Constant's New Babylon

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The Hyper-Architecture of Desire

Mark Wigley
To turn one’s gaze upon New Babylon today, at the close of our century, is to encounter another world, where surprise and the pleasure of the eyes mingle with innumerable questions, insights, and speculations. New Babylon was the focus of Constant Nieuwenhuys’s activity from 1956 to 1974. These very concrete dates encompass the creation of paintings, drawings, collages, lithographs, scale models, and texts, forming the corpus that we now rediscover at Witte de With, center for contemporary art. This rediscovery is motivated by a critical approach to the present, seeking to avoid a merely historical description of events from a past which, although recent, is nonetheless charged with significant paradoxes.

Constant is an artist who, with New Babylon, becomes one of the major visionary architects of this century. Both these domains interest us today: the art and its intentions, the expression and its content, the image and what it conveys, the text and the pedagogical system in which it is inscribed. The challenge is to present an artist whose complex, hybrid work finds no easy classification—especially in the present time of ideological flux, which allows us to elaborate new arguments and to form judgments.

New Babylon constitutes the last comprehensive formulation of an idea of the new man, or better, of a social space that allows for the emergence of an other man, of a new way of living in community, in society. New Babylon is engaged with man’s experience of the world—and thus with the function of art—but also with politics, with the values and instruments that we forge for our interaction with the world. Deeply rooted in the avant-garde tradition which, at the outset of this century, produced so many proposals for the renewal of society, New Babylon offers a sharp contrast with the close of our century, when the capacity to imagine the world differently has significantly declined. Here, then, is a first intriguing question: what today remains of our capacity to reinvent the world?

With this exhibition and monograph we seek to create a double effect. First, to offer the enjoyment of contemplating an œuvre of exceptional quality, which, since its last complete presentation in the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1974, has only reached the public through fragmentary presentations (at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, with the exhibition On the passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: the Situationist International, 1957-1972 in 1989; and at the Museu d’Art Contemporani in Barcelona, with the exhibition Situationists. Art, Politics, Urbanism in 1997). Second, to recover and evaluate the impact that New Babylon can have in the present, where radicality, conviction, and audacity are rare.

Without seeking to rank New Babylon in the category of models to be followed, we would like to understand it through comparison, contrast, and intuition.

We have aspired to do justice to the richness and meaning of New Babylon, through the investigation of appropriate ways of combining the images and objects, the works and documents, the static and the poetic. Constant made it easy for us with the enormous potency of his work, with the diversity of materials, dimensions, and qualities that it includes. This exhibition also deals with the capacity of painting, of art, to stimulate ideas through the sensible impact it provokes. New Babylon is intensely contemporary because it concentrates on the urban as the factor where the necessity of art can be read, as the place where the relevant facts spring forth. The predatory and sometimes guilt-ridden relation that modern society has established with nature invites us to question the status of the artificial, in both objects and acts. The city may actually be one of the most necessary human inventions, functioning as the underlying model of a characteristically Western ontology. New Babylon is an attempt to regenerate this model, using the criteria generated by art.

New Babylon has exerted a continuing influence on the architecture and urbanism of the second half of the twentieth century. These areas would appear to be dominated today by the pragmatism of the least common denominator: the conception of the city and its effects is based on the autonomy of the single building, or on the interrelation of individuals in a social matrix of extreme functionalism, derived from one-way political thinking. Yet contemporary artistic production is showing new glimmers of interest and attention toward the components of New Babylon and the ideas surrounding the project. The opposition between the present and this larger message, exalting the self-regenerating, problem-solving capacities of our cultural, psychological, technological, and political structures, may give rise to a highly beneficial effect of revulsion and provocation.

How revolting or provocative might New Babylon appear to us today? The contemporary viewer of this work receives a powerful visual shock, stemming in part from its acidly effective and highly demonstrative critique of the functionalist mentality developed by the ideology of the modern movement in architecture. The quality of the modern project began to contrast sharply with the lamentable perversions of its massive execution in the depersonalized, banalized cities denigrated and abhorred by Constant and his fellow travelers in the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus and in the Situationist International. Since the late nineteenth century, the movements for a renewal of modern life had been rooted in programs of deep metaphysical content, like the ones that propelled the emergence of abstract art. The profound break that the Second World War brought about in European history and in the consciousness of individuals left little room for a reflection on the powers of the mind, on an emancipatory practice of the arts and on the exercise of individual creativity. These, from the fifties onward, obeyed no other goals than those of urban reconstruction, economics, and the provision of basic necessities for the citizens—suffocating psychological and irrational needs even to our day. Guy Debord defined this alienated relation to the distancing image in one of the most incisive and influential works of contemporary thought, The Society of the Spectacle. The force of his critique remains frightening.

Why did Constant refuse the term ‘Utopia’ for his project? New Babylon was not an abstract model, but an assertion about a plausible reality. Indeed, art is one of the best means of access to an authentic relation with reality. Unlike science or ethics, art does not establish what reality must be, but what it could be. Constant was keenly aware of this difference while working on New Babylon, and he imbued the project with an eminently psychological dimension. New Babylon is a spirited answer to the disenchantment
brought on by the poverty of culture: it is a manifesto in favor of the potential of the individual existing as such within a relation of social interchange, impossible in the absence of others. For this, a new type of social space is necessary, one that can generate and permit encounters, as well as the play that sustains pleasure and lends the ephemeral as much significance as the eternal. 'Living becomes rest, the pause after a climax,' writes Constant.

The recent explosion of technologies for the creation and distribution of images has placed us in a privileged moment of knowledge and relations. Relations to matter and to others, existing and dissolving in the virtuality of places which combine the now-here with the nowhere. The nomadism of the gypsies inspired the initial formulations of New Babylon; today, the new geography of human groups displays surprising continuations of this nomadism, making us citizens of a fluid world composed of fluctuating notions of place, origin, and context. This world requires a new cartography and new reference-points, which Constant programs in terms of free activity and not of function. The use that Constant makes of materials in New Babylon suggests that he had intuitively grasped the instrumentalization of the image in terms of the artifact — that is, in terms of what the image does, rather than its material composition or its procedure of fabrication. A new architecture, a new city, calls for new media of representation.

With these lines, we would like to salute Constant and thank him for his collaboration, his enthusiasm, and his unfailing generosity in the elaboration of the exhibition and this monograph. By personally facilitating our access to his work and sharing his ideas, memories, and precious time, he has offered us a stimulating and gratifying experience for which we wish to honor him. Witte de With's thanks also go to Hans Locher, for the loan of works from the magnificent collection of the Haags Gemeentemuseum of which he is the director. Hans Janssen, curator at the Haags Gemeentemuseum, helped us at every step in the elaboration of this show, with continuous good will and cordiality. May our sincere gratitude also be extended to those persons and institutions who have accepted to lend their works for the exhibition, and to all those whose knowledge has assisted with the creation of the exhibition and the monograph.

Finally, we would like to thank Mark Wigley for making a historical project surface as a critique of the present. Without the generous support of the Stimulerings Fonds voor Architectuur, this exhibition and this monograph would never have seen the light. We wish that this exhibition and the book will help encourage a genuine and enriching debate in the arts, in architecture, and in urbanism — an objective which we certainly share.
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The Great Urbanism Game

1960. December 20. 8:15 P.M. Amsterdam. A packed room in the Stedelijk Museum waits for the 40-year-old artist Constant Nieuwenhuys. A slide projector and a large tape recorder sit behind the audience. Constant enters, stands by the machines, and delivers a half-hour statement about ‘Unitary Urbanism.’ The tone is militant.

Modern architects are negligent. They have systematically ignored the massive transformation of everyday life caused by the twin forces of mechanization and population explosion. Their endless garden-city schemes desperately provide token fragments of ‘pseudo-nature’ to pacify ruthlessly exploited citizens. The modern city is a thinly disguised mechanism for extracting productivity out of its inhabitants, a huge machine that destroys the very life it is meant to foster. Such exploitative machinery will continue to grow until a single vast urban structure occupies the whole surface of the earth. Nature has already been replaced. Technology has long been the new nature that must now be creatively transformed to support a new culture. The increasingly traumatized inhabitants have to take over the shaping of their own spaces to recover the pleasure of living. This reshaping will become their dominant activity when automation soon handles all forms of production. Leisure time will be the only time. Work gives way to an endless collective play in which all fantasies are acted out. The static constructions of architects and town planners are thrown away. Everybody becomes an architect, practicing a never-ending, all-embracing ‘unitary urbanism.’ Nothing will be fixed. The new urbanism ‘exists in time, it is the activation of the temporary, the emergent and transitory, the changeable, the volatile, the variable, the immediately fulfilling and satisfying.’ An intimate bonding of desire and space will produce a new kind of architecture for a new society.

The lecturer announces that he has a particular vision of this restless architecture, an ‘imaginary’ project called ‘New Babylon’ that he will reveal later. Meanwhile, the audience hears an analysis of the psychological impact of urban environments. People are profoundly influenced by the structures they inhabit. Their lives are conditioned by the unique atmosphere of each space. To neglect the nuances of ambience is to neglect people. As the world turns into a single vast city, and an exploding, increasingly mobile population has less and less room to move, a new relationship between space and psychology is needed: ‘what we lose in geometrical space we must recover in the form of psychological space.’ A special form of research needs to be deployed, a ‘psychogeography’ of the unconscious influences of urban atmosphere. Atmosphere is to become an ‘artistic medium’ with which to collectively reconstruct social space. The psychological quality of every point in the urban structure will be continuously modified to intensify the experience of the people moving through it. All forms of mobility will be fostered. The structure will itself be mobile and lack a clear identity.

Some details of the project start to emerge. New Babylon is to be a covered city, suspended high above the ground on huge columns. All automobile traffic is isolated on the ground plane, with the trains and fully automated factories buried beneath. Enormous

multileveled structures, five to ten hectares in area, are strung together in a chain that spreads across the landscape. This ‘endless expanse’ of interior space is artificially lit and air-conditioned. Its inhabitants are given access to ‘powerful, ambience-creating resources’ to construct their own spaces whenever and wherever they desire. The qualities of each space can be adjusted. Light, acoustics, color, ventilation, texture, temperature, and moisture are infinitely variable. Movable floors, partitions, ramps, ladders, bridges, and stairs are used to construct ‘veritable labyrinths of the most heterogeneous forms’ in which desires continuously interact. Sensuous spaces result from action but also generate it: ‘New Babylonians play a game of their own designing, against a backdrop they have designed themselves.’

The lights go out. The room is filled with a strange unintelligible noise. A huge architectural plan is projected on the wall. It shows a network of long, thin, rectangular structures zigzagging like dominoes across an orange landscape covered with amorphous red and green blotches. The network sits on top of an even more intricate web of black lines that rush in every direction with what seem to be high-speed streamlined curves. Railway tracks pass more soberly across. Intersections multiply. Everything is interconnected. The overlapping webs disappear off the edges of the plan and the ends of other webs enter from the sides. The already huge megastructure is apparently just part of a vast system. It is lightly subdivided into countless squarish spaces that are empty except for a small red rectangle in each that always occupies a different position. Larger black shapes pass through the divisions between these spaces and sometimes overtake a whole section of the structure. Some spaces are numbered sequentially. Others are crossed-hatched, or filled with parallel lines, or have mysterious arrows radiating from their corners. Over to the left, a thin line wanders in a serpentine trajectory across the divisions between spaces. At the bottom, a very thick line passes up through the structure, crossing each space in turn as it zigzags all the way to the center of the plan — a path to the heart of the labyrinth.

The qualities of the particular spaces remain unclear; only a general sense of diversity within a more or less regular but labyrinthine system can be perceived. The image is there for just a second. Another plan appears. It is obviously the same project — a closer view. Rough edges have given way to precisely measured lines. The spaces are more complex, ranging in their organization from completely open to densely packed with labyrinths. Even the type of labyrinth varies. Eccentric paths could traverse this veritable catalog of spatial types to pass between any two points in the megastructure without going outside of it. If anything, the labyrinthine quality is accentuated by a sense of transparency in the plan. All levels are compacted onto a single surface. The high-speed lines are visible as they pass under the structure, and at the densest intersection a square of translucent yellow paper has been superimposed as if to define some vague sense of focus.

This layout now reappears as a bird’s eye photograph of a model, an even closer view. The model still looks like a plan because it is built out of transparent layers of plexiglass. The subdivisions etched in thin lines on each layer produce an extremely dense overlapping pattern, itself overlaid on the web of high-speed lines. A few opaque pieces of white
The Great Urbanism Game

and black plexiglass stand out, but only a faint shadow hints at the three-dimensional shape revealed in the next slide. Moving in closer, at an angle, the camera discovers that the high-speed lines race across a smooth plane while the megastructure floats above. A single continuous structure weaves itself over an immaculate surface. Its section constantly changes. Some parts are made of a single thick slab of plexiglass while others are made of two, three, or four layers. The layers float high above the terrain or are unexpectedly cut away to expose the next level. Nails passing through them are arranged in a structural grid that supports the project, while a smaller grid of tiny holes appears to provide the local support for endless variations in the plan. The camera drops lower still. It reaches ground-level and looks across the smooth terrain towards the building. The floating horizontal megastructure catches the light and stretches as far as the eye can see.

The camera descends upon another model. The sound of an airplane accompanies the descent and another set of sounds fills the room as we land on the roof deck. Each image-shift is synchronized with an acoustic shift, although the sounds remain largely unintelligible. We head into the interior spaces that float between the roof deck covered with helicopters and the ground plane littered with cars. Only a few human figures are visible, perched on the edge of a vast space, but the soundtrack fills the auditorium with a metropolitan jumble of voices, traffic noises, machines, animals, and strange music. We hear the sounds of a life we cannot see, a life we are forced to imagine.

Our fantasies are made possible by sophisticated models that have been photographed in a way that conceals the fact that they are models. We never see their edges. Rather than viewing a small discrete object representing a huge project that may someday be built, we sense a complex, sensuous, built reality. Other spaces often appear in the background. The models have been placed side-by-side and colored sand sprinkled over the gaps between their bases to suggest the sense of a single coherent ensemble. We look into an endless world made up of tightly interconnected but heterogeneous spaces. Colored backgrounds and precise lighting enhance the realism. Images move quickly by. Time only for an impression. The almost cinematic effect is that of a realistic fantasy — the world of tomorrow built today.

The images follow a pattern. Models of large parts of the structure give way to detailed models of smaller parts; each is progressively explored from the widest distant angle down to the smallest interior space. We steadily advance into the new world. Any disruption of this relentless zoom is accompanied by a surprising sound. The precise layout of each level gradually becomes evident. The floating transparent layers carry a delicate tracery of some kind of embedded technical system and the division between spaces is formed by folded metal sheets, perforated metal screens, cut-outs in the floor, changes in lighting, and so on. Strange machinery sprouts from the ground plane or hangs from the ceiling. Each ‘sector,’ as Constant calls them, seems to rest on a different kind of support. Some have an array of diverse supports. Huge open frameworks sit on a small number of points. Dense layers are propped up on massive translucent sandwiches. Spiderwebs of steel are suspended off a tall cylinder. Transparent shells hover over the ground on vast columns like recently landed...
space ships. Intricate assemblages of platforms and volumes hang from each support.

Sometimes the ground below is an immaculately smooth white surface, like a salt lake ready for high-speed tests. Elsewhere, it is rough — like a moonscape — or covered with huge concrete labyrinths, strange marks and colored patches. The immaculate metalwork and transparent surfaces of the structure contrast with the tortured landscape below. Other parts of the terrain are domesticated with abstractly colored volumes, curved metal railings, strange dotted lines, densely packed nails, or an artificial forest made of a network of wires strung between delicate columns. High overhead, metal sheets fold their way across a space, or form vast surfaces. Translucent planes of different colors are suspended in intricate webs of metal. The overall lighting changes from red to blue to yellow to orange. Colored shadows are cast in every direction, producing blurry zones of imagined activity. The effect is at once precise and indeterminate. It is as if the very realism of the image frees the imagination. The sheer number of images collaborates with the sounds to increase the sense of realism. A technological aesthetic acts as the prop for an intense fantasy about a new but unspecified way of life.

After more than 100 images are shown, the last suddenly evaporates and the lights return. The audience is still blinking when a single cheer of ‘Bravo!’ rings out. But in the extended discussion that follows, there are protests. New Babylon might be the liberating way of the future, or it might just as easily be a nightmarish high-tech pleasure prison. Either way, it is a shock.

