

VISUAL ASSEMBLY made differently



V I S U A L A S S E M B L Y

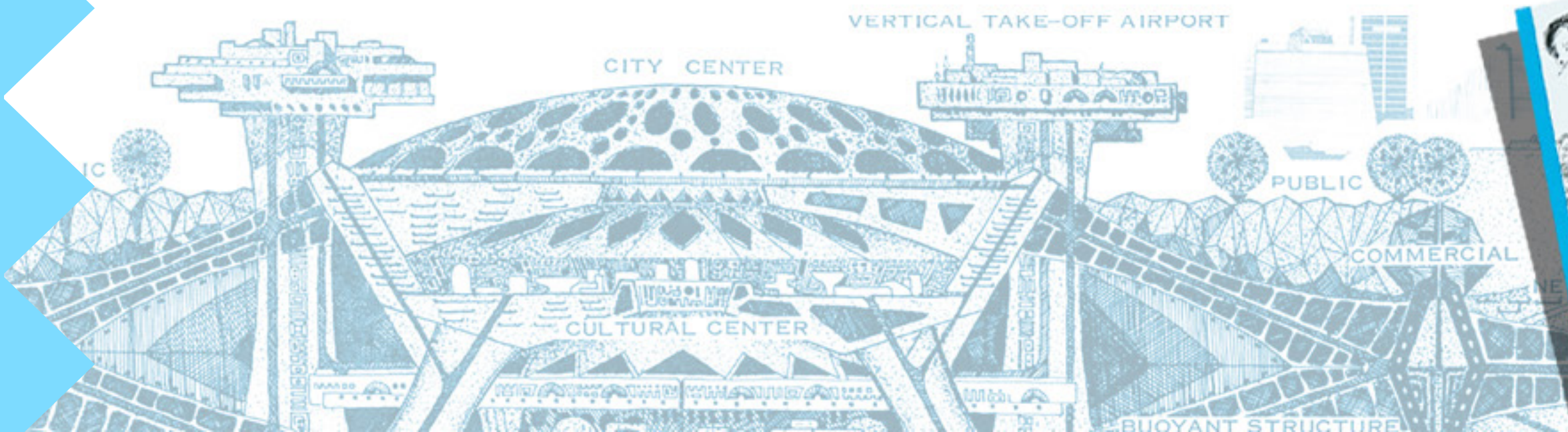
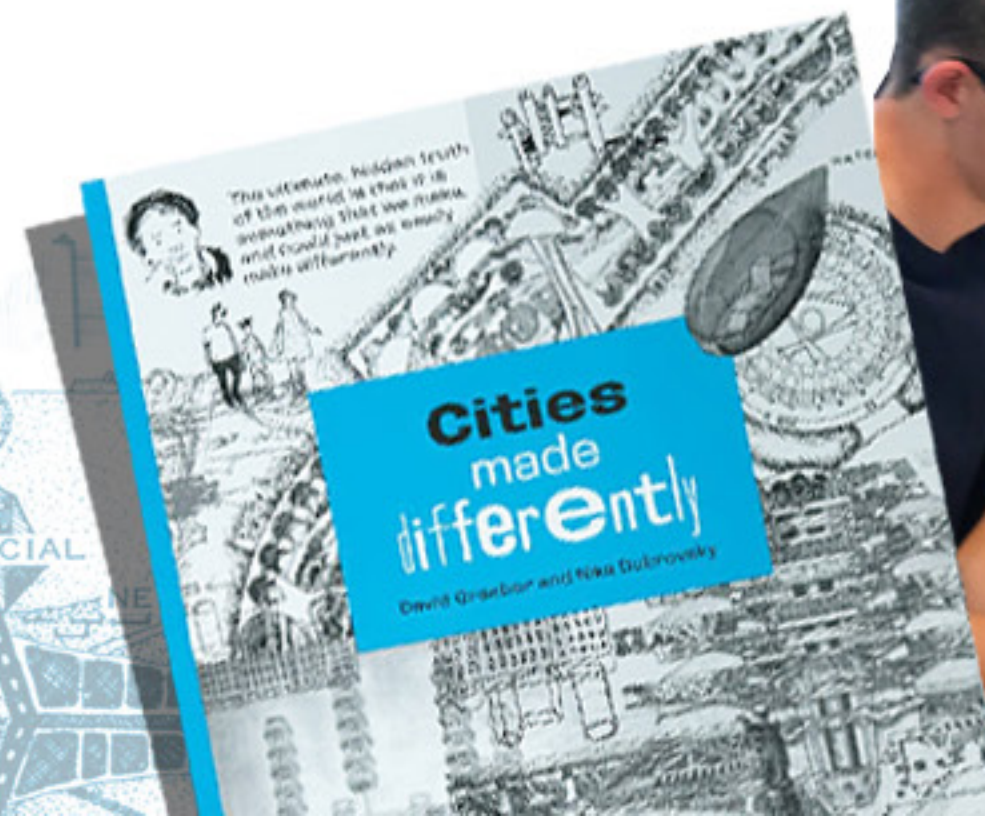
A4KIDS IS A SERIES OF BOOKS, WORKSHOPS, PUBLIC ART PROJECTS AND CONVERSATIONS, EACH FULL OF PICTURES AND STORIES ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN

The promise of anthropology is one of opening up our sense of human possibility.

