

**INSTANT URBANISM
TRACING THE THEORIES OF THE SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL IN CONTEMPORARY
ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM**

**10 JUNE – 16 SEPTEMBER 2007
S AM – SWISS ARCHITECTURE MUSEUM**

INSTANT URBANISM at S AM creates a conceptual link to the retrospective on the Situationist International movement at the Tinguely Museum in Basel, by drawing upon the radical proclamations made by the Situationists with relation to transforming architecture and city spaces. First taking a historical sweep through the field of architecture contemporary to the SI movement, and the ways in which fields of experimentation and visionary urbanism were rethinking the profession in the 60's and 70's, the exhibition assembles defining projects in architecture and urbanism that could be seen to put into practice that which the Situationists developed as urban critique and theory.

Faced with large-scale urbanisation in postwar Paris, the SI's development of the theory of unitary urbanism foreshadowed the urban revolutions of the 60's in its radical critique of the consumer-driven manipulations of cities and a total rejection of the programmed life of modernism. They propounded the reorganization of cities based upon the simple premise that citizens themselves could decide the spaces and architecture they want to live in, and how they wished to live in them. The goal was as presumptuous as it was seductive - the revolutionizing of everyday life. Unitary Urbanism became a manifesto for the redefinition of urban spaces through participatory games, through play, and the construction of situations, and architecture was to be infinitely malleable - providing flexible structures with a limited lifespan.

According to Constant Nieuwenhuys, whose models for New Babylon were the only architectural manifestation of the Situationist credos, architecture must become a playful megastructure that determined a nomadic metropolis engaged in a constant process of construction and decay:

"... the architectural complex which we conceive as the construction of a dynamic environment related to styles of behaviour - will refunction existing architectural forms, and make plastic and emotional use of all sorts of re-functioned objects, cranes, metal scaffolding" (Constant)

INSTANT URBANISM first takes the viewer on an associative journey through the mega-visions and utopian projects devised by contemporaries of the Situationist movement; architects and planners who embraced and visualised the new urban logic of mobility, fuelled by a belief in cybernetics and new ultra light construction techniques. Archigram, Cedric Price, the Japanese Metabolists, Hans Hollein, Yona Friedman, amongst others shared Constant's playful megastructuralism and engaged in experiments intended to transcend commonly held conceptions of architectural and spatial design. An installation featuring architecture and urban interventions over the last 10 years then interprets the defining aspects of Situationist urban theory with a view to tracing their radical critique in contemporary practice.

The exhibition is designed with deliberate recontextualisation, plagiarism, bricolage, and assemblage in mind; echoing the artistic techniques employed by the SI. Films, photographs, project documentation and found statements are organised thematically and juxtaposed with statements and definitions by the SI. Though the realised projects and interventions are far more modest in scale than the experimental architecture of the 60's and 70's, they show in practical terms how it may be possible to redefine the city as a site for play and appropriation, creating 'transient micro ambiances' as Guy Debord described the constructed situation. The critique of urbanism and conventions in architecture is implicit in the assembled works, all of which intend to renegotiate and adapt urban spaces and draw attention to the shortcomings of a thoroughly planned and rationalised urban environment.

EXHIBITED PROJECTS

Modular and temporary structures by the French collectif EXYZT (Paris) and 'add on. 20 höhenmeter', (Vienna) are aligned with container-architecture by Urban Space Management Ltd. and rapidly assembled viral constructions that can be implemented to create and augment a social space. PPAG Popelka Poduschka Architekten ingenious Enzi modules show how effectively a public space can be occupied and urbanised.

A section on urban nomadism looks at the precarious nature of the urban habitat and includes Refuge Wear by Lucy Orta, and Michael Rakowitz's paraSITE. New research on 'RV Urbanism' by Jörg Stollmann and Deane Simpson (ETH) takes a completely new view of the subject by investigating a contemporary phenomenon: 'leisure nomads' that are urbanising vast tracts of land in the USA and Europe. The theme of Mobility and speed in urbanism features research on turbo architecture of the Balkan states by Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss in 'The Good the Bad and the Ugly', which draws parallels with the Situationist critique of modernism. Also included is the architecture of Lacaton & Vassal: their social housing project in Mulhouse shows the potentiality of architecture that liberates space for appropriation by its inhabitants. These works are juxtaposed with the extreme development of informal architecture of the Gecekondu in Turkey.

*"We constantly have to defend ourselves from the poetry of the bards of conditioning, to jam their messages, to turn their songs inside out."
(Attila Kótanyi and Raoul Vaneigem, 1961)*

The Situationist practice of détournement – alienation through appropriation and recontextualisation - is transposed to architectural practice with an investigation of hybrid architectures and installations that alienate conceptions of city space. As the Situationists demanded that the rooftops of buildings be open to pedestrians, so Bernard Tschumi's 'Le Fresnoy Art Center' and Atelier Bow-Wow's investigation of Tokyo Hybrids are lasting reminders of what kinds of cross-programming is possible in architecture. The creation of atmospheres in cities - envisaged by Constant as 'ambiances' which could be regularly and consciously changed, is interpreted by several projects that effect both alienating and sensual transformations of urban spaces and architecture. Projects include the 'Stadtlounge St. Gallen' by the Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist and the architect Carlos Martinez as well as the Diller, Scofidio + Renfro's groundbreaking 'Blur Building' for the Swiss Expo 02, with which architecture was dematerialised.

The concept of play in urbanism through the reconfiguration of spaces is brought to bear in 'sportification' where marginal sites and built environments are implemented for extreme sports. This section features new work on parkour, laN+'s Sportscape and NL architects' reprogramming of urban landscapes.

“To the outside world the consistency of architecture is a given, from which you deviate at your own peril - which is ironic since it would be much better, and much more interesting, for the world at large if there were more deviations.”
(Rem Koolhaas)

Two new installations within INSTANT URBANISM will implement the central Situationist practice of the *dérive*: a strategy for exploring the increasingly fragmented spaces of the city through deliberate disorientation. The graphic designer Ruedi Baur investigates 7 cities in an urban narrative entitled ‘Le spectacle continue’ – the spectacle continues, in which seemingly banal signs lead to new urban narratives. The audio-visual installation *Citámbulos // Citamblers* maps out subjective itineraries of Mexico City in 5 different *dérives* and which enable completely new perspectives of the megalopolis.