Constant is no stranger to the audience, having been a founding member of the renowned Cobra group of artists whose most important exhibition had been at the Stedelijk Museum at the end of 1949. But in 1953 he rejected painting, and hadn’t been back to the museum until May 1959 when a solo exhibition of intricate constructions in wood, wire, and plexiglass culminated in a large model entitled Ambiance d’une ville future (Ambience of a Future City). The model would become one of the centerpieces of New Babylon and was featured in the lecture. The painter had returned as a strange kind of architect — a situationist architect.

The Politics of Atmosphere

Constant was a founding member of the Situationist International, a small group of activists that radicalized cultural criticism and political critique between 1957 and 1972. The catalog of the 1959 Stedelijk Museum exhibition had been published by the collective’s own press and the subsequent lecture elaborated some of the key terms of its discourse. The group had established itself around the idea of ‘unitary urbanism,’ a subversion of conventional urban planning set in motion by their infamous dérive, the roaming drift that undermines the structure of the city by locating transient atmospheres outside the control of any centralized authority or dominant economic force. Analyzing their day-long treks through the streets of Paris, they argued that cities are actually filled with hidden centers of attraction, force fields, and flows of desire. The visible order of the city harbors a psy-

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2 Internationale tentoonstelling van experimentele kunst, exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 3-28 November 1949. The original members were Asger Jorn, Christian Dotremont, Joseph Noiret, Karel Appel, Corneille, and Constant. The name of the group was taken from their three cities: Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam.

3 Constant, Constructies en maquettes, exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 4 May-8 June 1959.


The Politics of Atmosphere

A psychological order that can be explored and would be revolutionary if exploited. Situationists are experts in atmosphere, developing the 'science' of psychogeography to map its elusive contours. The documentation of their drunken meanders soon evolved into calculated interventions in the urban fabric and full-scale street protests that became an integral part of the 1968 battles. Atmosphere becomes the basis of political action. The seemingly ephemeral is mobilized as the agent of concrete struggle. As the fantasized endpoint of that struggle, New Babylon is a huge atmosphere jukebox that can only be played by a completely revolutionized society.

The project develops the logic of the dérive into a form of 'architectural science fiction.' Nobody works in this futuristic world. There is only playful drifting through an infinite and endlessly manipulable interior space. A more or less fixed structure, between 15 and 40 meters deep, made of state-of-the-art lightweight titanium and nylon, is suspended 15 to 20 meters off the ground, acting as the framework for continuous transformations of micro-spaces within it. There are no volumes, only fields of countless shapes to be negotiated by roving inhabitants. The old ground-based cities with their static organization have been abandoned as an outmoded technology. A few isolated sectors of this new city are built, and progressively take over, multiplying into an ever-growing network that has no limits, no exterior — 'a camp for nomads on a planetary scale.' The endless space of daily life is completely enclosed. Every now and then, it suddenly opens to the sky or the ground beneath. Lenses mounted in windows offer magnified views of the traffic, the stars, and adjacent neighborhoods, but it is the 'artificial landscape' of the interior that dominates the attention, and changes like the weather.

The suspended floors 'represent a sort of extension of the earth-surface, a new skin that covers the earth and multiplies its living-space.' It is a chaotic terrain with mobile building elements and environmental control devices allowing people to actively construct moods and develop new forms of behavior. The models for this 'playgroundlike' construction are the marginal spaces in the outmoded urban system: 'these areas of the historical cities, where the outcasts of the utilitarian society stick together, these poor quarters where racial minorities, artists, students, prostitutes, and intellectuals are living together.' But such spaces only offer a hint of the future. They cannot be used as a prescription without being transformed into a new official order that will itself need to be subverted. By definition, the future cannot be pictured. New Babylon is not an image of the future but an image of what the future may require. Unlike a traditional plan, 'every element is left undetermined... The project for New Babylon only intends to give the minimum conditions for a behavior that must remain as free as possible.'

Everyone and everything moves. The family home, as the paradigm of a static social order and a fixed sense of orientation, is replaced by transit hotels dispersed throughout the structure. The old sense of orientation within a clear spatial order gives way to a pervasive 'principle of disorientation.' Much of the interior is folded into a labyrinthine density to 'develop the ancient forces of architectural confusion.' Even the shape of the labyrinth is

7 Constant, unpublished manuscript of lecture to the Students Association at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen, 17 March 1964.
8 Constant, manuscript of lecture at the ICA, London, 7 November 1963.
always changing. The point-to-point efficiency of the modern city is abandoned. All paths become ‘detours.’ Mobility and disorientation increase social interaction exponentially. Heterogeneous desires collide and generate new spaces.11

Daily life does not occur in New Babylon. It is New Babylon. Constant rejects any distinction between design and desire, architecture and psychology, space and social life: ‘Spatiality is social. In New Babylon social space is social spatiality. Space as a psychic dimension (abstract space) cannot be separated from the space of action (concrete space).’12 Every transformation of the space, no matter how minor, is understood as a direct intervention in social life that sets off a ‘chain reaction’ of responses. New forms of behavior evolve, only to be challenged by the next spatial move, and so on. New Babylon is a vast playground in which the fantasy of self-critical avant-garde experimental art has been generalized into a collective life style. Art as a discrete practice critiquing the dominant order becomes redundant. Daily life has become an all-embracing artwork using every available medium simultaneously, a ‘unitary’ urbanism.

Constant first heard about unitary urbanism in September 1956 at the Primo congresso mondiale degli artisti liberi (First World Congress of Free Artists) held in the provincial Italian town of Alba. The congress was organized by the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus that had been founded in 1953 by Constant’s old Cobra colleague Asger Jorn and the painter Pinot Gallizio. Also attending was a delegate of the Lettrist International founded in 1952 by the brilliant poet, filmmaker, and strategic activist Guy Debord.

His group had been waging a campaign against functionalist architecture in their mimeographed newsletter Potlatch since 1954. The ‘repulsive’ Le Corbusier was the designated enemy. Amongst other crimes, he had taken away that ‘we have a right to expect from truly impressive architecture — disorientation on a daily basis.’13 Jorn had worked for Le Corbusier during the late thirties, but from 1946 on had opposed functionalist architecture. His 1954 article on the subject impressed Debord, who published part of it at the end of the same year in Potlatch, and they discussed the possibility of linking their groups. With this in mind, the lettrist Gil Wolman was sent to the congress in Alba by Debord with a prepared statement insisting that it was time to move beyond condemning functionalism and to develop a whole new unitary urbanism based on the ‘construction of atmosphere.’ While Le Corbusier had the ‘impertercence’ to present his architecture as unchanged, its infinitely suspect organization will soon evaporate: ‘Since Le Corbusier made his work an illustration and powerful instrument of action for the worst forces of repression, that work — of which certain teaching should nevertheless be integrated — will disappear completely.’14 Functionalist design offered valuable lessons but would be dissipated by a new way of life, a new way of occupying space. This stance was endorsed by the congress, which adopted a collective platform on unitary urbanism that was published in Potlatch in November. The members of both groups signed a mimeographed leaflet calling for demonstrations in favor of unitary urbanism that was distributed one month later in the streets of Turin.15

Hearing favorable reports from Jorn and Wolman, Debord tried to make contact with

11 ‘Instead of creating coagulated versions of individual desires, like the traditional art-forms used to do, the people in New Babylon will be able to realize immediately any image of their world at any moment.’ Constant, unpublished manuscript of lecture to the Students Association at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen, 17 March 1964.


14 Gil Wolman, ‘Intervention au Congres d’Alba,’ reproduced in facsimile in Gérard Berreby, Documents relatifs à la fondation de l’Internationale Situationniste (Paris: Editions Allia, 1985), pp. 356–358, 359. The ‘positive contributions’ of functionalism were later listed: ‘[Unitary urbanism] is not a reaction to functionalism, but rather a move past it; it is a matter of reaching — beyond the immediately utilitary — an enthralling functional environment. Functionalism — which still has avant-garde pretensions because it continues to encounter outdated resistance — has already triumphed to a large extent. Its positive contributions — the adaption to practical functions, technical innovation, comfort, the banishment of superimposed ornament — are today’s banalities.’ Unsigned, ‘L’urbanisme unitaire à la fin des années 50,’ Internationale Situationniste, no. 3 (December 1959), pp. 1–16. Translated by Thomas Y. Levin as ‘Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s,’ in Elizabeth Sussman, ed., On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist Inter-
Constant. In December 1956, he traveled from his mother’s house in Cannes to Alba. Having stayed on in Gallizio’s house after the congress, Constant was already working on models inspired by the concept of unitary urbanism which would gradually evolve into New Babylon. They got along well, discussing the possible futures of urban life. At the end of his stay, Debord suggested that they memorialize their solidarity. Everyone staying in the house posed in front of a local photographer’s painted backdrop: a gang in matching winter coats looks confidently into the camera; the new ringleader stands in the center with the modelmaker to one side. When Constant returned to Amsterdam, Debord wrote to him about the imminent formation of an even more radical group that would, as they both demanded, abandon the suspect terrain of fine art to concentrate on architecture:

We are working on organizing a more advanced movement — before lettrism and Bauhaus split up — this movement would really be founded on questions of psychogeography, the construction of ambience, behavior and architecture. If not, one could only have chatterings around painting or well-known literature. I will keep you posted on publications we will be making in this transitional phase. We need to define our objectives. If I can judge by our conversations in Alba, I think that we may be able to meet you on new terrain and I definitely hope so.16

In July 1957, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus and the Lettrist International were combined into the Situationist International with Constant as a founding member. A close friendship and collaboration quickly developed. Debord and Constant stayed in each other’s apartments and maintained intense correspondence while collaborating on dérives, journals, congresses, leaflets, manifestos, exhibitions, manifestations, and diverse experiments. In 1958, Constant completed the first fully detailed models of his project, and, in early 1959, Debord wrote an essay about them for the May exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, although it was ultimately not included in the catalog.17 The first account of the project appeared in July when Potlatch was revived. An essay by Constant entitled ‘Le grand jeu à venir’ (The Great Game to Come) sketches out what will be required in an ‘ambience-city,’ yet does not describe any details of his design.18 Indeed, the photograph of his Ambiance d’une ville future model is pointedly labeled ‘pre-situationniste’ and a short report by Debord on the Stedelijk Museum exhibition argues that the models ‘do no more than state the problem of unitary urbanism.’ But he immediately goes on to say that such constructions exemplify the radical critique of traditional art needed to mobilize a new kind of political activism. Aesthetic detachment in the service of consumer culture gives way to action:

This exhibition could mark the turning point, in the modern world of art production, between self-sufficient merchandise-objects, meant solely to be looked at, and project-objects, whose more complex appreciation calls for some sort of action, an action on a higher level having to do with the totality of life.19

The strategic importance of the project escalated at the end of the year when Debord used two images of another of Constant’s models as the only illustration of the analysis of the relationship between revolutionary politics and art that opens the third issue of Inter-

16 Letter from Guy Debord to Constant, dated 19 January 1957. All cited correspondence is part of the Constant Archive, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague.
17 When Debord receives the catalog, he writes to Constant that he likes it but feels that Willem Sandberg, the museum’s director, has modified it too much to the needs of the museum. Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 30 April 1959.
19 Guy Debord, ‘Première maquettes pour l’urbanisme nouveau,’ Potlatch, no. 30 (15 July 1959). Translated by Gerardo Denis as ‘Preliminary Models for a New Urbanism’ in Andretti and Costa, Theory of the Dérive, p. 63. The text is unsigned but the original manuscript in Constant’s archive is in Debord’s handwriting.
nationale Situationniste, the collective’s sporadic journal. The images illustrate the argument that constructed situations are the opposite of works of art, that situationists are ‘the organizers of the absence’ of the aesthetic avant-garde.20 The architectural model is what appears when art is discarded. The issue concludes with ‘Une autre ville pour une autre vie’ (Another City for Another Life), an essay by Constant that again rejects the traditional arts and is illustrated with the first sketch plans and sections of his proposed design.21 The project had quickly gone from being considered ‘pre-situationist’ to what Debord would soon describe as ‘the most advanced’ manifestation of the group’s efforts.

Debord was deeply invested in the project, having been the one who commissioned the two photographs he used, precisely specifying the angle they should be taken from. He even invented the name ‘New Babylon’ in response to Constant’s initial proposal of ‘Déri­ville.’ The name did not appear until June 1960, when the fourth issue of Internationale Situationniste featured Constant’s analysis of yet another key model. But it was precisely in that month that Constant resigned from the collective. He stopped referring to the situationists and they stopped referring to him. By the time of the Stedelijk Museum lecture six months later, major concepts like psychogeography and unitary urbanism remain in Constant’s polemic, but the people who invented them have evaporated. Soon, even the concepts fall away. While Constant elaborated the design and theory of his project for another 14 years, the relationship between the situationists and architecture remained problematic on both sides.22

Psychogeographic Design

At the beginning there was no problem. On the contrary, the situationists invested everything in architecture. The Lettrist International had been insistent that a new form of architecture be developed. In May 1954, they used an issue of the magazine La carte d’après nature, edited by René Magritte, to announce that they had already established such an architecture’s ‘first principles’ through psychogeographic research. Architecture could be used to turn some seemingly accidental playful qualities of urban existence into a whole new way of life:

The great civilization that is on its way will construct situations and adventures. A science if life is possible. The adventurer seeks out and creates adventure, rather than wait for it to come. The conscious use of environments will condition constantly renewed behaviors. The role of those small flights of chance which we call fate will continue to fade. An architecture, an urban planning and a mood-affecting form of plastic expression — the first principles of which exist today — will work in concert toward this end.23

Potlatch started a month later and similar claims are repeated throughout each issue. The goal is a ‘great game’ combining mastery of atmosphere with ‘a compelling town planning.’24 Jorn is cited to the effect that ‘architecture is always the ultimate achievement of intellectual and artistic evolution, the materialization of an economic stage.’25 The subversion of traditional structures must give way to subversive structures. ‘We have to experiment with forms of architecture as well as rules of conduct’26 while looking forward


21 Constant, ‘Une autre ville pour une autre vie,’ Internationale Situationniste, no. 3 (December 1959), pp. 37-40. Translated by John Hammond as ‘Another City for Another Life,’ in Andreotti and Costa, Theory of the Derive, pp. 92-95. The essay was originally entitled ‘Notre ambition est dans l’ambiance.’ Debord found the notion of ambience restrictive and proposed ‘Notre ambition est dans la construction totale de la vie’ when offering a few corrections to the text.

22 The most developed accounts of the relationship between Constant’s New Babylon and the situationists are to be found in: Simon Sadler, The Situationist City (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998);


to 'the complete construction of architecture and urbanism that will someday be within the power of everyone.'\(^{23}\)

How could architecture be subversive? All situationists are architects inasmuch as their mission is the 'construction' of 'concrete' situations in the specific context of the city. Yet this construction can never assume the solidity and immobility of traditional buildings. Situations are never more than transient atmospheres. How can particular architectural forms sustain the subversion of form? If psychogeography locates areas 'as ideal for drifting as they are scandalously unfit for habitation,'\(^{28}\) how can forms of habitation be developed out of the dérive without freezing and therefore destroying it? The usual concerns for housing conditions, architectural style, form, economy, and planning must give way to the free manipulation of atmosphere. The role of architecture must be transformed. At the very least, its mechanisms have to be subjected to the situationists' preferred strategy of détournement.\(^{39}\) Architecture must be appropriated in seemingly illegitimate ways and twisted to other ends.

In May 1956, Debord and Wolman speak of an experimental stage which will ‘détourn’ existing architectural forms.\(^{30}\) Six months later, Debord predicts that ‘one day we will construct cities made for the dérive.’\(^{31}\) But he only fully embraces the active invention of specific forms after repeated discussions with Constant. Rapport sur la construction des situations (Report on the Construction of Situations), the pamphlet he prepared for circulation at the inaugural congress in 1957, argues that unitary urbanism will involve ‘the creation of new forms’ in addition to ‘the détournement of previous forms of architecture, urbanism, poetry and cinema.’\(^{32}\) Instead of producing new atmosphere with architecture, atmosphere will produce new architecture: 'Architecture must advance by taking emotionally moving situations, rather than emotionally moving forms, as the material it works with. And the experiments conducted with this material will lead to unknown forms.' Rigorous psychogeographic research will lead to an ‘experimental city,’ a ‘situationist city.’

