hand, “necessitates the definition of a particular stance towards life—some idea of a culture’s relationship toward the world and existential problems. It employs the feeling found in cultural memory and personal experience to generate meaning, wonder, and expression” (Corner 1990, 61). From Corner’s perspective, as well as Dee’s and Iliescu’s, many examples of photomontage are indeed subject to criticism.

Within the discussion of photomontage in landscape architecture, there is a need to make distinctions between works that allow for comparative visual analysis through realistic representation of spatial conditions, and those which invite speculation and open dialogue through abstraction. To communicate effectively requires a common vocabulary to describe these works, an understanding of the visual qualities that set them apart, and a means of determining the most appropriate choices in crafting a work of photomontage relative to its intended purpose.

METHODS

What is the value of abstract and conceptual photomontage? What are counterarguments to criticisms leveled against photomontage? What are the compositional strategies that can be employed by designers to craft photomontage? In answering such questions, the authors used a mixed-method approach partially appropriated from art history to gather and analyze photomontage images from academic and professional settings. Images were digital or print reproductions, not the original works of art; therefore some variation in color and clarity was accepted in the assessment. Since the vast majority of audiences view photomontage in the form of reproductions, the authors consider image variability an acceptable condition. With the intent of identifying visual characteristics common to photomontage in landscape architecture, the authors reviewed and analyzed a broad cross-section of photomontage images. Images included in the analysis were selected from a variety of sources, including professional periodicals (Topos, Praxis, ‘Scape), edited essay collections (Corner 1999, Waldheim 2006), compendiums of professional and/or student work (Amoroso 2012, Comotti 2009, GROSS.MAX. 2007, Lang and Menking 2003, Sadler 2005, Smelik et al 2007), case study books (Czerniak 2002), textbooks, (Farrelly 2011), online archives (Archigram 2014), and a variety of professional practice web sites (Atelier le Balto 2014, Field Operations 2014, Hargreaves Associates 2014, Martha Schwartz Partners 2014, Nelson Byrd Woltz 2014, OLIN 2014, PWP Landscape Architecture 2014, Sasaki Associates 2014, Thomas Balsley Associates 2014).

The authors viewed over 200 images of photomontage works from the source materials. To interpret the images, they applied art historical methods and systematically answered such questions as what characterizes the image, what are the compositional attributes and which of those characteristics occur with frequency, how was each image constructed, to what degree is the work representational or abstract, and to what degree is the idea conveyed literal or conceptual? The authors employed abductive reasoning and a grounded theory approach to assess the many images under consideration. As a means of understanding the range of images, they identified two continua along which the works could be placed. They reviewed images in terms of their ideation, determining whether each image communicated a more literal thought or a highly conceptualized, more intangible idea. Next, they reviewed the graphic elements of each image as they ranged from representational to abstract and positioned images based on the degree to which it depicted a more photo-realistic scene or a greatly abstracted composition. The authors plotted each work on a graph with the representational/abstract continuum on the x-axis, and the literal/conceptual continuum on the y-axis thereby allowing them to visualize the location of each photomontage work under analysis (Figure 3). In studying the plots, the authors observed that the majority of works fell into one of two categories: literal and representational, or conceptual and abstract. The authors further examined the most highly conceptual and visually abstract works to define their common
characteristics, understand the graphic cues that set them apart, and explore their potential in landscape architecture visual communication. The authors termed the conceptual and abstract examples, “eidetic photomontage.”

**Eidetic Photomontage Description and Application**

The selection of the term “eidetic” reflects Corner’s (1992, 1999) writings on representation in landscape architecture. He describes eidetic as “that which pertains to the visual formation of ideas, or to the reciprocity between image and idea. That drawing is fundamentally about making images suggests that it might actually generate and transform ideas for the percipient rather than simply representing them” (Corner 1992, 244). Eidetic images focus more on ideas and conceptualization than on proposing a finished product.

Corner (1999) and Cantrell and Michaels (2010) apply the term “ideogram” to examples of abstract photomontage. While evocative, using “ideogram” to characterize conceptual collage compositions invites confusion given its established definition: “a written character symbolizing the idea of a thing without indicating the sounds used to say it” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). The singularity of “a written character” is antithetical to the plurality of photomontage and is therefore inadequate as a descriptor. However, that Corner and Cantrell and Michaels categorize photomontage as representing an “idea of a thing” is noteworthy because it aligns with Dadaist motivations to express an idea-driven agenda.

