Aalborg Universitet

Instant City Design

Kiib, Hans

Published in:
Dansk Arkitektur Center

Publication date:
2013

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript, peer reviewed version

Link to publication from Aalborg University

Citation for published version (APA):
Kiib, H. (2013). Instant City Design. *Dansk Arkitektur Center*. http://www.dac.dk/da/dac-life/byg-det-op/inspirationsartikler/instant-city-design/

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

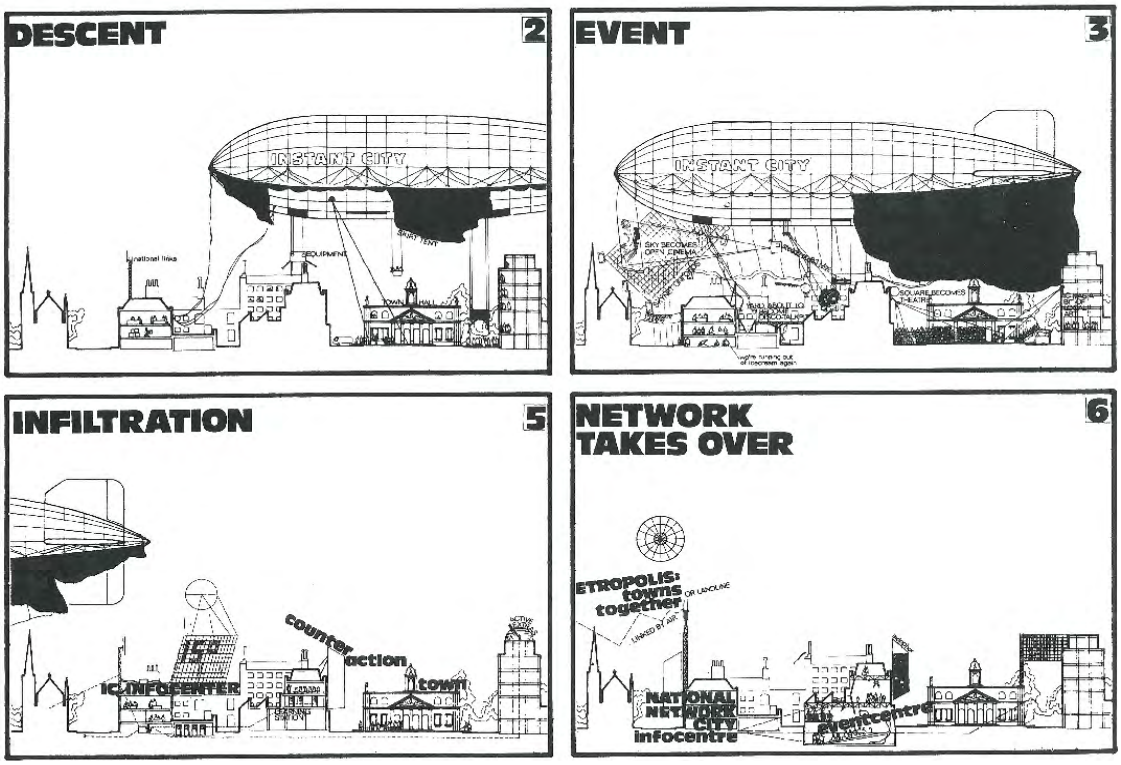
Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at vbn@aub.aau.dk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from vbn.aau.dk on: 11 08, 2026

Hans Kiib

Instant City Design

This article put special emphasis on temporary architecture, which may provide a special freedom to construct spatial situations that promote an experimental life. Through symbols, ornaments and decorations it is possible create recognizable urban sceneries in which people can be involved in aesthetically and bodily challenging situations. It advocates for development of 'relate architecture' in temporal urban installations.



Instant City Airship 1969
A diagram explaining the learning philosophy behind the Instant City project: The airship is used as a metaphor related to the architectural and cultural activity, adding a 'new cultural layer' to the sleepy town. 'Instant City' placed great importance on temporal architecture as a 'learning machine', able to serve as a technological and cultural innovation force in relation to the existing society (Cook (ed.) 1972).

The construction of situations

There is a clear line from art installations and choreographed urban spaces of today back to the architectural avant-garde in the 1960s, where the Situationist Movement criticized the absence of atmosphere in modernistic architecture and suburban cities. Along this line they promoted mapping tools and artistic 'construction of situations' s that could evoke a more comprehensive way of experiencing city life. Situationist architecture should display a new way to integrate the many facets of city life in a continuum of hybrid functions whilst advocating *a pleasure-driven and eventful everyday life*.

One of the many project to follow was the 'Instant City' project (Archigram1969) developed the ideas behind and applied them to a mobile, urban structure. It consisted of a sophisticated set of mobile units - information pavilions, learning environments, cultural scenes, laboratories and sports arenas - which could be integrated into existing urban

societies. They could be mounted on rooftops or in open fields and function as an additional 'new, innovative layers' to the existing functions of the permanent city. 'Instant City' placed great importance on temporal architecture as a 'learning machine', able to serve as a technological and cultural innovation force in relation to the existing society (Cook (ed.) 1972).