Debord’s text refers obliquely to an unpublished manuscript from 1953 by the lettrist Ivan Chtcheglov that fantasized a reorganized city ‘of tomorrow’ in which each quarter would be given different psychological qualities. Air conditioning, artificial light, and mobile structures would enable the production of endlessly changing and disorienting landscapes: ‘architecture, at least initially, will be a means of experimenting with a thousand ways of modifying life.’\(^{13}\) Chtcheglov’s essay, ‘Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau’ (Formula for a New Urbanism), was published under the pseudonym Gilles Ivain in the first issue of Internationale Situationniste in June 1958. In the following issue, Constant described the essay’s proposals as ‘chimerical’ because they lacked a specific technical basis. He attempted to realize them by designing a world of endless drift facilitated by the latest and imagined technologies. To transform daily life, new mechanisms would be invented and deployed in the ‘visual, oral, and psychological’ domains.\(^{34}\) Debord supported the project’s complete confusion of the dérive and urban construction. Having earlier insisted that ‘there can be no situationist painting or music but only a situationist use of these means,’\(^{35}\) he comfortably

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24. 'A new idea in Europe,' Potlatch, no. 7 (August 1954). "The construction of situations will be the continuous realization of a great game (...) such a synthesis will have to bring together a critique of behavior, a compelling town planning, a mastery of ambiances and relationships.'


27. Guy Debord, "Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine," Les lèvres nues, no. 6 (September 1955). Translated by Ken Knabb as "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" in Knabb, Situationist International Anthology, pp. 5-8, 7.


29. "The first issue of Internationale Situationniste offers the following definition of détournement: 'Short for: détournement of preexisting aesthetic elements. The integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of these means. In a more primitive sense, détournement within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which testifies to the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres.' Definitions, Internationale Situationniste, no. 1 (June 1958), p. 13. Translated by John Hammond as Definitions, in Andreotti and Costa, Theory of the Dérive, pp. 68-71.


31. Guy Debord, "Théorie de la dérive," Les lèvres nues, no. 9 (November 1956). As Thomas Levin points out, the concluding paragraph containing this sentence was omitted when the article was republished in Internationale Situationniste, no. 2 (December, 1958). Thomas Levin, "Geopolitics of Hibernation: The Drift of Situationist Urbanism," in Andreotti and Costa, Theory of the Dérive, pp. 68-71.


used the expressions ‘situationist architecture’ and ‘situationist architect’—even proposing the construction of mobile cities that would wander across the landscape.

It is not that Debord wanted psychogeography to be used as the theoretical prescription for certain practices. On the contrary, he refused the distinction between theory and practice, between critique of the city and action within it. Unitary urbanism ‘has already begun the moment it appears as a program of research and development.’

The pleasure seeking drift through atmospheres that subverts urban structure becomes indistinguishable from the construction of new urban form. The process of designing, the design itself and the life that will go on in it have to be the same thing. As Chtcheglov had already argued, an architecture that could be endlessly modified by the desires of its occupants will be at once ‘a means of knowledge and a means of action.’ Psychogeographic analysis and situationist architecture would be indistinguishable. Constant took this to heart. In early 1959, he enlisted three collaborators, Armando, Har Oudejans and A. Alberts, to form the ‘Bureau de recherches de urbanisme unitaire’ as the Dutch section of the Situationist International. Research and design would be unified. New Babylon continues, rather than applies, the situationist readings. The new city emerges out of a radical interpretation of the old one.

In 1955 Debord had suggested that traditional city maps could be reappropriated and transformed to produce psychogeographic maps that document the hidden psychological structure of urban space. A year later and again in mid-1957, he and Jorn produced two such maps: Guide Psychographique de Paris and The Naked City, both of which became emblematic of the situationist project. The most generic maps of Paris are cut up and rearranged. Sections of the city with a particular ambience are isolated and repositioned in psychological rather than physical relationships. The parts of the city that lack atmospheric intensity are simply removed. Zones of intense ambience float free on the blank page, linked only by unidirectional red arrows that define flows of attraction. A more nuanced version of the map was produced at the end of 1957 for Mémoires, Debord and Jorn’s collage book on the early years of the Lettrist International. The arrows were now fragmented into multiple streaks that overlap, rather than simply link, the zones of ambience. A more complex picture of desire and movement emerges. Small fragments of theoretical text are dispersed on the page like architectural elements, calling on the eye to navigate through theory with the same eccentric movements that navigate the hidden resonances of the city.

These images were very influential on the development of New Babylon, which precisely takes the form of a psychogeographic map. Each section of the vast structure that leapfrogs across the landscape operates like a zone of the traditional city with a particular atmosphere. The lines of traffic circulation take the place of psychogeographic arrows. The pattern is repeated at a smaller scale in plan and section within each sector. The detailed drawings of the interior show discrete spaces of atmospheric intensity linked by flowing lines. This sense of a psychogeographic map started to become explicit with the Groep Sectors model and plans of 1959. The plexiglass layers of the model blur the usual distinction between model and map by visually collapsing all the levels upon one.
Psychogeographic Design


2. Guy Debord and Asger Jorn / page from Mémoires, 1959 (photo: Tom Haartsen)


4. Guy Debord / La vie continue d'être libre et facile (Life Continues to be Free and Easy) collage, 1959 / gift to Constant (photo: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague)
another; the plans are filled with architectural detail that emphasizes the repetition of the large-scale pattern of drift within each structure. Debord enthused that finally 'the dérive will manifest itself in three dimensions.'

But it was just six months later that Constant resigned and Debord rejected the possibility that situationist architecture could have a specific form. The collective promptly carried out yet another of its trademark assassinations. In September of 1960, Attila Kotanyi and Raoul Vaneigem took over the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism, moving its base to Brussels and giving it a new program in the sixth issue of *Internationale Situationniste* in August 1961, rejecting architecture as 'falsely satisfying a falsified need' and urbanism as 'a rather neglected branch of criminology.' Constant became a role model of what to avoid. In the same issue, the reader is reassured that 'this cunning soul, among two or three plagiarisms of badly understood situationist ideas, shamelessly offers himself as a public relations man for integrating the masses into capitalist technical civilization.' After New Babylon was given a prominent place in one of the most influential architectural journals in 1962, the editorial of the eighth issue of *Internationale Situationniste* referred to it as an 'extremely meager sub-theory.' The final blow came in the same January 1963 issue when Debord used 'Constant's technocratic concept of a situationist profession' as an example of 'deviationist seeds that have since blossomed into gross results.' From the center of Debord's ever-tightening circle, the project was presented as a failure. New Babylon became part of the spectacular economy under attack. The very idea of a situationist architect was seemingly dismissed, banished from situationist discourse with the other art forms it had so fervently critiqued.

Yet New Babylon had a very different life — a different history — in architectural discourse. It grew out of a series of connections that Constant had with architectural culture that preceded his engagement with the situationists and continued long afterwards. Another kind of picture emerges from this wider perspective, and another sense of the project's strategic impact on situationist tactics.

The Playground of Architecture

Constant spent some time in London in 1952, moving around a lot and becoming fascinated by the intricacies of urban form. The city itself seemed to realize the dreams of avant-garde artists better than their work. By the time of his return to Amsterdam in early 1953, he was obsessed with space — with new possibilities of structure and organization and asked the architect Aldo van Eyck to give him some books to study. After reading these basic books on construction techniques, he went to the library for more advanced information on reinforced concrete and new metals like titanium, aluminum, and stainless steel. The rejection of painting had become a full-blown turn to architecture.

Van Eyck was a friendly guide. They had first met in 1947. In fact, it was through this meeting that Constant's collaboration with Asger Jorn was cemented. Constant had been looking at some Miró canvases in a gallery in Paris when Jorn walked in trying to sell some lithographs. That evening, they met again in a café and Jorn described his dream of an in

39 Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 4 November 1959. *The atmosphere of a few places gave us intimations of the future powers of an architecture it would be necessary to create to be the support and framework for less mediocre games.* Script of Guy Debord's 1959 film *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (On the passage of a few persons through a rather brief period of time). Translated by Ken Knabb in Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, p. 31.


41 'The ex-situationist Constant, whose Dutch collaborators had been excluded from the SI for having agreed to construct a church, himself now presents model factories in his catalogue published in March by the Municipal Museum of Bochum. This cunning soul, among two or three plagiarisms of badly understood situationist ideas, shamelessly offers himself as a public relations man for integrating the masses into capitalist technical civilization; and reproaches the SI for having abandoned its whole program for shaking up the urban environment, which he would remain the sole person to be occupied with. And under these conditions!' Unsigned, 'Critique de l'urbanisme,' *Internationale Situationniste*. 
international movement of artists. When Jorn visited Amsterdam a few weeks later, he and Constant went to Van Eyck’s home; the architect was said to have acquired some Mirós while living in Switzerland during the war. A bond was immediately established around the relationship between art and architecture. Van Eyck became a shadow member of the Cobra group and designed the celebrated installation of their most important show at the Stedelijk Museum in November 1949. In the same year, the first issue of the *COBRA* magazine featured an attack on functionalist architecture. At the time, Van Eyck was also leaning away from orthodox modernism, having made a famous attack on rationalism to the most influential international architects at the 1947 meeting of their organization CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne).  

When Constant first turned to architecture, Van Eyck regularly took him to the meetings of De 8, the Amsterdam-based group that acted as the Dutch branch of CIAM along with Opbouw, the Rotterdam group. The journal *Forum* was their vehicle. The presence of an artist was accepted at the fortnightly meetings of architects because he was Van Eyck’s colleague. A 1953 issue of *Forum* devoted to CIAM featured their collaboration for the *Mens en huis* (Man and House) exhibition on modern interior design at the Stedelijk Museum in November 1952. Reacting against the display of aesthetically approved furnishings in the exhibition, the architect had selected a small canvas the artist had just painted in London and designed a colored space to surround a wall-size enlargement of the work. Constant literally surrounded himself with architecture. At the De 8 meetings, he was able to absorb architectural discourse by some of the most important international figures of the day like Van Eyck, Gerrit Rietveld, Cornelis van Eesteren, Sandy van Ginkel, and Benjamin Merkelbach, while remaining skeptical: ‘I wanted to learn... I was aware that there was quite a distance between us. They were thinking about present conditions. I was dreaming of the future.’  

When the New Babylon project began, he stopped going to the meetings and presented it as an attack on CIAM’s functionalist mentality. By then, Van Eyck had also pulled away from the mainstream as a member of Team 10, the international breakaway group of younger architects founded in 1953 in a protest against the doctrine of the founding generation of CIAM. But Van Eyck’s dialog with Constant ended during the New Babylon years:

*He thought about Utopia. I did not. I believed in New Babylon but he knew what it looked like. He had the combined intelligence and creativity to do it. It was a total concept. I never had a total concept. So I appreciated it but there was no discussion.*

The experiment with color continued when Constant collaborated with Rietveld on ‘Idea for Living,’ a model interior for a couple with two children in a 1954 furniture exhibition displayed at De Bijenkorf department store in Amsterdam. Rietveld designed and furnished two rooms and Constant provided the color scheme.  

While collaborating with Van Eyck, Constant had polemicized the work with a theoretical essay: entitled ‘Spatial colorisme’ (Spatial Colorism), it argued that the intimate bond between color and form should become the basis of an equally intimate bond between artist and architect. A 'con-

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1 Aldo van Eyck installing the Cobra exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1949
2 Constant and Aldo van Eyck. Voor een spatiaal colorisme, part of the *Mens en huis* exhibition. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1952 (photo: Jan Versnel)
structive’ collaboration had to displace the respective disciplines in favor of ‘a totally new plastic art with its own independent laws, and with a potential far outstripping that of both architecture and painting.’ The essay was published in a limited edition with some silk-screens of the installation and later reprinted in *Forum*. Constant sent a copy to Rietveld, who returned it covered with detailed pencil notes. They maintained a dialogue on the question long after their collaboration was completed.

Rietveld and Constant were both members of the Liga Nieuw Beelden (League for New Representation) that had been established in 1954 to foster the unification of artists and architects. Monthly meetings were held in the house of its founder, Charles Karsten, an architect who had also been one of the founding members of De 8 but had since become a sculptor. He organized talks by all the members of De 8 but also by key figures like Mart Stam, Jacob Bakema, J.H. van den Broek, Naum Gabo, and Carola Giedion-Welcker. A monthly mimeographed bulletin documented the evolving positions and occasionally *Forum* would report on the group’s activities. Constant was a frequent participant in the panel discussions and contributor to the *Liga Bulletin*. His ‘constructions’ were included in the group’s annual exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum.

Constant’s work had not suddenly ‘become’ architectural when he came into contact with the situationists and their theories of urban life. His constructions had been carefully positioned at the threshold to architecture and slowly moved across it over a number of years.

An important part of this strategic displacement was an ongoing collaboration with the sculptors Steven Gilbert and Nicolas Schöffer between 1953 and 1956. They too wanted to become architects. Gilbert had been one of Constant’s Cobra colleagues in the late forties, but started working on designs for houses and apartment buildings. Schöffer was designing whole cities. In 1953 he invited Gilbert and Constant to his studio in Paris to see if they would collaborate on the theme of ‘spatiodynamism’ that had obsessed him since 1948. He defined it as ‘the constructive and dynamic integration of space in a plastic work’ and had produced a series of open metal frames animated by movement, noise, light, music, projections and constantly changing angles of perception. As the structures grew, they took on urbanistic pretensions, literally moving through the city under their own guidance or towering overhead to project an atmosphere of flickering light and sound. They soon took over the whole urban space. In 1952, Schöffer prepared drawings of a *Spatiodynamic City*. The city would be a ‘giant sculpture’ for ‘leisure’ made of long translucent volumes floating 16 meters in the air on pilotis and divided into two levels with ‘sliding, pivoting or disappearing walls’ to accommodate any function. The structure was suspended in a ‘network of communicating arteries’ with helicopters landing on the roof and cars on the ground beneath. The plan was to simultaneously build experimental centers in different countries that would be modified as they gradually extended themselves across the landscape.

Looking at some constructions and hearing the theory, Constant and Gilbert agreed to collaborate. All three worked with a similar geometry, suspending colored panels in metal
1 Observatorium (Observatory), 1956 / plexiglass and brass / h. 53 cm / private collection (photo: Jan Versnel)
2 Verende constructie (Springy Construction), 1955 / band iron / h. 150 cm / destroyed
3 Constructie met gebogen vlakken (Construction with Curved Planes), 1954 / steel, brass, plexiglass / 88 x 79 x 45 cm / private collection long-term loan to Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
4 Ruimtefiguur (spaceform), 1958 / plexiglass and metal / 80 x 74 x 69 cm / collection Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (photo: Jan Versnel)
1 Observatorium (Observatory), 1955 / plexiglass and steel / h. 45 cm / private collection (photo: Jan Versnel)

2 La fleur mécanique (The Mechanical Flower), 1955 / brass, lead, plastic, plexiglass, rock / 140 x 61 x 48 cm / collection Rijksmuseum Twente, Enschede (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)

3 Untitled, 1955 / plexiglass and brass / 56 x 45 x 30 cm / collection Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld (photo: Jan Versnel)

4 Constructie met doorzichtige vlakken (Construction with Transparant Planes), 1954 / aluminum, plexiglass / 76 x 76 x 30 cm / private collection (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)

5 Constructie met gebogen dak (Construction with folded roof), 1955 / aluminum and brass / 70 x 70 cm / destroyed (photo: Jan Versnel)
frameworks, but things went slowly. It was not until the beginning of 1955 that Schöffler prepared a provisional draft of a manifesto on spatiodynamism and Gilbert and Constant modified the text, retitling it 'Neo-Vision' to distinguish it from Schöffler's personal concerns. In March, Schöffler and Gilbert presented it in Schöffler's apartment to some fellow members of the Groupe Espace that had been founded in 1952 by Andre Bloc, the influential editor of L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui and L'Art d'aujourd'hui. After a few minor modifications, architect Claude Parent, composer Pierre Henry, engineer Jacques Bureau and art critic Guy Habasque added their signatures. Such a team had always been envisaged. Parent had collaborated on the original Spatiodynamic City project and in June 1954 published an article with the architect Ionel Shein which condemned functionalism and praised mobility in the Belgian journal Architecture. Schöffler then collaborated with Parent and Shein on a project for a radio broadcast center that was exhibited in the Salon des réalités nouvelles. Once again, a variety of shapes was suspended in an open metal frame. In the next two years, Parent and Schöffler produced unrealized designs for a commercial center in the same mode, a pair of spatiodynamic apartments, and a theater. Gilbert became a member of Group Espace and hoped the Neo-Vision team could link up with an English branch of the group when he moved to London, but Bloc's attempts to set up such a branch failed. The plan was to use a major exhibition of Neo-Vision projects at the intersection of art and architecture. Constant proposed the Stedelijk Museum and Willem Sandberg, the director of the museum, agreed to present the show. But a month before its scheduled February 1956 opening, the exhibition collapsed because the transportation of all the large structures from Paris could not be arranged.