In contrast to photo-real examples, eidetic photomontage includes photographic elements, but frequently incorporates other media as well. These mixed-media compositions depict subjects that often relate to a variety of historical contexts, and communicate intangible qualities, temporal dimensions, or abstract phenomena of a design proposal. Common stylistic characteristics of eidetic photomontage include ambiguous image frame, rough image extractions of individual composition elements, uneven distribution of both light and color, and photographic elements combined with a variety of other media (e.g. hand-drawn elements, painting, or ink wash). Eidetic photomontage focuses more on conceptual development and
Figure 4
Become. Watch/Switch. Explorative eidetic photomontage using generalized depiction of place to investigate contested and complex influences on a site (Haddox 2013; with permission of Elizabeth Haddox).
ideas rather than accurately depicting a spatial condition (Figure 4).

In contemporary landscape architecture, a number of offices create eidetic photomontage as a regular part of their practice. The collage-like photomontage of the Edinburgh-based landscape architecture firm GROSS.MAX. provide stunning glimpses into the firm’s ideation in their design process. Using almost exclusively photographic fragments, GROSS.MAX.’s photomontage often takes on a surreal tone through layering of patterns, shifts in image transparency, and placement of compelling characters in the image foreground (Figure 5). For GROSS.MAX., however, making photomontage is less about creating an artifact and more about generating design ideas. Founder Eelco Hooftman writes: “While for many architects, the plan and diagram remain the starting point of their designs, for us, the image, or more precisely the mental picture of the image, is the point of departure into further exploration. In our works the image is not so much an artistic impression or presentation, but rather an expression and speculation” (Hooftman 2009, 39). Like Archigram and Superstudio, and the Dada artists before them, GROSS.MAX. uses photomontage to explore potential and generate ideas. Significantly, these ideas allow designers like Hooftman to take a position and make arguments about their work, “For us the image acts as a preview and eye-opener, a view but also a point of view” (Hooftman 2009, 39). GROSS.MAX.’s integration of eidetic photomontage into speculative project development illustrates the role eidetic photomontage can play in idea generation.

For GROSS.MAX. and other designers who use photomontage as an idea generator, the act of making is as valuable as the composition itself. Andrea Kahn notes “…representation is not a matter of getting a reality right as much as a matter of constructing forms of knowledge that can cope with multiple realities. In this sense, site drawings, models, and discourses are never mere second-order descriptions of some pre-existing condition as much as they are evidence of thought in formation, a thought about what the urban site might be” (2005, 289). Applying Kahn’s perspective, photomontage becomes analogous to a quick sketch documenting a momentary glimpse of a vision, evidence of a thought in formation that expands dialogues and opens potential.

Richard Weller (2006) uses seven eidetic photomontage works to support his theoretical claims regarding the tension between planning and design. The highly conceptual compositions use images from pop culture such as Freddy Krueger from the Nightmare on Elm Street film series and images from artists such as Salvador Dali and William Blake. Weller’s compositions also contain specific references to landscape architectural work, including the juxtaposition of Ian McHarg’s face transposed onto the body of a professional wrestler holding a drawing from James Corner and Alex MacLean’s 1996 book Taking Measures Across the American Landscape. Weller also uses extractions from Rem Koolhaas/OMA’s proposal for Parc de la Villette and graphically references ideas reminiscent of Superstudio’s exploration of the grid as urban organizer. Although these works may be obtuse to readers unfamiliar with the references therein, Weller’s target audience will likely find deeper meaning through the combination of evocative image and text.

Eidetic photomontage also addresses the call from designers seeking emotive expression in photomontage...
compositions. Karen M’Closkey (2012) argues for moving beyond simple simulacra, and advocates for creating purposeful images expressing visceral aspects of design. Describing her students’ photomontages: “Notably, the images are not photorealistic. We have come to rely too much on ‘accurately’ depicting a place rather than using images to convey imaginative, rather than literal, possibilities” (M’Closkey 2012, 215). For M’Closkey and other contemporary landscape architects, eidetic photomontage presents an opportunity for expressing design ideas that link landscape dynamics with design intent, mood, and emotion.

**Eidetic Photomontage Image Analysis**

With an understanding of eidetic photomontage inspired by Corner, Hooftman, Kahn, Weller, M’Closkey, and others, the authors selected a set of photomontage works, which they differentiated as eidetic using three primary criteria: (1) images composed of photographic image fragments assembled from different sources, (2) images exhibiting a collage-like appearance, sometimes combined with other media such as hand-drawing or computer modeling, and (3) images with a clear focus on idea generation. To narrow the selection and focus on more abstract collage-like images, photomontage examples that were realistic in nature—those that might most closely emulate a photograph—were systematically eliminated.

