

Introduction:  
**Sketchbook:  
Drawing the City**

**David Michalski**

**Abstract**

An introduction to the issue and its content.

The fluid production and distribution of the image, enabled by the omnipresence of phone cameras, has transformed the lived condition of the street. The city and its subjects respond to this new level of self-surveillance with a consciousness of representation, where-in both image-maker and image-subject, achieve their highest-level of objective validation from the subjectivity of photography.

The testament of digital photography, however, has also naturalized a transparency of vision, one in which, the photographer and her subject share a compact on the limits of representation, agreeing on a particular digital surface, and masking those places where light will not reflect.

*Streetnotes* 30, “Sketchbook: Drawing the City” has gathered work that pierces this opaque quality of urban representation, bypassing the camera’s mechanical eye, to take up, instead, the pen. The response to this call has gathered these artists, ethnographers, urbanists and architects, all of whom practice drafting the city, in street scenes or in urban encounters, by interrogating its surfaces, and by preserving the fragility of their impressions. Their drawings serve to complement, problematize, critique and reimagine the everyday life of urban forms, traffic, and behaviors.

The effort to draw what one sees, builds upon a communication between one’s physicality and vision, and expresses a dialogue between that image and form. These drawings reveal the contemplation of place, allowing us, as readers/viewers to account and answer for the documentary experience, and in this way, re-experience intimate moments of reflection.

I want to thank the contributors here for graciously sharing their work and practice. The evocative character of their images shows how the vibrant craft and artisanship of ‘sketching’ can help one focus on the central questions of observation today.

### **About the editor**

David Michalski is the founder and editor of *Streetnotes*. He holds a PhD. In Cultural Studies and Critical Theory from the University of California, where he is the Social and Cultural Studies Librarian. His books include *The Dialectic of Taste* (Springer 2015) and the *Cosmos and Damian: The World Trade Center Collage*. (Bootstrap Press, 2005).