Throughout this time, Schöffler collaborated with almost all the Groupe Espace members, but Gilbert and Constant kept a certain distance from what they considered his more 'mystical' approach and independently maintained a regular correspondence on the relationship between art and architecture. They exchanged comments on each other's manuscripts and discussed the role of architects like Bakema, Auguste Perret, and Le Corbusier. At the beginning of 1954, Constant sent Gilbert a copy of the first Liga Bulletin. Both found its call for an integration of art and architecture promising but agreed on a more radical view: the traditional arts were simply inadequate for the new task: architecture had to take over. They floated the idea of a magazine on the theme of 'Art and Habitat.' 'Habitat' had been the rallying cry for the foundation of Team 10 in 1953 and the main point of discussion between Van Eyck and his colleagues when Constant first turned to architecture. Constant sent Gilbert several versions of an essay that uses the concept of habitat to collapse the distinction between art and architecture; Gilbert passed some of the documents along to Anthony Hill and Victor Pasmore—who agreed to add their signatures to the venture.

A 1955 version of Constant's 'Art et habitat' essay carries traces of all the various connections he had with architectural discourse during these years and prefigures the mentality of New Babylon. The final section, 'For an Urban Aesthetic,' contrasts the fixed relations of...
the traditional artwork with the endless movement in the city and calls for an aesthetic of 'unlimited elasticity' — an 'ambience of freedom.' The traditional distinctions between inside and outside established by a linear system of streets and facades would have to be replaced with a more complex sculptural play between masses and voids that sets up a new kind of urban rhythm. As in Schöffer's city, pilots would establish a complete disengagement from the ground. The repetition of similar small elements would be broken by the idiosyncratic forms of communal spaces like schools, cinemas, and shopping centers.

While the Art and Habitat project never gained momentum, Constant did publish some of the ideas in a 1955 article for Forum entitled 'Van samenwerking naar absolute eenheid van de plastische kunsten' (From Collaboration to Absolute Unity Among the Plastic Arts). The essay insists that the old idea of collaboration between art and architecture has to be abandoned. Instead of combining individual art forms in a way that 'stifles' architecture, every discipline has to concentrate on the production of 'habitat, a fundamental form that encompasses all facets of life.' The discrete identity of disciplines and individual practitioners will disappear. Architecture will lead the way in this self-erasure because of its intimate connection with daily life and long-standing embrace of mechanization. Specialized technicians and engineers will join the team to help reject the subjective expressionism that dominates the arts. The architect's usual 'inferiority complex when faced with this turbulent stream of artistic hocus-pocus' will evaporate in favor of a new collective form of production.

The single illustration for the text is a photograph of Monument voor de wederopbouw (Monument for Reconstruction), a sixteen meter tall structure that Constant had just built for the E55 exhibition in Rotterdam. Commissioned by Bakema, it resembled the open framed metal sculptures with colored plexiglass inserts that Constant, Gilbert, and Schöffer had been working on and was published in Forum, Bouwkundig Weekblad, L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui, and L'Art d'aujourd'hui.

Constant did not simply absorb architectural discourse during these years; he was involved in a number of such realizations. Indeed, each of his encounters with the architectural world seemed to lead to some kind of practical construction, enabling him to experiment with the logic of play that would later be developed in New Babylon. Van Eyck, who had been responsible for countless playgrounds in Amsterdam since 1947, helped him obtain commissions for playgrounds and play equipment. Constant's stainless steel swings and reinforced concrete seating platforms carried over the logic of the glass and metal table and metal stool that he had designed for commercial production by the Het Spectrum company in 1953, as did the mobile construction he made in 1956 for the lobby of the municipal housing company in Amsterdam. Traces of these projects can be found throughout New Babylon.

The Infrastructure of Play

By the time Constant made contact with the situationists, he had absorbed a depth of architectural culture, adopted polemical positions, and elaborated specific designs. He
arrived at the 1956 Alba conference with the text ‘Demain la poésie logera la vie’ (Tomorrow Life Will Reside in Poetry) criticizing functionalist architecture for being hypocritically decorative in its use of primitive construction methods. To avoid being 'dispersed' in the void between engineering and sculpture, he argued, ‘audacious’ new forms of architectural practice must imaginatively deploy the latest postwar techniques of metal and reinforced concrete structure. These technologies ‘have developed to such an extent that construction methods represent virtually no further obstacle at all to the realization of very free forms, involving an absolutely original conception of space.’

With the formation of the Situationist International, the different critiques of functionalist architecture by Debord, Jorn, and Constant combined to initiate an intense debate. Debord’s 1957 Rapport sur la construction des situations attacks the theory of functionalist architecture established by the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier for being based on the most reactionary social and ethical conceptions... an excessively reactionary notion of life and its framework. The pamphlet calls for a ‘holistic’ unitary urbanism ‘infinitely more all-encompassing than the old empire of architecture over the traditional arts.’ In the same year, the situationist press (which was funded by Jorn) published all of Jorn’s essays about architecture as the book Pour le forme with The Naked City psychogeographic map added as an insert. In the second issue of Internationale Situationniste of June 1958, Constant argued against Jorn’s rejection of machines and was answered by Debord and Jorn. The debate continued when Constant began his Stedelijk Museum catalog with citations from his September 1958 letter to his fellow situationists reaffirming his rejection of painting and calling for a creative use of machines:

Those who mistrust the machine and those who glorify it show the same incapacity to utilize it. Machine work and mass production offer unheard-of possibilities for creation, and those who are able to place these possibilities at the service of a daring imagination will be my creators of tomorrow.

Artists have the task of inventing new techniques and of using light, sound, movement, and in general all the inventions that can have an effect on environments.

Otherwise the integration of art into the construction of the human habitat remains illusory.

Ten years separate us from Cobra, and the history of so-called experimental art demonstrates its errors to us.

We ought therefore to invent new techniques in all domains, visual, oral, and psychological, so as later to combine them in the complex activity that will produce unitary urbanism.

Constant repeatedly distanced himself from both the functionalist embrace of the machine, which forfeited the status of art, and the ‘hatred’ of the machine that Cobra shared with all the artistic movements from William Morris through to ‘a more recent tendency like action-painting.’ It is not that Constant simply rejected the Cobra mentality outright. Traces of his early paintings remain in New Babylon. In fact, it can be argued that he was able to take Cobra’s playful concern with psychological excess to a new mass level by rejecting the cult of the individual artist and privileging the machine. New Babylon combines the critique of modern architecture with the deployment of the latest technical develop-
ments. High technology is displaced from work to play. Efficiency of structure and movement becomes extravagance. Clarity becomes confusion. Precisely defined objects become indeterminate fields. Direct paths become serpentine. Abstract visual order becomes an enveloping sensuous eccentric rhythm of light, sound, smell, and color.

In New Babylon, the Team 10 mentality is everywhere evident, from the rejection of the garden city idea and the abolition of master planning to the specific details of the design. Van Eyck had concentrated on the informal way in which daily life operates in the city according to a completely different kind of pattern than the apparent urban order. His play grounds were the laboratory for this research. Constant’s pivotal Ambiance de jeu (Ambience of Play) model of 1956, which marks the beginning of New Babylon as a spatial organization rather than free floating sculptural objects, is nothing more than a playground design in the spirit of Van Eyck’s projects. In 1955, Van Eyck had already monumentalized the logic of his playgrounds in his acclaimed orphanage building for Amsterdam. Its labyrinthine form with endless different paths, and a web of microclimates generated by the users rather than the architect, resonates with the mentality of New Babylon operating at a larger scale.

Another critical influence on the project was the ‘streets-in-the-air’ concept that Alison and Peter Smithson presented in 1953 to the ninth CIAM congress as a possible replacement for the basic principles the organization had established twenty years earlier in its infamous document, The Athens Charter. They argued that the appropriate pattern of associations between people and functions cannot be predicted. Social groupings are the product of ‘looseness’ of spatial organization and easy communication rather than fixed patterns. Architects should provide a structure that is open to unexpected and changing relationships. The internal life of a city would be suspended over the ground in a continuous multilevel complex that stressed movement patterns. Its linear form would be connected where necessary to work and to those ground elements that are necessary at each level of association. . . . Our hierarchy of associations is woven into a modulated continuum representing the true complexity of human association. The concept was first developed in an unsuccessful entry to the Golden Lane Housing competition of 1952. Three levels of elevated ‘street mesh’ spread out across an area of Central London. The structure zigzags in a labyrinthine pattern and the different angled blocks all ‘flow into one another with an uninterrupted articulation. The Smithsons kept elaborating the project, adjusting the details and moving it to different sites; photocollaging it, for example, onto bombed out areas of traditional cities. They took the idea one step further in 1958 when they collaborated with Peter Sigmond on an entry for the Berlin Hauptstadt competition. Rather than sitting on the ground and displacing a run-down neighborhood, the meandering overlapping networks now hover over a ‘ruined city.’ Suspended high off the ground, the network is ‘free and irregular, providing routes and spaces for the random patterns of pedestrian movement.’ One of the plans was published in the Liga Bulletin by Constant’s colleague Alberts, and a similar sense of hovering multiple overlapping systems of movement would become central to New Babylon.
Such strategies were variations within the overall concept of ‘infrastructure.’ Architects provide a basic support for an unforeseeable and ever-changing life. The spatial system, as the Smithsons put it, but ‘a framework, like drains, to which everyone connects up.’ Furthermore, buildings are understood as a form of landscape, a terrain on which social transactions take place. Team 10 projects by the Smithsons, Georges Candilis, Woods, and Bakema drew on precedents in Le Corbusier’s megastructural fantasies to develop the strategy, but the concept was much more widespread. It can be seen, for example, in the open-plan office ‘landscapes’ that emerged as a spin-off of generic modernism during the second half of the 1950s. A structural framework is again provided for a free play of program, furnishing and organization. Elements are standardized, flexible, and replaceable to produce a mobility and unpredictability of activity. This sense of infrastructural landscape would dominate experimental architecture from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. New Babylon became an early part of this experimental tradition, absorbing the conceptual lessons of Team 10 and echoing some of the formal strategies, but also changing the trajectory significantly.

While the Team 10 proposals are explicitly based on the preservation of the house, New Babylon is based on its vaporization. All the Team 10 founding documents on ‘habitat’ insist on the everyday house as the paradigm; their designs aim to progressively expand the logic of the private house to the street to the district to the town. The Smithsons associated their schemes with the ‘random aesthetic’ of action paintings by Jackson Pollock, the related art brut of Jean Dubuffet, and the work of their Independent Group colleague Eduardo Paolozzi, but they located fixed domestic organizations within that pattern. Even the precise view from each suspended private garden is specified. In contrast, the apparently similar aesthetic of Constant’s project is formed out of the debris of the exploded house. The freedom to infinitely rearrange the environment is seen to be dependent on the collapse of restrictive institutions, starting with that of the family. The situationists’ very first displacement is that from architecture as a fixed form derivative of the closed physical space of the house to the ‘architectural complex’ as ephemeral atmosphere. The eccentric geometry of this normally hidden complex cannot be associated with the ‘spontaneous’ gestures of the Cobra artists or the action painters. On the contrary, as Debord argued in 1957:

The most elementary unit of unitary urbanism is not the house, but the architectural complex, which combines all the factors that makes up an ambience, or a series of distinct ambiances, on the scale of the constructed situation. The spatial development must take into account the emotional effects that the experimental city will determine... The comrades who call for a new, free architecture must understand that this new architecture will primarily be based not on free, poetic lines and forms — in the sense that today’s ‘lyrical abstract’ painting uses those words — but rather on the atmospheric effects of rooms, hallways, streets, atmospheres linked to the gestures they contain.71

The lettrist statement presented by Wolman at Alba had already argued the impossibility of Le Corbusier’s attempt to base an architecture of the future on a defunct institution

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1. Aldo van Eyck, Burger Weeshuis (Municipal Orphanage), Amsterdam, 1955
2. Alison and Peter Smithson / Golden Lane Housing, 1952
3. Alison Smithson, Peter Smithson, Peter Sigmond / Reconstructionplan for Berlin Hauptstadt, 1958

70 ‘The house, the shell which fits man’s back, looks inward to family and outward to society and its organization should reflect this duality of orientation. The looseness of organization and ease of communication essential to the largest community should be present in this, the smallest. The house is the first definable city element.’

Alison and Peter Smithson, ‘Human Associations,’ p. 44.
of the past like the family. Team 10 likewise criticized Le Corbusier but maintained the institutional order. Constant absorbed many lessons from them but redirected the experimentation towards a dissolution of suspect institutions. Over the years, he would repeatedly condemn architects for simply providing spaces for current society.

In addition to transforming a number of Team 10 strategies, Constant's vast structures incorporated many recent developments by innovative structural engineers. In keeping with its philosophy, New Babylon is a virtual catalog of structural techniques. Some of the huge webs of metal touching down on a few points clearly echo the huge metal space-frames developed by Konrad Wachsmann and Robert de Ricolais in the early 1950s, which were given international exposure in most major architectural journals in 1954. Likewise, the suspension of transparent planes in a three-dimensional grid and the hanging of multilevel platforms is reminiscent of designs by Frei Otto. René Sarger's 1956 French pavilion at the Brussels Expo, where Constant exhibited, seems to have had an impact on some of the sectors, as did Richard Buckminster Fuller's lightweight spans over vast distances, including especially Fuller's proposals for structures that could accommodate entire cities and the suspension of multiple levels within a single spherical shell, as in the Automated Cotton Mill project of 1951. Constant learnt from these architects and engineers in the same way that they learned from each other. He promiscuously combined their techniques just as the inhabitants of New Babylon were meant to promiscuously combine resources to produce unique transient spaces.

New Babylon emerged at the intersection of early 1950s architectural discourse and the Lettrist International discourse of the same years. This intersection can clearly be seen in the series of maps Constant prepared between 1963 and 1969 showing New Babylon installed in various European cities. The maps mix megastructure drawings like those of Team 10 and psychogeographic drawings like those of Debord and Jorn. Constant reappropriated and transformed architectural culture just as Debord reappropriated the 1952 maps of the sociologist Chombart de Lauwe. Constant used isolated quotations from De Lauwe in his 1959 Stedelijk Museum catalog alongside photographs of the models. The Ambiance d'une ville future and Ambiance de départ models, for example, were accompanied by a line that had a huge impact on the situationist mentality: 'An urban quarter is not determined by geographic and economic factors but by the representation that its inhabitants and those of other quarters have of it.' Space is psychological. New Babylon is produced by cross-fertilizing early 1950s architectural culture and early 1950s social geography. Debord presented Constant with a fully formed critique of urban life and Constant presented him with a fully formed critique of architecture. Both drew on Johan Huizinga's 1938 book Homo Ludens to insist on the structural role of play. Political and aesthetic theory were carefully mixed and redeployed.

When Constant and Debord first met, Constant insisted that the account of unitary urbanism presented at Alba was far too vague. Precise definitions were needed as a practical and propagandist platform for further work. Debord agreed and they collaborated on

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72 'When, after a general analysis of the mystification of the evolution of social relations, we realize that the family as we know it is fortunately going to disappear, we realize that it is fatal for an architecture that wants to turn itself to the future to have attached its destiny on its conservation.' Gil Wolman, 'Intervention au Congres d'Alba,' in Berreby, Documents relatifs, pp. 396-398.