The authors identified 72 images considered representative of eidetic photomontage and visually reviewed them for patterns and recurrence of graphic elements. Through abductive visual analysis, each author individually reviewed the set and collectively identified 19 graphic characteristics, or visual cues, that occurred with frequency. The visual cues included a broad range of image qualities such as image framing, use of human figures, use of foreground collage elements, and abstraction of surfaces. Using the 19 visual cues as criteria, the authors rigorously analyzed the 72 examples of eidetic photomontage.
to quantify occurrences of visual cues in each of the selected compositions. The results were recorded and tabulated.

Many of the visual cues identified through the pattern analysis are characteristics common in other types of representation. Intending to identify characteristics unique to eidetic photomontage, the authors eliminated 11 visual cues from the initial pattern analysis. For example, the authors noted the presence of “butterflies, birds, balloons or flowers” with high frequency, but this visual cue was eliminated because it commonly occurs in literal representational photomontage as well as perspective hand-drawings, elevations, and cross-sections.

**COMPOSITIONAL AND AFFECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF EIDETIC PHOTOMONTAGE**

The remaining eight visual cues help explain both the compositional and affective characteristics of eidetic photomontage. Compositional cues include ambiguous frame, scale and perspective distortion, extracted image fragments, and the presentation of abstract surfaces. Affective cues include the generalized depiction of place, emotive figures and devices, simultaneity and temporal distortion, and the imaginative use of cultural references. Figure 6 is an eidetic photomontage created by one of the authors for illustrating the visual cues, and is supported by Table 1, an explanation of the author’s application.

**Compositional Cues**

**Ambiguous frame.** Often an eidetic photomontage is composed such that there is no clear boundary denoting where the image begins or ends. An ambiguous frame can help bridge between the imagined space of the artwork and real space occupied by the audience, thus mediating between the represented world and the physical world. This compositional technique can also alter expectations, allow for greater freedom of interpretation, and pique the imagination regarding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Cue</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Ambiguous frame</td>
<td>Elements emerge from the primary frame, creating a secondary implied frame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Scale and perspective distortion</td>
<td>Realistic scale and perspective is employed, with attention to foreground, middle ground, and background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Extracted image fragments</td>
<td>Rough extraction around the perimeter of the foreground figures signals the image fragments originate from another source. As an experiential extract, a willow leaf is collaged onto the image foreground, suggestive of a potential place experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Presentation of abstract surfaces</td>
<td>Part of the pathway is left unrendered, leaving surface materiality open to interpretation. Shadow casting implies a level plane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Generalized depiction of place</td>
<td>The assembly is not tied to a specific geographic location, and is thus interpretable as an idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Emotive figures and devices</td>
<td>Laughing figures in the foreground set a light-hearted tone. A dusky sky with a crescent moon rising alongside Venus presents a memorable context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Simultaneity and temporal distortion</td>
<td>The woman’s face is translucently replicated, suggesting movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Imaginative use of cultural references</td>
<td>Middle-ground figures retrieved from a mid-nineteenth century periodical suggest historical considerations to place narrative.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
possibilities beyond the edge of the composition (Figures 5, 7, and 8)

**Scale and perspective distortion.** Scale and perspective are foundational considerations for constructing an image with believable depth and proportions. Most importantly for constructing a realistic perspective, the image must have a consistent horizon line that serves to organize image extracts, particularly human figures. While some eidetic compositions (or portions of them) are true to scale with believable vanishing points, often scale and perspective are manipulated and distorted, underscoring certain ideas and/or drawing out compositional relationships. Significantly altering the relative proportion of elements shifts the composition to a collage-like appearance, and provides a visual cue that the image is conceptual (Figures 8 and 9). The degree to which image extracts are out of proportion is critical, and the successfulness of the composition hinges on the magnitude to which image extracts are scaled. If the elements are very close to being accurate in perspective and proportion, but are not quite right, the photomontage appears amateurish and unintentional. Many examples of radical scale juxtapositions are found in Corner and MacLean’s (1996) book *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, in which maps, human figures, and landscape elements such as wind turbines are collaged into non-scalar compositions, giving new meaning to relationships between the parts.

**Extracted image fragments.** Image extracts are photographic fragments that retain their individual character and add abstraction to a composition. Two techniques are primarily used to accomplish this: rough extractions capture some of the original context around the perimeter of a fragment, and experiential extracts involve placing an image fragment in a collage-like fashion onto the foreground of the image frame. Rough extractions exhibit coarsely cropped edges that capture hints of the original context, which signals the pieces originated from different sources.