In a thousand ways, we are taught to lower our expectations, to accept that the world we live in is the only possible world. But thousands of other ways of organizing homes, cities, schools, societies, economies, and cosmologies have and could exist. The series is designed—in the spirit of Borges, Eco, or Lem—to play with possibility, to overcome the suspicion, subtly inculcated in everyday life, that life is necessarily limited, miserable, and boring.

Let's change that, shall we? Let's create a new educational practice, which is more horizontal, democratic and fun.

made differently



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How did the idea come about?

Nika Dubrovsky and David Graeber, working with friends, have created a number of book series for children and adults: a series on utopias and dystopias, a series on democratic arts, and a series on real and imaginary social groups. All of these interactive doodle books are freely available for download at a4kids.org

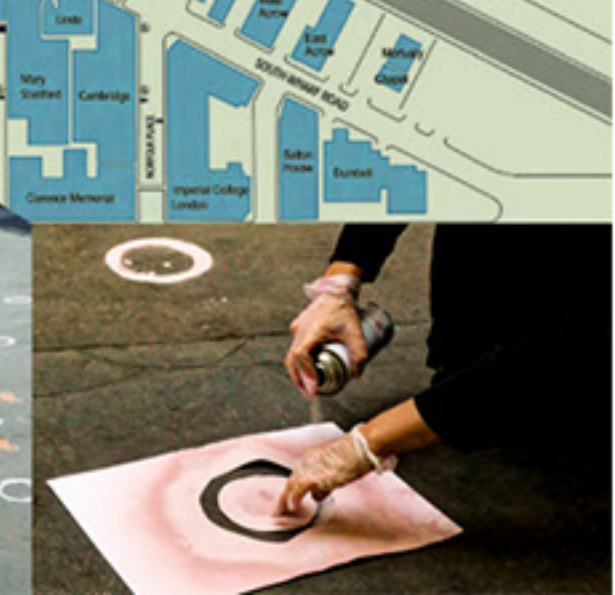


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The Concept of Visual Assembly

The Visual Assembly is a democratic form of creative collaboration that aims to imagine new ways to run and organize our social systems. Every human society sustains itself through various forms of collective sociality. Different types of assemblies were developed as experiments in direct political deliberation, as a response to the crisis of representative democracy. Books and workshops we created around the world over the years became the basis for the way we conduct Visual Assemblies, in which people collaborate on public art projects. These assemblies are intended to facilitate direct, recurrent dialogue between people of different ages, classes, and social statuses, without intermediaries, whether teachers, artists, or other experts. Everyone is invited to participate on equal footing.



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Can art and education really make a meaningful difference in society?



We believe that society would be freer, more peaceful, and happier if people could be directly and collectively involved in learning and decision-making.

It takes practice, doesn't it? Most of us aren't used to making decisions together. In schools, children learn to follow instructions and compete with each other, not to work together and reach a consensus.

Citizens' assemblies, a type of direct democratic assembly, combine expert input with discussions among participants, which is great! But how to participate if you are a kid, a language learner, or just someone who is shy in public? What if, in addition to collective conversations, we introduce the practice of drawing and writing together in order to communicate better? After all, some people communicate best with words, while others communicate best with drawings or gestures.

All assemblies, unlike academic conferences, always focus on a specific action. They center around creating something real: planning an activist intervention, directly solving a problem, or organizing a carnival. A Visual Assembly is an assembly with a practical outcome. It produces a collective art project, but it also plans a possible social space: a school, a library, a hospital, a museum, or a city...