73 The first publication of Konrad Wachsmann's hangers was 'Etude d'une structure à trois dimensions: un hanger d'aviation,' L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui (July-August 1954), pp. 4-9. The article was followed by an analysis of the hangers by Robert de Ricolais and then one of his own projects. Shortly afterwards, Wachsmann's project appeared in Architectural Forum (September 1954).

such a document, with Constant writing nine of the points and Debord adding two more. After some fine tuning, they were published in the second issue of Internationale Situationniste as ‘La déclaration d’Amsterdam’ (The Amsterdam Declaration).\textsuperscript{77} From then on, the two continued to make friendly critiques of each other's texts. With the third issue, Constant became an official member of the editorial board, and Debord wrote to him, agreeing with the attempt to concretize unitary urbanism and speaking enthusiastically about each new model. One evening at the end of 1959, while looking at Constant's latest construction in Gilbert's apartment in Paris, Debord came up with the name 'New Babylon' and suggested that the description of the latest model, which would appear in the fourth issue of Internationale Situationniste, take the form of an itinerary through the sector, following a traditional architectural plan. Similar itineraries through the other sectors could then be collected together into a publication, Promenades à New Babylone, that would act as a 'descriptive guide,' like a tourist guidebook to an already existing city. It would be as if the situationist dream-world was built, mapped, and simply waiting to be explored.

Debord and Constant were happy when the first exhibition of New Babylon was scheduled for January 1960 in a small gallery at Essen owned by Otto van de Loo, a close friend of Jorn who had hosted the third situationist congress in Munich in April 1959. The exhibition seemed to be a great propaganda opportunity and the small catalog featured texts by both of them. Yet this was to be the last public gesture of solidarity. Collaboration gave way to conflict.


\textbf{The Scandal of Architecture}

The catalyst for the break was the August 1959 issue of \textit{Forum}, guest-edited by the Liga Nieuw Beelden. The editorial committee was dominated by Constant and his colleagues in the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism. Six months earlier, he had given a successful lecture organized by the Liga at the Academie voor Bouwkunst in Amsterdam on ‘The Goal and Ambition of Postwar Avant-garde Groups from “Experiments” to “Situations”.’ It cemented the formation of the Bureau and allowed it to transform the upcoming issue of \textit{Forum}. Constant had always communicated his latest thinking to the Liga and continued to pass on each development after his initial exchanges with the Lettrist International. A month before the founding of the Situationist International in 1957, he made a statement in the Liga Bulletin calling for a new form of mass-collaboration that would go far beyond the organization’s idea of cooperation among artists:

\textit{The youth don't yearn for masterpieces. The youth is fascinated by the big adventure that the face of the world is changing. And they participate. Technique, electronics, construction and movement are no longer only utilitarian names. The fantasy, once stimulated, doesn't know any limits any more. The possibilities go beyond the vision if one single person. Only in flashes, only sometimes we can see something of the strange still unknown beauty that people can create with light, power and movement. But these flashes are enough to fill many with enthusiasm and trust. Not only artists but everybody realizes what is going on even if he goes from a different starting point. Scientific or social because culture doesn't let itself be split up in squares, and there is no purely artistic or purely scientific activity. For the
The masses, trapped by their respect for aesthetic concepts imposed from outside, do not know that they too are capable of creation. This will be awakened by an art which makes suggestions but not spell anything out, an art which awakens and foresees the associations of images. Constant, 'Manifest van de experimentele groep,' Reflex, no. 1 (1948), pp. 2-6. Translated as 'Manifesto,' in K. Stiles and P. Selz eds., Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists Writings (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 704-708.

The argument was not so different than the one Constant had made in 1948 to his colleagues in the Experimentele Groep (Experimental Group – the Dutch branch of Cobra) and developed further in 1955. But by 1959, the rhetoric was explicitly situationist. The Forum issue was devoted to the Liga's usual theme of 'Integration' but was completely dislodged by the more radical situationist agenda. The coverage of the Liga's latest exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum is relegated to the back of the issue which begins with collages of crowds, Brigitte Bardot, jets, highways, gallows, and telephone book entries before a series of statements on integration by Constant, Bakema, E. Hartsuyker, and Van Eyck, who insists that 'integration = impotence.' Photographs of exemplary collaborations, including spatio-temporal sculptures by Schoffer and playgrounds by Van Eyck, then lead up to Constant's redefinition of integration as the construction of situations:

The now much talked about monster treaty between functional architecture and individualistic arts has proven not to have any viability.

The integration of art and life, on which a culture is based, cannot be realized with traditional means. First, a radical change should take place in our existence and our thinking. The construction of new situations is our first and most necessary task.

These new situations could become the kernels for a rebuilding of our environment. The separate arts cannot play a role in this anymore.

Constant, 'De eerste tekenen,' Liga Bulletin (June 1957).

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These new situations could become the kernels for a rebuilding of our environment. The separate arts cannot play a role in this anymore.


Our life, and the surroundings in which it takes place, can only form an indissoluble entity, which entails everything which we now collect here and there in a fragmentary way.

Short statements by Constant and Debord on unitary urbanism, along with one-line definitions of 'constructed situation,' 'situationist,' and 'unitary urbanism,' frame a photo of the Ambiance d'une ville future model. Three equally space-age models – an airy railway station by Enrico Castiglioni, Konrad Wachsmann's vast space-frame aircraft hangers, and Eero Saarinen's TWA terminal – then appear alongside an excerpt of A.F. Conard's attack on Le Corbusier from a July 1954 issue of Potlatch. Situationist architecture and theory is embedded within state-of-the-art architectural culture. It was the first time that 'official' situationist arguments had ventured out of their usual habitat in the group's own magazine (or surrealist journals like the Belgian Les lèvres nues, where some of the early key texts had appeared). And they were promptly ambushed. Debord was furious when he saw the issue. Having assisted in preparing its material, he was amazed to see that two small photographs of a church design by Oudejans and Alberts had been added alongside Constant's text. An outraged letter to Constant details his objections:

It is impossible to construct a church within even the slightly coherent perspective of modern urbanism. And that not only morally and politically; but for directly architectural and urbanistic reasons. Within this terrain of unitary urbanism, one can see clearly how all these positions are reuniting: moral and construction form an inseparable unity. One could not say that a dogmatism or ideological fanaticism prevented certain solutions or experiences. The perspective of unitary urbanism explains our life, and the surroundings in which it takes place, can only form an indissoluble entity, which entails everything which we now collect here and there in a fragmentary way.

Constant, 'Integratie?... van wat?,' Forum (August 1959), p. 184. Part of the text was used on a Liga invitation to their 1959 exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum. Constant wrote to the editors of Forum on the special issue: 'The idea of the integration of art and social is something that most avant-garde of the last half century have tried. (...) We need essential change in the structure of society and the phenomenon of artistic creativity to get to integration. The situationists are against individual productions. (...) The production of works of art in the face of today can only be valuable as a preparation for unitary urbanism. Every attempt for integration or synthesis without this perspective is doomed to fail in advance.' Letter dated 23 June 1959.

Enrico Castiglioni's project had been featured, along with those of René Sarger and Frei Otto, in the March 1966 special issue of L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui on 'Structure.'
perfectly the total failure of all the construction in this genre, a failure that is already evident and comical in the photographed model.  

A follow-up letter insists that the architects’ indifference to the program of a church is even unacceptable on the level of classical urbanism. Building as a form of ‘sculpture’ indifferent to function ‘falls into a sort of art for arts sake, free formalist’ and marks ‘a certain cynical opportunism of architects.’ Debord had repeatedly used the church as the model of what situationist strategies subvert. In 1954, Potlatch portrayed Le Corbusier’s architecture as ‘nothing more than a regression en masse to the old, not properly interred world of Christianity’ and the point was repeated in the lettrist statement at Alba. Over the years, Debord sent Constant a number of postcards of religious buildings or icons, some subtly retouched, with ironic comments on the back. Soon after seeing the Forum issue, he published an unsigned essay in the third issue of *Internationale Situationniste* on ‘L’urbanisme unitaire à la fin des années 50’ (Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s) that singles out church buildings as the antithesis of situationist architecture. The attack on functionalism must begin with the ‘psycho-functional’ condition of structures that prop up suspect institutions. The whole point of situationist architecture is to aggressively assault established psycho-functions and develop a shifting array of new ones. Unusable, uninhabitable, unthinkable dream spaces.

One must construct uninhabitable ambiences; construct the streets of real life, the scenery of daydreams. The issue of church construction provides a particularly illuminating criterion. Functionalist architects tend to agree to construct churches thinking — if they are not stupid deists — that the church, an edifice without function within a functional urbanism, can be treated as a free exercise of plastic form. Their error is that they fail to consider the psycho-functional reality of the church… In the very era of the technologies that gave rise to functionalism, the situationist architects, for their part, are searching to create new frames of behavior free of banality as well as of all the old taboos. The situationist architects are thus absolutely opposed to the construction even to the conservation of religious buildings with which they find themselves in direct competition. Unitary urbanism merges objectively with the interests of a comprehensive subversion.

Unsurprisingly, the Dutch architects were expelled from the collective. Debord accepted that Constant didn’t know about the inclusion of the church design, but Constant soon resigned. The break would be as complete as all the other ritualistic exclusions that Debord presided over, creating the impression that architecture itself was excommunicated. However, the events have to be followed in more detail. The scandal played itself out over a significant amount of time and generated a nuanced discourse about the limits of architecture that more precisely reveals the dilemmas posed by the very concept of ‘situationist architecture.’ Constant, Gallizio, and Jorn’s departures from the collective within the space of a year has often been represented as a shift away from aesthetics towards politics, but the situationists refused such a distinction, insisting that politics and aesthetics were inseparable. They never abandoned art, let alone architecture. Rather, they reconceptualized it. Architecture was redefined rather than rejected. If architectural interventions had...
been understood as the basis of political action, political interventions were now understood as new forms of architecture. If anything, it was architecture that separated itself from the situationists rather than the other way around.

Without Enthusiasm

Given the extraordinary intensity of Debord’s hope that architecture could carry out his political mission, his sense of betrayal by the *Forum* issue cannot be overestimated. He had been very taken with the idea of the Bureau at the beginning, agreeing that its ‘propaganda effect’ would accelerate the production of new forms of practice in opposition to the traditional arts.87 When Constant reported the success of his lecture to the Liga and the opportunity of using *Forum*, Debord replied ‘bravo for recruiting architects! Excellent… It is also very good to do this publication thanks to the Liga.’88 He promptly sent some of his own texts and agreed that Armando and Oudejans could come to the third congress of the situationists in Munich, saying that he looked forward to participating in discussions of architecture with them. The congress began with a lengthy report by Constant on unitary urbanism that announced that the Bureau had been formed to realize a new kind of collaborative work on research and practical designs. Architects must shift emphasis from form to atmosphere so radically that architecture itself will disappear as a discrete practice:

The architect, like all those working in our enterprise, finds himself up against the need to change trades: he will henceforth be a builder not of single forms but of complete ambiances. What makes contemporary architecture so boring is its principally formal preoccupations. Architecture’s problem is no longer the function / expression opposition; that particular question is far behind us today. Even as he uses existing forms and creates new ones, the architect’s principal concern has got to become the effect that it is going to have on the dwellers’ behavior and existence. All architecture will then be seen as part of a broader and more complete activity; ultimately, architecture, like the other arts, will actually disappear to the benefit of this unitary activity.89

The Italian section offered some resistance to the idea of the Bureau but it was soon accepted and the Dutch were made responsible for editing the first issue of a new series of *Potlatch*. Constant later presented slides of his models and the architects became involved in all the discussions. They created a strong impression. In fact, Debord was so taken with the idea of topology raised by Oudejans that he later went so far as to suggest that it might displace psychogeography as the central concern of the collective.90 A photo of him raising his tankard with Constant and the two architects in a Munich beer hall was used to illustrate the announcement of the Bureau’s formation in *Potlatch*.

The architects were even asked to take over responsibility for detailing the most important project of the time, a polemical exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum intended to be the definitive situationist statement. Throughout 1959, Debord and Constant had discussed the possibility of combining a major exhibition with a publication to ‘concretize’ unitary urbanism. A number of meetings were held in different cities to discuss the design with the other members. The idea was that a massive *dérive* on the outside of the museum with three

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87 Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 28 February 1959.

88 Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 11 March 1959.


90 Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 7 September 1959.

91 Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 23 September 1959.
separate teams of drifters coordinated by Constant on a mobile radio transmitter parallel a micro-dérive through a labyrinthine interior built within the museum. Debord was dedicated to the project, insisting that 'one single realization, even very summary, would give a great illusion of reality to discussions of possible architectures.' Constant was equally insistent on the need for a large collective publication and perhaps a film that would take the form of a 'Manifeste de UU.' At the beginning of the year, Debord agreed, but argued that the third issue of Internationale Situationniste should be dedicated to the preliminary development of their urbanistic proposals and only later might an issue of an architectural review be taken over to display the final research on a bigger scale. After the Munich congress, Constant revived the idea of a publication and Debord sent a number of texts, adding that he had developed the appropriate cinematographic techniques for the film. Debord again insisted that the exhibition was the most important device with unprecedented propagandistic value. He wanted it to demonstrate the play between micro- and macro-ambiences they had specified in 'The Amsterdam Declaration,' and that had originally attracted him to Constant's 'very beautiful' models:

"Your constructions are heading in the direction of a creation of a decor for a micro-ambience and at the same time the models of a new architecture. This differentiation is only a question of proportion, of scale. That is, we are rediscovering the profound unity of restricted ambience and of urbanism." Constant's models would appear in a separate 'documentation room.' Debord wrote to him that such an exhibition of spatial experiences, as distinct from the representations of spaces, would be only one step short of real urbanism:

"We are going to intimately mix zones of ambience evoking a city, and the zones of ambience invoking the interior of a house (this is what our realistic terrain is at the Stedelijk Museum: a sort of apartment that we could furnish, and offer the appearance outside of urban elements). I believe that this interior-exterior mix will produce the most advanced point of our experimental constructions. On the other hand, it is the only material option possible to create a true milieu, a true mixed environment never before seen, and not a poor representation of urbanism. We could offer true urbanism the next time."
It was not until June of 1959 that Sandberg accepted the idea of the exhibition. Meanwhile, Constant kept raising the issue of an equally definitive publication. When a small opportunity had arisen in March with the special issue of *Forum*, Debord immediately sent some notes and his 1955 article on psychogeography, suggesting Constant publish quotes from it, never suspecting that they would be associated with a church design. When he did find out, the precise timing of his responses reveals the precise tactical role that the architecture was playing in his thinking. By September, he was repeatedly asking if *Forum* had come out while encouraging Constant to push Oudejans and Alberts to write something on topology for *Internationale Situationniste*. Everybody was enthusiastic. After finally seeing *Forum*, in October, he wrote a letter predictably saying that the publication of a church would probably lead to the expulsion of the architects from the situationist collective but nevertheless went on to ask them again to contribute texts. In November, he received such a text, the ‘Première proclamation de la section hollandaise de l’IS’ (First Proclamation of the Dutch Section of the SI) - written by Constant but co-signed by his colleagues, and promptly asked the architects to prepare a measured plan of the Stedelijk Museum labyrinth, which they did. Their offenses were overlooked. Indeed, when the situationist journal came out in December, it referred approvingly to *Die Welt als Labyrinth*, which they did. Their offenses were overlooked. Indeed, when the situationist journal came out in December, it referred approvingly to *The World as a Labyrinth*, which they did.94 In November, he received such a text, the ‘Première proclamation de la section hollandaise de l’IS’ (First Proclamation of the Dutch Section of the SI) - written by Constant but co-signed by his colleagues, and promptly asked the architects to prepare a measured plan of the Stedelijk Museum labyrinth, which they did. Their offenses were overlooked. Indeed, when the situationist journal came out in December, it referred approvingly to *The World as a Labyrinth*, which they did.