*Figure 7*
View Across Lake Toward the City’s Horizon. Eidetic photomontage employing generalized depiction of place, rough extractions, and an ambiguous frame. (Corner 1999; with permission of James Corner Field Operations).
Experiential image extracts are foreground elements with strong tactile qualities exhibiting a collage-like appearance, and are suggestive of objects or experiences likely to be encountered. Often placed out of scale and context and overlapping the frame, experiential extracts create a proto-foreground that gives a feeling of immersion in the space. Both of these strategies are employed in Figure 6, where the human figures retain a “halo” of their original context, and the foregrounded willow leaf implies a potential experience in the place depicted.

**Abstract surfaces.** Surface treatments refer to the rendering technique used to represent materiality of horizontal and vertical surfaces in a photomontage. In the most realistic photomontage, all of the surfaces possess a material realness, often created through Photoshop rendering or 3D rendering software. As such, an audience can fully understand the visual characteristics of a designer’s vision. Eidetic photomontage can leave aspects such as texture and materiality to the imagination of the viewer by leaving surfaces un-rendered. Such abstraction of surfaces, exemplified by Superstudio’s grid on a white ground plane, supplants the importance of literal materiality with concepts, and/or leaves materiality open to discussion. The presence of surfaces can be suggested by shadow casting (Figure 6), reflections (Figure 10), or the application of abstract planes such as topographical maps, grids, design plans, aerial photographs, or other images (Figure 8).

**Affective Cues**

**Generalized depiction of place.** Place specificity is the degree to which a photomontage is associated with a particular geographic location. By its very nature, photo-real photomontage is bound to a particular location; however, eidetic photomontage images may be place-specific, but also offer greater flexibility to communicate more general or speculative concepts. Neutralizing place-specificity through
Eidetic photomontage allows for investigating broad philosophical or systemic influences pertaining to a design proposal. For example, in Figure 4, Elizabeth Haddox’s “Become. Watch/Switch” uses generalized depiction of place to explore the paradox of industrial processes, environmental degradation, and individual human identity on a contaminated urban site (Haddox 2013). In addition, eidetic photomontages can be used to convey a general type of place experience. Corner and Stan Allen’s photomontage of a grassland scene in their competition entry for Downsview Park, Toronto, expresses an overall place experience not necessarily tied to a specific vantage point (Czerniak 2002).

Emotive figures and devices. One of eidetic photomontage’s greatest strengths is its ability to elicit an emotional response from the viewer. Often, emotional responses are evoked through the imaginative placement of human figures. Facial expressions feature prominently in foreground figures, including laughter, joy, excitement, wonder, surprise, concern, sorrow, and curiosity. Figures may also signal emotion through their poses or engagement with other people in the image. In addition to emotive poses, the figures may sometimes be engaged in creative or unexpected activities, or embedded with cultural or historical meaning. Creative use of the human figure presents opportunities to set the mood and emphasize specific potentials. Eidetic photomontage often maximizes the potential of setting a mood by foregrounding one or more figures with an emotional expression (Figures 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10).

Memorable events in scenes can evoke emotions, as can the depiction of atmospheric or cosmic phenomena. Contrary to generic blue-sky compositions that articulate generalized or idealized conditions, photomontage that incorporates emotional and memorable events invite the audience to draw from their own repository of memories and engage the image on a more personal level. A subtle emotive event is illustrated in Figure 6, in which a crescent moon and Venus are rising over a dusky horizon.

Figure 9
Urban Meadow Brooklyn. A place-specific setting with a realistically presented perspective and accurately scaled human figures combines with exaggerated blooms, abstracted butterflies, and unexpected surface textures on the human figures. (Balmori 2007; with permission of Balmori Associates).
Simultaneity and temporal distortion. Photomontage may express or explore temporal phenomena in primarily three ways: a snapshot in time, simultaneity, and movement. While some photomontage depicts a scene as a static image, or a snapshot in time as time is experienced in reality, “simultaneity” refers to works of eidetic photomontage that exhibit various programmatic activities or events occurring together that would not (or could not) occur simultaneously (Figure 8). For example, a mountain bike race, a wedding, a controlled burn, and bison grazing may occur on the same prairie landscape, but not in the same place at the same time, yet some works of eidetic photomontage may explore these different phenomena in a single composition. Such simultaneity engages the multiplicity and pluralism of imagined places and has the potential to draw out latent relationships. Some examples of eidetic photomontage also suggest temporality through exaggerated blurring of objects in motion or repeating a sequence of figures, similar to chronophotography (Figure 6).