Instant City today

The ideas behind the Situationist thinking are very much alive in performance art, temporal architectural installations and public space design today:

- 'Temporary Architecture' are often labelled as 'a learning machine' related to urban transformation; and
- Art installations and urban actions have much in common with the general ideas behind 'experimental behaviour' meant for social experiments and on the irrational excavation of hidden places or unexpected aspects of city life;

Re-act-architecture

One example is 'Add-on 20 Höhenmeter' from Vienna, 2005 - a steel pipe scaffold installation with temporary homes, car wash bath, a spa etc., which has the appearance of a vertical building where its skin has been peeled off. The 'building' was placed on a public square invited the public in general to participate and to explore, offering a wide range of views and vistas from various levels. The transparent structure intentionally put intimate private spaces into a public sphere making the installation into an invitation to explore new relationships between private and the public. It created the illusion of a vertical compact city where you could accommodate (stay over night) and live in an unexpected and mixed social environment. This project has a clear references to Dada and Fluxus, and is founded on interaction between people on the basis of principles of 'react and act!'

***Add-on 20 Höhenmeter* 2005**
Add-on 20 Höhenmeter is a steel pipe scaffold installation with temporary homes, car wash bath, a spa etc., which has the appearance of a vertical building where its skin has been peeled off. The structure consisted of different platforms that rose 20 meters high. In them custom-made spatial modules interlocked with prefabricated parts that had been imaginatively altered from their original functions. A project by Peter Fattinger, Veronika Orso, Michael Rieper and students of Vienna University of Technology. (Photo: Sebastian Schubert)

Ephemeral Architecture

Another example is the 'Blur Building' at the EXPO, Switzerland 2002 by Diller & Scofidio + Renfro. The Blur Building is a fog mass resulting from natural and manmade forces. Fine mist through 35.000, high-pressure nozzles provide a clean 'architecture of atmosphere'. A smart whether system reads the climate conditions of temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction and regulate water pressure at a variety of zones. Upon entering Blur Building visual and acoustic references are erased. There is only an optical 'white-out' and a 'white-noise' of sounds from pulsing nozzles. Contrary to the immersive environments of the lake and the mountains, the Blur Building is weekly defined. Here there is nothing to se and orientation is dependent of our senses. This 100 meter wide and 25 meter tall performative space is intentionally neglecting the powerful economical forces running the Swiss Expo 2002. The building is totally devoted to the memory of great natural forces - an artificial context for a strong experience and thus questioning the economical genius of the exhibition.

Blur Building
EXPO Schweiz 2002 by Diller & Scofidio *(Photo:* Diller Scofidio + Renfro*)*

Conclusion

In this respect very much can be learned from the current 'Instant Urbanism' projects, which share the following common traits:

- They treat architecture as an urban choreography;
- They stage 'private' or 'neglected' problems and put them on the agenda, publically;
- They aim at creating an either physical or emotional aesthetic experience;

- They aim at giving the participant an unexpected visual or physical experience that may provoke or change individual and collective behaviour; give pause for thought and, possibly, in extension hereof initiate a process focusing on the given subject.
- They have (often) a social commitment and an ethic agenda, be it directly or indirectly.

All in all these 'artistic constructions' represent a 'new experiential layer' in the city. 'Situation Construite' in public spaces contribute to highlighting the ability of the city to connect people in open social communities and offer new aesthetic experiences and cultural practice. Humour is an important part of the 'situations construite' related to grave, global problems - may it be manmade environmental disasters, refugees of war and poverty, and, last but not least, social discrimination of minorities. With humour and art as vehicles these projects enable individual and collective engagement – to act and re-act! In this crossroad where a sensible architectural scenography is allocated in awkward urban settings it is able to come closer to the experiential design of our urban environment, and maybe through this to redefine city life.

References

Cook, P. ed. (1999): *Archigram,* Prinston Architectural Press, New York.
Debord, G-E. (1959): Positions situationnistes sur la circulation, in *Internationale situationniste, no 3*;
Fattinger, P., V. Orso, M. Rieper, et. al. (2007): Add On. 20 Höhenmeter, in Ferguson, F. ed. (2007), *Instant Urbanism, Tracing the Theories of the Situationists in the Contemporary Architecture and Urbanism*, Christof Merian Verlag, Basel;
Ferguson, F. ed. (2007): *Instant Urbanism, Tracing the Theories of the Situationists in the Contemporary Architecture and Urbanism*, Christof Merian Verlag, Basel
Kiib, H., 2010, Performative Urban Design, Aalborg University Press, Silkeborg
Marling, G & M. Zerlang (2007): *FUN CITY.* Copenhagen: Arkitektens Forlag
Marling, G., Kiib, H., 2011, *Instant City@Roskilde Festival* Aalborg University Press, Silkeborg;
Sadler, S. (1999): *The Situationist City*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston
Sadler, S. (2005): *Archigram, Architecture without Architecture*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston

Hans Kiib
Professor in Urban Design
Department of Architecture and Media Technology
Aalborg University

Hans Kiib conduct research on urban transformation, architectural theory, design methodology, temporal architecture and art in urban environments
http://vbn.aau.dk/da/persons/hans-kiib%287a2367ef-4250-41a2-bb64-14175901f656%29.html