The architects were promptly expelled. Having been drawn further in after their ‘treason,’ as Jorn put it, they were thrown out the moment they were no longer of use. While exempting Constant from blame, Debord quickly went on the attack in the fourth issue of *Internationale Situationniste*. The report of the expulsion is preceded by a complaint that his text in the Essen catalog was published with his name on it after it had been cut. Constant took offense. From the beginning, he argued that exhibiting in a gallery was a risk, insisting that the whole point of concentrating on architecture was to avoid being ‘put in a box by consumers of modern art.’ In response, Debord persuaded him that the show was a good idea, just as he had earlier reassured him that holding the situationist congress in Van de Loo’s Munich gallery was an acceptable risk. At the end of November, he encouraged Constant to present the large models that had appeared in *Internationale Situationniste*

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96 Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 25 March 1959. In the end, a passage from Debord’s 1957 Report on the Construction of Situations’ was used.
97 Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 25 September, 1959.
98 ‘I think that Har and Albert are very nice and interesting and they’re evidently intelligent and they can follow this logically I hope. Do your best to this end but don’t forget that it is a question that can in its development necessitate a complete rupture. I expect very quickly the photo and the texts.’ Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 8 October 1959.
101 ‘The architecture still to be made must keep its distance from the preoccupations with spectacular beauty of the old monumental architecture and privileged topological organizations commanding general participation. We will play on topophobia and create a topophilia. The situationist considers his environment and himself as plastic entities.’
because of the exhibition's ability to promote 'our urbanistic perspectives in Germany where they are completely unknown.'

Carlheinz Caspari, the curator, agreed and asked Constant for a short catalog text. It was Debord who suggested that he contribute a text of his own, proposing the unused text for the 1959 Stedelijk Museum exhibition, saying it was more appropriate to the Essen catalog than Constant's proposed collective book on unitary urbanism. Later, Debord agreed to the use of a small extract, explaining how his argument narrowly but successfully avoided falling into the unacceptable genre of art criticism:

On the one hand, this text is on the frontier of art criticism: I have taken a distance with respect to this activity on the first page; on the other hand, it corresponds to a precise manifestation with your models. Outside of these narrowly calculated circumstances, the text in and of itself falls into the category of art criticism; and you know that I absolutely do not want to be part of that game.

Debord's essay begins by carefully dissociating itself from traditional art criticism and Constant's models from traditional art. A number of Constant's essays, from Cobra texts of 1947 to situationist texts of 1958, are cited to present the models as a strategic attack on the institution of art, the artist, the critic, and so on. The opening paragraphs (omitted from the Essen catalog) end by insisting that the models are preliminary moves towards 'an uninterrupted and conscious transformation of the entire material environment' rather than definitive art works to be appreciated as such. The work and its producer must be relieved of the burden of the usual economy. Enthusiasm is the first thing to go:

For our situationist comrades, for Constant and myself, the three-dimensional explorations in question here can in no way be an object of enthusiasm, as they are but scattered elements on the path toward a future construction of ambiances...

...we will obviously not encourage a personality cult by way of the customary confidences, for we seek to go beyond the division of artistic labor.

A closing paragraph goes one step further. Constant's very activity as a model maker exhibits the kind of leisure that must define the new world he is describing:

Constant's work, in its unfinished, scale-model aspect, like all the tendencies of situationist activity in general, perfectly illustrates the falsity of bourgeois artistic freedom. The artist has, at best, the freedom to ply his trade as an artist, that is, to carry out normalized production, matching the needs of a given stratum of the dominant culture's highly differentiated public. A truly vanguard project today poses the problem of new trades, which can hardly be exercised within the frame of bourgeois society, and whose predictable development, given the far greater means it would demand, is not even reconcilable with the capitalist economy. These trades are no longer, strictly speaking, trades. They are involved in the transition to the universe of leisure.

This point had always been fundamental to situationist activism, but the issue had become particularly sensitive by the end of 1959. Constant could never accept the situationists' continued support of Gallizio and Jorn as individual artists. His correspondence with Debord is punctuated with sarcastic gibes at both of them, repeating that the whole point of situationist architecture is to kill off the old system of discrete fine arts. When the Dutch architects were excluded and he offered his own resignation, he reminded Debord of the
suspect support of Gallizio, a criticism sharpened by the fact that Gallizio had just accepted the very exhibition space at the Stedelijk Museum that was vacated when the situationist exhibition was canceled. Debord responded that it was the architects who had placed themselves outside the group with their actions. He concedes that Gallizio, like them, is guilty of 'a certain opportunism' and should be excluded; asking Constant to reconsider the resignation, declaring his continued interest and faith in the work.¹¹³ Constant is unmoved. The exchange continues for three weeks until Debord finally accepts the resignation in a letter of 21st June. They had always agreed that New Babylon exemplified the rejection of formalism but now, as if to explain the break, Debord insists that 'the true development of unitary urbanism will be strongly in relation to a research of global liberation and not pure formal construction, even gigantic.'¹¹⁴ He ends his letter by reaffirming his respect and saying they should stay in touch. Constant tersely replies that further contact might not be possible since the inaccuracy in the published account of the Essen catalog 'poorly hides feelings of animosity.'¹¹⁵ When later visiting Paris, he leaves a message that he is in town. There is no response. An intense and productive collaboration had ended.

The shared desire for architecture to liberate a new politics was, if anything, too intense. What is surprising is not the break, but the level of agreement that lasted for three and a half years. The situationists prided themselves on disagreeing with everything and everyone. They thrived on their scandals. Each issue of *Internationale Situationniste* featured the latest expulsions. More than seventy names were added to the list over the years and virtually no one was left at the end. Constant’s departure would be just another example of the diverging trajectories of strong-minded individuals were it not for the extraordinary investment that the situationists had made in architecture. Constant symbolized that investment. It remains symptomatic that he resigned and was not forced out as is sometimes suggested. Debord didn’t pass on Constant’s letter of resignation to the other members until he had given up trying to keep him in the group. The fifth issue of *Internationale Situationniste* reported the expulsion of the artists, saying that Constant had 'just reason' to be concerned at their conduct but that he had 'deplored' the similar treatment of the Dutch architects, who were acting as 'technicians of architectural form' for the unitary urbanism research and therefore should not be subjected to the same disciplinary standard. Having been told 'outside of any sense of hostility or demerit' that any break would be final, Constant had 'chosen to leave the IS.'¹¹⁶

Once outside the group, Constant was pushed further away. The idea of unitary urbanism was maintained, but redefined from the construction of new forms to the active resistance of suspect ones, particularly 'modern forms of utopian architecture' as Debord put it in 1966.¹¹⁷ *Internationale Situationniste* maintained a strong discourse about architecture and urbanism, much of which remains perceptive and relevant. In 1972, the year of the group’s dissolution, Debord returned to the theme, publishing a short essay praising Jorn’s renovation of a few houses in Northern Italy from the time of the founding congress and reflecting on the irrepressible enormity of the group’s architectural ambitions:

¹¹³ 'I ask you to write me as quickly as possible if knowing the end of the Pinot affair, you will maintain the terms, or not. In the case that you maintain your resignation, it is well understood that it will be a resignation decided by you alone, and in no way an “exclusion”; that I will retain all interest which I have for your research but that it will be a public and definitive choice. (...) Hoping for a positive decision on your part, if you judge this possible.' Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 2 June 1960.

¹¹⁴ Letter from Debord to Constant, dated 21 June 1960.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Constant to Debord, dated 2 August 1960.


¹¹⁷ ‘The idea of unitary urbanism, the experience of the dérive, must be understood today in their struggle with modern forms of utopian architecture, the Venice Biennales, or happenings.’ Guy Debord, ‘Report to the 7th Conference of the IS in Paris (excerpts) in *The Veritable Split in the Internationale*, 3rd rev. (London: Chronos Publications, 1990), p. 121. Cited
The Afterlife

It is known that initially the situationists wanted at the very least to build cities, the environment suitable to the unlimited deployment of new passions. But of course this was not easy and so we found ourselves forced to do much more. And during the entire course of events various partial projects had to be abandoned and a good number of our excellent capacities were not employed, as is the case—but how much more absolutely and sadly—for hundreds of millions of our contemporaries...

Could one not have appeased the situationists around 1960 by means of a few lucidly conceived recuperative reforms, that is, by giving them two or three cities to construct instead of pushing them to the edge and forcing them to unleash into the world the most dangerous subversion there ever was? But others will surely retort that the consequences would have been the same and that by conceding a little to the situationists—who had even then never intended to be satisfied with just a little—one would have only increased their requirements and their demands and would have only arrived even faster at the same result.118

The situationist withdrawal from urban design was not a withdrawal from architectural ambition. On the contrary, political strategies were now understood to be, by definition, architectural. Space was addressed by other means.

The Afterlife

Meanwhile, New Babylon had kept growing after the break, gathering momentum in the architectural community. Caspari, a theater director who became the curator at Essen, went out of his way to attract architects to the gallery and even organized a Saturday-night lecture series on contemporary architecture.119 One of the professors of architecture who attended the exhibition invited Constant to speak at his school in Aachen. The lecture, ‘Was ist Städtebau?’ (What is Urban Planning?) would be the first fully extended account of New Babylon. Delivered three days before Debord had finally accepted Constant’s resignation, it presented situationist thinking in the context of ongoing architectural discourse. A long analysis of city planning principles and Le Corbusier’s role in developing ‘The Functional City’ is given alongside an equally detailed account of unitary urbanism. Both the Situationist and Lettrist Internationals are discussed. Early essays by Debord are cited and concepts like psychogeography and the dérive are elaborated. But Constant ends by returning to architecture, referring to specific projects like Buckminster Fuller’s proposal to cover New York with a vast dome and concluding with a call for ‘technological science fiction.’120 By the time of the Stedelijk Museum lecture six months later, most of Constant’s references to the situationists had evaporated. Organized by the Liga Nieuw Beelden, prominent architects like Van Eyck and Bakema attended. Students from the school of architecture at Delft University devoted much of their new magazine Delftse School to paraphrasing its arguments.121 The director of the school, Bakema’s partner Van den Broek, invited Constant to speak two months later. The lecture refers to unitary urbanism but not the situationists. Two months later, another lecture in Bochum reduced the references to a single comment on unitary urbanism in the very last line.

The situationist lineage of the project had given way to its architectural lineage. Con-

in McDonough, ‘Rereading Debord, Rereading the Situationists,’ p. 13.


119 ‘I myself want, as I said, to try to get architects and urbanists from the area for our lecture and your exhibition.’ Letter from Carlheinz Caspari to Constant, dated 17 November 1959. ‘I have already got a number of architects interested.’ Letter from Caspari to Constant, dated 9 December 1959.

120 Constant, ‘Was ist Städtebau?’ manuscript of lecture given at Institut für Städtebau und Landesplanung de Rheinische Westfälische Technische Hochschule, Aachen, 18 July 1960.

stant's old ties to the architectural world were reinforced. His lecture at the architecture school in Delft, for example, was published in an issue of the Delftse School and was responded to in the following issue by Bakema, Van den Broek, and Van Eesteren. At the time, Bakema and Van den Broek were developing classic Team 10 'streets-in-the-air' experiments like their 1962 project for Tel Aviv in which a linear megastructure walks all the way from the ocean to the center of the historical city on huge legs. The dialogue between such 'practical' schemes and the much more extreme but related project of Constant continued for many years. Occasionally they would be published alongside each other. As a frequent guest of the Delft school, Constant influenced a whole generation of students.

Another important alliance with the architectural community was made in 1961 when a colleague of the Paris-based architect Yona Friedman sent him a copy of Constant's Aachen lecture. Friedman had attended the ninth CIAM congress in Aix-en-Provence that gave birth to Team 10, but had taken a different trajectory away from orthodox modernism with the concept of 'mobile architecture.' Vast gridded space-frames would accommodate endless variations of life-style dictated by the users; functions would be continuously displaced throughout. Friedman had formed the 'Groupe de l'Architecture Mobile' (GEAM) in November 1957 to coordinate an international group of architects devoted to developing new forms of cities and in 1961 published his first book on the subject. A three-dimensional grid floats on pilotis above the landscape, whether it be open terrain or an existing city. In April of 1961, Friedman wrote to Constant that he was thrilled to find many points in common between our views and sent some of his own articles, suggesting that they meet in Paris. Constant became part of the GEAM circle and in 1962 took part in a major exhibition of 'L'Architecture Mobile' in Amsterdam, where New Babylon appeared alongside experimental projects by designers like Friedman, Paul Maymond, Frei Otto, and Eckhard Schulze-Fielitz. On the occasion of the exhibition, the Liga Nieuw Beelden organized a conference of GEAM at which Constant joined Friedman, W. Ruhnau, N. J. Habraken, Hartsluyker, and J. Trapman to address the theme, 'On Some Aspects of Human Settlements.' Later in the same year, he organized a follow-up meeting of a similar group on 'The Milieu of Life in the Technological Era.'

While aspects of Friedman and Constant's projects appear formally similar, they saw fundamental ideological differences between their work. In response to Friedman's first letter, Constant wrote that he completely agreed with the social critique of contemporary urbanism and the impending culture of automation, but did not think that the Mobile City project carried out the critique; it remained a 'functional city' emphasizing private dwellings and avoiding the newly emerging condition of mass culture: 'It is not sufficient to transform the city in a technical or practical sense but above all in a social and cultural sense. The future city should not be accentuating dwelling (which is nothing but the opposition between inside and outside) nor displacement (search for needs), but a new use for social space (ecology).' Friedman responded that Constant's project was too much the vision of one artist: 'Today, everyone knows how to design, dwell, photograph, or work; why force

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123 Constant, dated 31 March 1965 lecture at Delft University was published in Kunst als wapen in de klassenstrijd (1970).

124 The signatures on the GEAM's April 1962 program for a 'Mobile Architecture' were: David Georges Emmerich, Camille Friedman, Yona Friedman, Günther Gün schel, Jean-Pierre Pecquet, and Werner Ruhnau.

125 Letter from Yona Friedman to Constant, dated 10 April 1961.

126 'Your project doesn't completely deal with this social critique. You continuously accentuate private dwelling: You are evading a solution of collective life and a culture based on the game (...), a type of city completely different from today's functional city. It is not sufficient to transform the city in a technical or practical sense but above all in a social and cultural sense. The future city should not be accentuating dwelling (which is nothing but the opposition between inside and outside) nor on displacement (search for needs), but on a new use for social space (ecology).' Letter from Constant to Yona Friedman, dated 21 April 1961.

127 'I think there is no one who could influence the development of the city in a cultural or social sense. There is only one possibility: that of permitting all people (and I mean all) ways of adapting their city to their "games." The future city must accentuate both dwelling and social space. One cannot exist without the other; and it would be a mistake to
people to follow the preference of one individual, a self-proclaimed expert. I don’t like "follow the leader".127 He felt that providing mobility for those who wished to take advantage of it was better than imposing endless mobility on all. The disagreement was repeated in public at the GEAM conference where Constant opened the plenary discussion by accusing Friedman of designing for contemporary society and therefore reinforcing its inequities rather than looking for freer forms of collective social life. After a long exchange, Friedman concluded that ‘people could choose the direction of Constant and live together more collectively but you cannot make this a prescription.’128 Constant would restate his criticism of Friedman in many contexts in the following years but they remained allies in an international network of colleagues who promoted one another’s work.

It was through that network that New Babylon would be published in almost all the major international architectural journals during the next three years. When organizing the follow-up GEAM meeting, for example, Constant included some of his old associates like Anthony Hill and Caspari; the latter of whom had become an important promoter of New Babylon and promptly invited Friedman to lecture in Essen. Friedman’s associates did the same in return. Shortly afterwards, Lucius Burkhardt, the editor of Werk in Basel wrote that he had been talking with Friedman about compiling an issue on ‘Mobile Architecture’ and wanted to include New Babylon.129 The issue came out in February 1963.130 At the same time, André Bloc, who ten years earlier had found Schöffer and Parent’s Spatio-dynamic City too extreme to publish, produced his influential special issue of L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui on ‘Architectures fantastiques’ – the large collection of experimental projects from around the world that aroused the situationists’ disdain. The centerpiece was the Space City of Schultze-Fielitz featured on the cover. Like New Babylon, it was presented as a ‘realizable science fiction urbanism’ in which a structural system accommodates infinite rearrangement. A vast labyrinthine public space establishes a new artificial landscape for unpredictable patterns of living. It passes across the existing terrain and then above the old cities, hastening their collapse into disuse. Schulze-Fielitz was based in Essen and, being a close friend of Caspari, had almost certainly visited the first exhibition of New Babylon in 1960. Unsurprisingly, the long section that Bloc devoted to his project is symptomatically preceded by the juxtaposition of New Babylon and Friedman’s Mobile City on facing pages.131 Variations of similar ideas circulated freely among the designers. None of them could be considered in isolation and all were indebted to the pioneering work of Buckminster Fuller and Konrad Waschmann.