Imaginative use of cultural references. Photomontage presents opportunities to introduce meaning through deliberate selection of compositional elements with collective cultural significance. In Figure 2, the “Instant City” dirigible is adorned with iconic pop cultural images of the period. Contemporary examples of photomontage reference pop culture, art, and history. Careful selection of recognizable people, places, objects, and symbols provides the designer with a means to articulate specific messages in their work. The effectiveness of references within a photomontage as communication is highly dependent on a shared understanding between designer and audience. For example, Weller’s aforementioned 2006 eidetic photomontage referencing William Blake’s “Ancient of Days” depicts Urizen drawing together picturesque landscapes over OMA’s Parc de La Villette competition entry. Such a work would only be fully understandable to someone with a basic knowledge of art history, landscape theory, and current developments in landscape architecture. To others, it would likely be a
CONCLUSION: SITUATING EIDETIC PHOTOMONTAGE

As the Dadaists understood, photographic elements make images accessible to audiences with a wide variety of visual skill. Combining visual accessibility with the abstractness of collage, eidetic photomontage has the potential for creating images that fall outside expected or learned categories, thus challenging preconceptions and opening the door for new interpretations. To create images that strip away the expected and present new relationships, dynamics, and potentials is to set the stage for new ideas.

This article constitutes an early step in engaging a dialogue on specific types of photomontage used in landscape architecture education and practice. Photomontage is a common form of representation in landscape architecture practice and education, and presents opportunities for design expression in a variety of capacities. The current dialogue on photomontage is sparse, and the vocabulary used to describe photomontage is inconsistent. Across the spectrum of photomontage that reaches the eyes of professionals, students, and project stakeholders, many examples are subject to critique, giving the medium a contested role in graphic communication. Although critics have bemoaned a lack of purpose in application, singular narratives, and a “candy store aesthetic” in photomontage generally, the conceptual nature of eidetic photomontage catalyzes generative ideation, opens dialogue, and as the Dadaists aspired, harnesses the potential for connecting art and life. Within this context, photomontage is, and promises to continue to be, a dominant form of representation for communicating refined design proposals, as well as speculative design investigation.

Releasing the constraints of overall compositional simulacra allows for exploration and expression of relationships and speculative visions. By shifting the focus away from concrete and literal aspects of a future condition, conceptual images have the potential to explore affective and intangible aspects of design. Employing the abstract nature of collage, eidetic photomontage sponsors multiple narratives and multiple readings, and thus remains open to interpretation and invites dialogue from different points of view. Bringing focus to ephemeral phenomena, references to external conditions, or the effects of otherwise invisible forces such as social, political, or economic influences, eidetic photomontage facilitates a more open and less literal interpretation of design ideas. Landscape architects might enrich their creative process and their ability to generate and communicate ideas by leveraging the potency of eidetic photomontage early in their design process to expand their personal investigation, and to invite dialogue from others. Additionally, landscape architects working on the fringes of theoretical projects might enrich their texts with evocative juxtapositions of unexpected or seemingly contradictory concepts through eidetic photomontage. Finally, landscape architects might be able to trace their thoughts as they unfold through quick sketch-like eidetic photomontage. The value of eidetic photomontage is both its capacity to communicate conceptual and abstract aspects of design, and its agency to nurture new forms of thought, creativity, and imagination.

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the diligence and thoroughness of two graduate research assistants who helped shape this article. Caleb Melchior contributed to image collection, research, and analysis, and Heather Grogan contributed to research on Dada artists. We would like to thank the Landscape Journal editors and anonymous peer reviewers for providing productive insights and helping us to focus our claims. The Mary K. Jarvis Endowment funded Heather Grogan’s graduate research assistantship through the Emerging Faculty of Distinction in Landscape Architecture Award.
**AUTHOR**  Blake Belanger is a landscape architect and associate professor of landscape architecture at Kansas State University. He holds a BLA from Michigan State University and a dual MLA and MUD from the University of Colorado at Denver. His interests focus on service learning, design methods, and representation in landscape architecture education and practice.

Ellen Urton is an associate professor and an Undergraduate and Community Services Librarian at Kansas State University. She holds a BA in History and Art History from Augustana College in Rock Island, IL and a Master’s degree in Library Science from the University of Missouri at Columbia. Her research interests include embedded librarianship, service learning, and visual literacy.
Copyright of Landscape Journal is the property of University of Wisconsin Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.