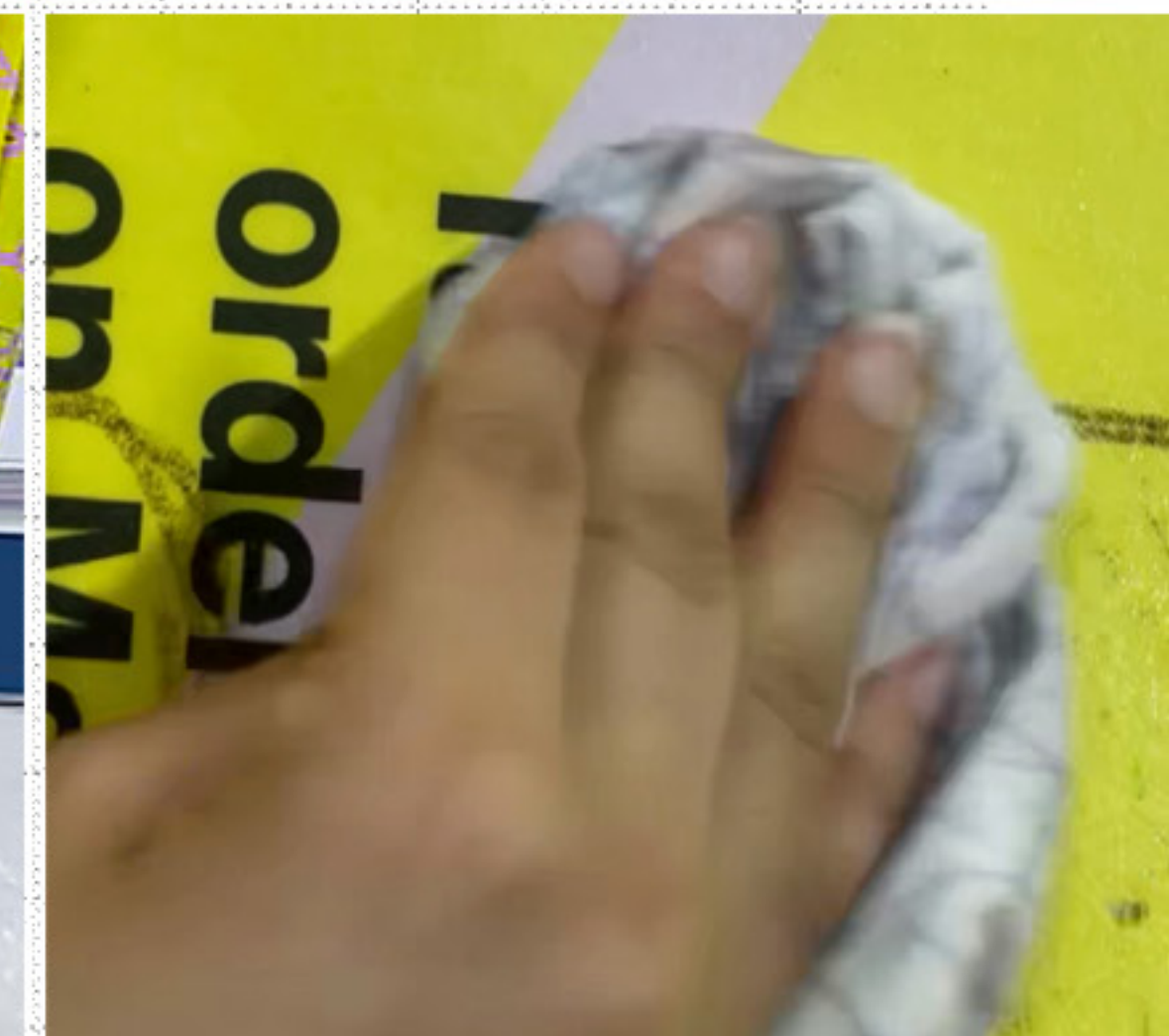
What is the best way to organize Visual Assemblies?

We would like to create permanent assembly spaces where children and adults can gather to discuss and realize joint projects. We can make use of the places they already visit, such as libraries, schools, museums, and art centers.

For marking a place for a Visual Assembly, we have created large sticker mats that are durable and resilient. People can walk over them, draw, and write with colored pencils and chalk. The sticker mats can be washed and reused. They look great, they're lightweight, can be easily rolled up, and sent anywhere by mail.

The sticker mats are not blank; rather, loose frameworks have been printed on them to help participants begin their project. These frameworks—which include structural elements but also may include outlines of cities, objects, or figures of people—offer an invitation to conversation and experiment. They can be integrated into the final drawing, be made to disappear, or anywhere in between.

Participants can also erase all or parts of their Visual Assembly, leaving the sticker mat blank for future use. Visual Assemblies can be recorded by photograph or video at any step of the process. Both the discussions and the outcomes of a Visual Assembly can remain as a result, be discussed, and revisited.



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Everyone is an artist

Visual assemblies are the public art projects done by the people for people, without special training and without intermediaries in the form of authorities or experts.

Imagine that traditional public art — statues, mosaics, frescoes that were commissioned by the authorities from individual artists — is replaced by art that ordinary people create collectively and that offers a space for ongoing dialogue.

Just as Wikipedia is written and rewritten every day by many people in different countries, Visual Assembly provides an opportunity for us to improve our public spaces: squares, gardens, schools, cities, and perhaps countries.

The world is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently.