At the beginning of the year, Anthony Hill had suggested that Friedman and Constant lecture together at the ICA in London, but the arrangement fell through and Friedman went alone. Hill and Victor Pasmore organized another invitation to the ICA for Constant but the lecture did not take place until November of 1963. When Kenneth Frampton published an edited version of the talk in Architectural Design in 1964, it became very influential.132 Having last appeared in the journal as a sculptor in 1958, alongside work by Gilbert, Schöffer, and Antoine Pevsner, he returned as an architect.133 Peter Cook, who had also gone to

think that specialists, artists, etc., could be of a direct influence on the one or the other. (…) Therefore, I make the distinction between tendencies which could be influenced and those which cannot be by the planner. I believe that your mistake is to try to force people into a "collective creativity"; where I believe that mobility permits them this creativity, in whichever way they like. (…) In your project, it is the interchangeability which I miss. The definitive state is an idea of the artist, but (in my opinion) "artistry" is currently passé. Today, everyone knows how to design, dwell, photograph, or work; why force people to follow the preference of one individual, a self-proclaimed expert. I don’t like "follow the leader". (…) I would be happy to meet you, as I believe a discussion between us would be fruitful." Letter from Yona Friedman to Constant, dated 24 April 1961.


129 Letter from Lucius Burkhardt to Constant, dated 25 August 1962.


1 Yona Friedman and Constant at the GEAM congress in Amsterdam, 1962 (photo: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague)

2 Yona Friedman / Mobile City over Amsterdam Brochure for GEAM exhibition and congress, Amsterdam, 1962 (photo: Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague)

3 Cover of special issue of L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, June-July 1962

4 Eckhard Schultze-Fielitz / Space City, 1961

5 Yona Friedman’s Mobile City and Constant’s New Babylon in L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, June-July 1962
1. Ruimtevaart (Space Travel), 1957 / oil on panel / 32 x 42 cm / private collection (photo: Tom Haartsen)
2. Cosmisch landschap (Cosmic Landscape), 1957 / oil on panel / 19 x 43 cm / private collection (photo: Tom Haartsen)
3. Ruimtelandschap (Spatial Landscape), 1957 / oil on panel / 27 x 30 cm / private collection (photo: Tom Haartsen)
4. Structuren in de ruimte (Structures in Space), 1958 / oil on panel / 19 x 40 cm / private collection (photo: Tom Haartsen)
5. Landkaart (Map), ca. 1958 / dry point etching / 49 x 60 cm / private collection (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
6. Ets met drie gaten (Etching with Three Holes), ca. 1958 / dry point etching / 49 x 60 cm / private collection (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
7. Divergerende stralen (Divergent Beams), ca. 1958 / dry point etching / 25 x 29.7 cm / private collection (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
8. Ronde ets (Round Etching), ca. 1958 / dry point etching / 29.7 x 25 cm / private collection (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
9. Ronde ets met drie gaten (Round Etching with Three Holes), ca. 1958 / dry point etching / 29.7 x 25 cm / private collection (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)

2. Schets voor Nébulose Mécanique (Sketch for Nébulose Mécanique), 1958 / pencil on paper 25 x 18 cm / private collection (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)

3. Abfahrt im Raum (Departure to Space), 1958 / metal, plexiglass / h. 81 cm / collection Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld

4. Constructie met halve cirkels (Construction with half circles), 1958 / aluminum, plexiglass 56 x 22 x 39 cm / collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo / on loan from Collectie Nederland (photo: Bram Wisman)

5. Het Zonneschip (Sunvessel), 1956 / metal, plexiglass, wood / 90 x 170 cm / private collection / long term loan to Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague (photo: Rob Kollaard)

6. Draadconstructie (Wire Construction), 1958 / iron wire / 93 x 96 x 84 cm / collection Museum Bochum (photo: Jan Versnel)

7. Lijn zonder einde (Endless Line), 1958 / metal, plexiglass / h. 150 cm / private collection (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)

8. Eivormige constructie (Egg-shaped Construction), 1957 / steel and plexiglass 90 x 60 x 60 cm / private collection (photo: Jan Versnel)

9. Ruimtecircus (Space Circus), 1956-1961 / iron wire, copper, cable sockets, blind rivets 105 x 90 x 100 cm / collection Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague
1 Three Nébuloses mécaniques / Photomontage Victor E. Nieuwenhuys, n.d.

2 Draaibare Constructie (Pivotting Construction), 1956 / iron, plexiglass, brass / 396 x 95 x 86 cm made for the municipal housing company in Amsterdam / destroyed

3 Construction dans un volume (Construction in a box), 1957 / metal, paint / h. 142 cm / private collection / photocourtesy Galerie Daniel Gervis, Paris (photo: Jean Dubout)
the lecture with his fellow Archigram member Michael Webb, wrote asking for material for the fifth issue of Archigram, dedicated to the question of 'Metropolis,' which came out at the end of 1964.\textsuperscript{134} In the same year, Frei Otto made the opening speech at the opening of an exhibition of New Babylon in Berlin, the Liga Nieuw Beelden organized a slide presentation of New Babylon on the occasion of a visit by Schöffler to Amsterdam, and Friedman organized an exhibition with the critic Michel Ragon on future urbanism at the Musée d'art deco and asked Constant to contribute.\textsuperscript{135} In 1965, Ragon, who had written extensively on Friedman and his circle, was preparing a special issue of the Mexican journal Arquitectura and asked the editor to write to Constant for material on New Babylon. It was eventually published alongside Friedman's projects.\textsuperscript{136} In the same year, Burckhardt organized an exhibition and catalog in Bern on 'New Tendencies in Architecture' that grouped the by then familiar cast of characters with seminal figures like Fuller, Wachsmann, and Noriaki Kurokawa of the metabolist group.\textsuperscript{137} This set of associations would be repeated in a number of essays, special issues, catalogs, and books.\textsuperscript{138} Constant had become a fixture in the architectural world and made a distinct impact on experimental tendencies.

During and after his membership in the Situationist International, Constant had continued to work on practical commissions. At the end of 1957, Bakema and Rietveld chose one of his small constructions to be installed in the 1958 expo in Brussels. In mid-1959, A. Bodon, a member of the Liga and a partner of Merkelbach and Karsten, invited Constant to work with his firm of engineers and architects on the design of an advertising tower. Constant produced several versions in detailed models that developed his five Vertical City towers of the previous year, but the project fell through in mid-1960. The towers, reminiscent of constructivist agit-prop designs, nevertheless survived as an integral part of the representation of New Babylon, appearing in exhibitions, catalogs, and films. In 1963, Constant constructed a 14-meter-high reinforced concrete structure as the entrance to the Ookmeer sports ground using a geometry taken from one of the New Babylon Dioramas. It was accurately described in a newspaper report as 'Sculpto-Urbanisme.'\textsuperscript{139} In the same year, Constant formed the 'Bureau Havocon' with Shamai Haber and Andre Volten, two artists who also aspired to be architects. They were commissioned by Phillips to design a park around the 'Evoluon' building in Eindhoven of 1966, whose spaceship form was explicitly based on Constant's Spatiovores ('space-eaters') from New Babylon. They sculpted the ground itself into a series of overlapping layers that occasionally rise up as discrete objects defining space. Though neither of their two schemes was accepted, an exhibition of the drawings and models was held.\textsuperscript{140} Constant's design for a fountain in Leiden was built with a large field of columns of different heights producing a three dimensional space out of water. He was also commissioned by Dutch Telecom to produce a labyrinthine field of colored translucent elements in front of a building by Bakema. Like another design for a whole ensemble of elements on the grounds of a modernist hospital in Zwolle, it did not go ahead, but in 1966 Constant collaborated with a small group of followers on building an 'Experiment Studio Rotterdam' (ESR) inside the Bouwcentrum building. The double-
height volume employed a number of devices for spatial play from New Babylon. Spaces were devoted to sound, smell, labyrinths, mirrors, bending over, crawling, and so on. Constant's open-framed models for the scheme are reminiscent of some of the New Babylon studies. It was the closest he came to building something like New Babylon — if New Babylon is considered a traditional architectural project. But, of course, it is not. Constant's involvement in architectural commissions is very important, but should be understood as another form of experimentation and publication. If anything, his commitment to physical constructions only served to intensify the sense of a conceptual polemic.

The Birth of a Hyper-Architecture

Constant's radical adoption of the architect's persona was much more decisive than his work on practical designs or appearance in architectural journals and exhibitions. Indeed, he took on and exaggerated so many traits of the architect's typical behavior that he became a hyper-architect — more like an architect than any architect.

The most obvious symptom is the models that form the centerpiece of the project. They are unmistakably architectural, yet have the quality of refined artworks, employing materials and finishes rarely seen in architectural models of the time. The construction of the model itself was as radical as the space it proposed. In 1956, after carefully constructing and exhibiting a 1.8-meter-tall model in colored metal and wood for his Monument voor de wederopbouw, Constant was criticized by a city architect for making his models too beautiful. Constant disagreed, noting that influential designers like Rietveld and Theo van Doesburg had made very elegant models and kept them. He understood that the polemical value of a model far outstrips its practical value in the construction of a particular project. The exhibition and publication of models had acted as the basis of architectural discourse since the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the architect's primary role is that of speculator rather than builder; architects produce images of spaces that may or may not be built. Constant's lack of technical training in architecture was no obstacle to adopting this role. If anything, it allowed him more freedom to innovate with unique images.

The years between 1953 and 1956 were crucial, enabling Constant gradually to come to terms with the disciplinary limits of architecture and to displace artistic techniques into the architectural realm. He imported the plexiglass and metal structure, for example, from constructivist artists like Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner. His first gesture was not to simply reach into the art world, but to reach into architecture and move backwards and forwards across the limit. The early structural frames with suspended color planes typical of the years with Gilbert and Schöffer — exemplified by the Monument voor de wederopbouw — have an immediately recognizable architectural quality. The relatively simple metal frame supports itself and the plexiglass panels up exactly as it would have to do as a building. It is only with the formation of the situationist collective that Constant rethinks the status of the ground and heads off into space.

139 Constant, 'Sculptuur voor de toegangsweg van de sportvelden in Oo­kmeyer, Amsterdam,' Dagblad Cobouw, no. 19 (December 1964), p. 13. Published in architectural journals like Bouwkundig Weekblad, which featured it on the cover and interviewed Constant; 'Interview met Constant Nieuwenhuys,' Bouwkundig Weekblad (27 August 1965), pp. 315-316.


The Ambience de jeu model of 1956 hangs the ground up on a wall and disperses objects freely across it. The playground moves into space. But space also becomes a playground. Constant prepares four small painted panels between 1956 and 1957 in which outer space is lightly marked with the delicate web that will soon dominate in New Babylon. Ruimtevaart (Space Travel), Cosmisch landschap (Cosmic Landscape), Ruimtelandschap (Spatial Landscape), and Structuren in de ruimte (Structures in Space) announce a crucial turn in the work, which was echoed in a small series of unpublished etchings. The models are quick to follow. Between 1957 and 1958, the metal frame becomes extremely intricate, passing through the plexiglass, which in turn weaves itself in every direction. Neither dominates. In the series of Nébuleuse Mécanique, the plexiglass is no longer suspended in a heavy frame; everything has become light—suspended in space. The twisted forms hang from the ceiling, or are held up on a single light rod, or touch the ground at only a few points. And those points are not stable. The objects seem ready to move and, in photocollages, they lift off the ground or race down the highway at high speed. Architecture has taken off.

Immediately after Constant returned to Amsterdam from Alba, his floating forms return to planet earth—not to solid ground, but to the zone just above the ground, which he endows with the fluid qualities he explored in outer space. In the Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp (Design for A Gypsy Camp) model, the distinctive spirals of metal of the Nébuleuse Mécanique are lodged sideways in the earth like a crashed spaceship. But the plexiglass panels are still in the air, defining a space within which moveable partitions are envisioned to accommodate the nomadic community that would use the structure as a base. The architecture is meant to float in an indeterminate space, open to the unpredictable desires of its occupants. New Babylon appears as such for the first time. The plexiglass shapes that used to fly through space now hover just above the ground and wait for desire.

The plexiglass clearly embodied some fundamental qualities of the project, but the use of what was then a rare and expensive material also signaled the transformation of the architectural model into a polemical object designed for exhibition and discussion. Plexiglass produces the effect of an abstract volume glowing with indeterminate life. The traditional logic of a clearly defined set of walls enclosing an empty space that may be occupied gives way to the sense of dense activity defining an amorphous volume. The project is nothing but interior, yet it is not an interior that can simply be looked into; it is an interior that can only be experienced from within. Even then, it is so labyrinthine that it does not seem to have a definable exterior, and an interior with no exterior is no longer simply an interior. It is a whole new world unto itself. To look at the model is to look at a substitute world. The modern architect’s obsession with a radical transparency that exposes all the details of structure and lifestyle turns into an amorphous sense of interactions between life-styles too complex and transitory to be simply exposed. Clear shapes behind glass give way to a mysterious flickering glow. Transparency is put at the service of mystery. The model is designed to be looked into, yet nothing is revealed other than the polemical indeterminacy of the floors. The eye cannot even rest in this openness; the floors
are transparent. In a sense, the model can only be looked through. It is a kind of mirage.

The design and exhibition of the models were inseparable. There were no sketches. Each was conceived as it was constructed. The model is a form of exploration, a means of designing as distinct from a representation of a design. What is exhibited is the process. Constant worked for up to ten years on some of the structures. Like any architect, he used various assistants (after having made the first three models alone). Their differing technical skills — in the welding or riveting of the metalwork for example — would change the detailing. The basic form would also evolve. Elements would move. Some models got bigger. Others shrank. This endless process of refinement also included destruction. The large metal model with the helicopters that was featured in many of the early exhibitions and publications, for example, was rejected for looking too technical; technology was not meant to be confused with the new way of life it would liberate. The model was cut into three pieces and thrown out the window of Constant’s studio. It floated for a while in the canal before disappearing. In 1969, a big piece of the last model was suddenly cut off. Some of the models that were accidentally damaged in transport, like the original Ambiance d’une ville future (later renamed the Orange Construction), were rebuilt at a slightly different scale. Others were lost. The Ruimtecircus (Space Circus) construction and one of the Spativores were reproduced at a much larger scale. All the models carry traces of changes, archaeological layers, holes where pieces were once attached, outlines of missing elements, remains of earlier coats of paint, and so on. They display the kind of evolution that New Babylon itself was meant to undergo. The life of each model simulates the transitory world that is being proposed. Like a New Babylonian, Constant explores the spaces he has modeled and then rearranges them.

With each exhibition, the collection changed. The core set of models was established by 1960 when the first series of exhibitions started but more were added over the years and some were removed. No two exhibitions were the same. The experience of the exhibition itself was meant to simulate the experience of New Babylon. In the first exhibitions, the gallery was darkened and spotlights focused on the models, producing the sense that they floated in space. Some were hung from the walls or off the ceiling to accentuate this other worldly or spaceship effect that had been prefigured in Constant’s very first description of the project at the end of 1959: ‘The space voyages that are being announced could influence this development, since the bases that will be established on other planets will immediately pose the problem of sheltered cities, and will perhaps provide the pattern for our study of a future urbanism.’

The visitor to the exhibition, who would likewise have the sense of floating in space, was soon negotiating a labyrinth. In 1965, the architect Nic Tummers (a member of the Liga who would be one of the collaborators on the Experiment Studio Rotterdam a year later) laid out one of the New Babylon exhibitions with a twisting path moving through the objects. In the same year, Constant built a full-sized concrete labyrinth with Tummers as the entrance to his exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum and the poster/brochure for the show acted as a kind of tourist guide to the labyrinthine path that extended out from the construction and through all the New Babylon material. Constant built


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1 Experiment Studio Rotterdam, 1966
2 Axonometrische tekening voor het ESR (Axonometric drawing for the ESR), 1966
  ink and pastel / 75 x 60 cm / collection Universiteit van de Socio-Ruimte (photo: Gustaaf Begas)
3 Constant working with Jan Jacobs on model video still from ‘Constant oder der Weg nach New Babylon’ directed by Carlheinz Caspari, broadcast on German NDR television, 1968
4 Installation view Constant – Amsterdam, Städtische Kunstgalerie, Bochum, 1961
5 Installation view Constant, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, 1965
another labyrinth with as many swinging doors as fixed partitions as part of the 1974 exhibition at the Haags Gemeentemuseum. The simulation of New Babylon was repeatedly extended to the space of the gallery itself.

The models were never exhibited as independent objects. They were carefully constructed to reinforce the sense of the transitory. Their physical condition as fixed objects was always a threat. Constant incorporated photographs of the models into the exhibitions. Images taken for lectures or the catalog became part of the display. Each model became less a singular three-dimensional image of the future than a stage set for multiple fantasies.

The precise way that the models were photographed became just as important as the way they were constructed. Each was shot in numerous ways. Different lenses, angles, lighting, backgrounds, and landscapes would produce different effects. Other models would be juxtaposed and sometimes drawings of the same spaces, or projections of slides of the models, would be placed in the background to add depth. Ethereal clouds, menacing dark skies, or colored glows would provide an atmosphere for the forms. Sometimes the plexiglass was lit in a way that made it seem as if the light was radiating from the building rather than shining onto it - a technique that has become widespread among architects today.

Various photographers were responsible for the classic photographs. Many of the early photographs were the work of Jan Versnel, an art photographer who would take very precise studio shots, isolating the models against black backgrounds to reveal the details of the forms. Har Oudejans made more impressionistic images, like the ones shown at the Munich Congress of the situationists and those published in their magazine. To make models seem already built, he placed them against the sky, or did close up photographs of bird droppings to produce the sense of an otherworldly landscape beneath them. Many images were made by Bram Wisman, including ones using special processing techniques that produced the effect of a holograph or transformed everything into sharply defined planes of color.

Being more of a press photographer, he would quickly take multiple shots and produced hundreds of images over the years, eventually making an exhibition in 1965 of his own interpretation of New Babylon. Constant's text for the catalog describes how the photographer went from documenting New Babylon to producing it as an artist in his own right. The gap between production and representation had disappeared and Wisman became another of the collaborators on the Experiment Studio Rotterdam in 1966. In the end, Constant's favorite photographer was his son Victor, who added a whole new range of techniques. In the early seventies, for example, he collaged some of the models into contemporary landscapes of wasteland and highway intersections to make the project appear already constructed.

Constant then applied colored paint to the large black and white blowups for exhibition, drawing a few figures in the foreground, adding extra details to the structure and some other sectors stretching to the horizon in the background. The sense of realism was blurred between photography and painting. Images of the different sectors were also rescaled and printed end on end to make it seem as if all the sectors formed a single vast structure that was then montaged onto a terrain. Negatives of the same model taken from different

Aus Anlass der Ausstellung

NEW-BABYLON
Vorstellungen zukünftiger Lebensformen
sprachen, Freitag, den 20. November 1964, 20 Uhr

CONSTANT - AMSTERDAM
an Hand farbiger Lichtbilder zu den Einzelplänen seiner
IMAGINAREN STADTLANDSCHAFTEN

C. CASPARI - KÖLN
über

DAS LABYR IN NEW-BABYLON
IM MUSEUM HAUS LANGE, KREFELD
WILHELMSHOFALLEE 91

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angles were overlapped to produce an even more dense and complex effect. And so on.

These images were not regarded as secondary forms of representation; if the reality of the project could be found anywhere, it was in the multiplicity of photos rather than in the 'original' models. This effect was even more pronounced in film. The 1959 Stedelijk Museum exhibition had already featured some films of Constant's early constructions by the American filmmaker Hy Hirsh, who had been living in Amsterdam. He gave the structures little movements or had other objects passing in front or behind them. In 1962, Simon Vinkenoog, the writer and self-appointed president of the 'mood engineering society,' made a program with Constant for Dutch television. Constant started talking about a definitive film at the end of 1964, and in 1968 Caspari made a long film about New Babylon for German television. In the final section, the camera moves around and into the models while a version of the soundtrack from Constant's lectures is playing. Constant had earlier been seen walking through the streets of Amsterdam and then making polemical statements about New Babylon. Shorter programs were broadcast in 1965, 1966, 1971, and 1974. The effect was similar to that which Constant attempted to produce in his lectures. Indeed, one of the lectures asked the audience to consider the slides as stills from a movie he intended to make. The theoretical polemic, images, and the soundtrack envelop the models so densely that the physical objects become just another ingredient in a polemical atmosphere.

The production of so much theory was another crucial part of Constant's adoption of the architect's persona. Architects are theorists. Being fundamentally speculative, architecture is inseparable from theoretical discourse. It is even theoretical when built. Architectural projects never appear without a polemic. Polemic transforms a building into 'architecture,' not a set of formal characteristics. It is anyway the theory that highlights the characteristics. Architects necessarily leave a trail of manifestos, journals, articles, and books.

Constant understood this, having watched Team 10 organize themselves in response to the cia m organization. The role of cia m was to produce, authorize, elaborate, and enforce a standard theoretical position, a doctrine that served as a focus for the Team 10 attacks picked up by Constant. He had always been a theorist, producing influential manifestos for Reflex and COBRA in 1948 and 1949, but he went into overdrive when he became an architect. Every catalog or magazine became an opportunity to elaborate his position. While certain key ideas were obviously repeated, the texts were always different. Each was site specific. Constant wrote directly in French, English, Dutch, and German as required. Only when publishing a text in a language he did not know would a previous statement be reused in translation.

The structural role of the theory was formalized in 1965 when Constant (on the suggestion of Tummers) started to produce De Nieuw Babylon Informatief, a series of small newspapers that were distributed at key exhibitions. Number 1 came out during the Maastricht exhibition in July 1965, number 2 at the Haags Gemeentemuseum exhibition of October

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144 One of Hy Hirsh's films of Constant's work was shown and discussed at the Liga in March 1968. Hirsh also did some of the early still photographs of the models.


New Babylon kan, om deze reden, alleen gemaakt worden door de newbabylonische kultur. Op dit ogenblik kan New Babylon niets meer zijn dan een model, een model om over te denken en om mee te spelen. Alles wat we weten is dat de mens potentieel een creatief wezen is en dat de ontwikkeling van de technologie hem in staat stelt zijn kreativiteit te bevrijden, en zijn leven op een hoger niveau te brengen. De rest is spekulantief en stelt op de ervaringen van de kunstenaar aan een materiële wereld die kan worden gebouwd, die, in tegenstelling tot de functionele werelden en op het kreatieve gebruik van de technologie.

De aanvan van een ludieke maatschappij steunt op een behoefte om zichzelf als schappende mens te zien als sublimatie van primitieve driftvormen in een later "nuttige" taak in de maatschappelijke ontwikkeling het nut dat nog dikwijls in het kind is erop gericht de kreatieve drift te verdringen maken voor een later "nuttige" taak in de maatschappelijke ontwikkeling het nut dat nog dikwijls in het kind is erop gericht de kreatieve drift te verdringen. Het begrip "opvoeding" kan onder deze omstandigheden hebben: onderdrukking van de individuele belangen, zo typisch voor de newbabylonische maatschappij dus, terwijl de materiële voorwaarden daarmee verbonden zijn, dat de verklaring voor de ontkoppeling van agressiviteit en strijd in de hedendaagse maatschappij ook de bezitterlijke klasse niet in staat is om de te manifesteren. Begrijpelijkerwijze is de frustratie bij de bezitters in de huidige maatschappij ook de bezitterlijke klasse niet in staat om de te manifesteren. Begrijpelijkerwijze is de frustratie bij de bezitters in de huidige maatschappij ook de bezitterlijke klasse niet in staat om de te manifesteren. Begrijpelijkerwijze is de frustratie bij de bezitters in de huidige maatschappij ook de bezitterlijke klasse niet in staat om de te manifesteren. Begrijpelijkerwijze is de frustratie bij de bezitters in de huidige maatschappij alsook in de hedendaagse maatschappij ook de bezitterlijke klasse niet in staat om de te manifesteren. Begrijpelijkerwijze is de frustratie bij de bezitters in de huidige maatschappij alsook in de hedendaagse maatschappij ook de bezitterlijke klasse.
1965, number 3 at the Cologne exhibition of January 1966, and number 4 for La xxxiii Bien­
nale di Venezia of June 1966. This last issue featured fragments from many of Constant’s texts alongside diverse images of the project. A New Babylon Bulletin letterhead was also prepared, with Constant listed as the editor, on which he presented a long essay on ‘Traffic in Towns’ in January 1967. This and other essays were compiled in 1969 for the book Opstand van de Homo Ludens (Revolt of Homo Ludens). But Constant’s major project was a large manuscript in German for a definitive study entitled gradiation of technology into this everyday bylon alongside a number of other essays in the catalog of the 1974 Gemeentemuseum Towns’ in January 1967. This and other essays were compiled in 1969 for the book pared, with Constant listed as the editor, on which he presented a long essay on ‘Traffic in the project. A

nale di Venezia

The key moment in each lecture was the transition from the theory to the slides. The

149 ‘These words are being communi-
cated by way of a tape recorder, not, of course, in order to illustrate the inte-
gration of technology into this everyday life on the margin of the technologi
cal world, but in order to seize the simplest opportunity to break with the appearance of pseudocollaboration, of artificial dial-
gue, established between the lecturer “in person” and his spectator. This slight discomforting break with accustomed routine could serve to bring directly into the field of questioning of everyday life (a questioning otherwise completely ab-
stract) the conference itself, as well as any number of other forms of using time or objects, forms that are considered ‘nor-
mal’ and not even noticed, and which ultimately condition us. With such a detail, as with everyday life as a whole, alteration is always the necessary and sufficient condition for experimentally bringing into clear view the object of our study, which would otherwise remain uncertain—an object which is itself less to be studied than to be altered.’ Guy Debord ‘Perspectives de modifications conscientes dans la vie quotidienne,’ Transcript of tape recording presented on 17 May 1961 to a conference of the Group for Research on Everyday Life convened by Henri Lefèbvre. The text was published in Internationale Situationistes, no. 6 (August 1961). Translated by Ken Knabb as ‘Perspectives for Con-
scious Alterations in Everyday Life,’ in

Theory collages for Hans Locher, 1974

150 Letter from Constant to Carlheinz Caspari, dated 29 December 1969.
fact that the project could be seen only after passing through a substantial theoretical argument is symptomatic. The polemic created a specific atmosphere for the reception of the forms, a mood that was enhanced with the accompanying soundtrack. If New Babylon was a space defined by atmosphere, its design started with the atmosphere of the lecture itself. A theoretical climate was established in which the images were carefully given an ambivalent status. They had to be intensely evocative of a sensuous environment and yet the specifics of that environment were not to be taken literally. The October 1964 lecture at the Galerie Diogenes in Berlin, for example, ended with: ‘And now I want to propose through a series of slides and a soundtape to show you a fixed moment in New Babylonian social space.’\footnote{152 Constant, manuscript of lecture at ICA London, 7 November 1963.} The images captured a fleeting and illusory sense of organization. They were, as the lecture in Konstanz insisted, ‘tentative’ in the sense of being just ‘space-time moments’ in the continual rearrangement of New Babylon, fixed points in a spatial system whose only feature is restless movement.\footnote{153 Constant, manuscript of lecture at Schloss Mainau, Konstanz, 7 November 1964.} Furthermore, even such fixed points are unknowable. The polemic of the 1963 lecture at the ICA in London concluded by insisting that the images that would follow were just props for the imagination of a future world that by definition could not yet be visualized. But the audience was still encouraged to literally enter the atmosphere of the images as if entering a ‘new and unknown city’:

\begin{quote}
After this basic information, I will show you a number of slides that show details of the models I made to illustrate my conception. I hope they will help you to get an idea in which way an unfunctional city for not-working people may differ from the kind of cities that are built until now for working people. With these slides I only want to give you a suggestion like the painter or the poet used to suggest a world different from the utilitarian world he tried to escape from. I certainly don’t want to predict how the world of the future will look like in any detail, for that would be impossible. I just will try to give you — and myself — an idea how the world might look like when labor will be abolished. So I beg you to look on these slides as if you were visiting a new and unknown city and to undergo its specific atmosphere. A sound-tape that I will let you hear in the same time, is meant to suggest the presence of life, and the rest now is left to your own imagination.\footnote{154 Constant, ‘Imaginaire Stadlandschaften,’ manuscript of lecture at Haus Lange, Krefeld, 20 November 1964.}
\end{quote}

The same argument was repeated at the end of the 1964 lecture to the architecture students at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen, with the addition of the phrase: ‘I want to challenge the imagination of those who will have to prepare the construction of the future world.’\footnote{155 Constant, manuscript of lecture to the Students Association at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen, 12 March 1964.} The multiple fantasies of the audience were put ahead of those of the artist. The lecture in Krefeld later the same year went even further, putting the audience in the creative position of New Babylonians:

\begin{quote}
Soundtape will fill the still empty ambience and animate them. What is important in these slides is to show how beautifully a relatively small number of spaces realized with simple standardized elements give the possibility to form an almost unlimited number of ambience. You will see the same models, the same spaces, in another order. You will walk through these models and change them yourself.\footnote{156 Constant, ‘Imaginaire Stadlandschaften,’ manuscript of lecture at Haus Lange, Krefeld, 20 November 1964.}
\end{quote}

With the addition of new models and images, the collection of slides and the matching soundtrack were incrementally adjusted. But the text of the lecture often changed radically. Constant presented the same ideas in different ways to different audiences, progres-
sively developing the thinking and feeding the latest formulations into his book manuscript. The initial critique of the 'Functional City' in the first lecture to the architecture students at Aachen, for example, evolved into an extremely detailed chapter analyzing the suspect role of town planning. At the same time, Constant produced a number of essays on the status of artistic experimentation that do not refer to New Babylon directly but act as explanations of its strategic mission. Some were published in catalogs. 'De dialectiek van het experiment' (The Dialectic of the Experiment), for example, appeared in the catalog of the 1965 exhibition at the Haags Gemeentemuseum. That the theory did not directly refer to the project continued the sense of theory as atmosphere — not simply conceptual atmosphere for physical design, as the design was meant to be all atmosphere; atmosphere for atmosphere itself. The polemic had to direct attention to that which by definition could not be addressed directly.

Constant continued the oblique theoretical speculation on the radio (as during the Bochum and Krefeld openings and a 1968 radio talk on 'Spatial Ordering or Spatial chaos') and in countless interviews for newspapers and journals. He even interviewed himself. In response to his own question as to why try to provide illustrations of an unknowable future, he said that the project's primary role is that of a 'provocation' and an attempt to develop the urbanistic principles that will be necessary in the future world. His hyper-architectural behavior promotes a series of strategies, a theoretical posture, a mentality rather than a set of forms. The goal is more conceptual than aesthetic.

Multi-Media Assault

The absence of graphic work in the early publications and exhibitions is symptomatic of more than just Constant's polemical reaction against painting. The first image of New Babylon to appear was the Jan Versnel photograph of the Ambiance d'une ville future model that was published between May and August of 1959 in the Stedelijk Museum catalog, Potlatch, and Forum. It was not until December of that year that some drawings appeared as illustrations of an essay in Internationale Situationniste. A set of two diagrammatic plans reminiscent of the analytical style of drawing of Le Corbusier (who had picked it up from the illustrations of Camillo Sitte's late nineteenth-century theoretical treatise on city planning) were used to reject both the old city and Le Corbusier's proposed 'green city.' In their place, Constant offered a 'spatial “plan”' showing his 'covered city' as an abstract field of overlapping elements and a sketch section through a suspended sector. Neither corresponds directly to any of the models. The drawings are explicitly architectural but remain diagrammatic and subordinate to the theoretical argument. At the same time, Constant did produce a series of detailed architectural drawings: plans of the Groep sectoren (Group of Sectors), New Babylon Nord, and the Orient Sector (Orient Sector), along with the Gele Sector (Yellow Sector) plan that would be published alongside photographs of the model in June of 1960 in Internationale Situationniste. The graphic technique is architectural in its precise presentation of three-dimensional information on a single surface. The different distribution of spaces within each volume is specified. But there is still none of the usual archi-

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159 Constant, 'Ruimtelijke ordening van ruimtelijke chaos,' radio broadcast on Dutch VPRO radio. The talk was published in Ruimte voor de mens, no.1 (1969), pp. 4-6.

160 Constant, 'Autodialogue à propos de New Babylon,' Opus International, no. 27 (September 1971), pp. 29-31. Translated as 'Autodialogue on New Babylon,' Ibid., pp.79-8a, 8a.

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2 'Transverse section of the covered city,' published in Internationale Situationniste, no. 3, December 1959.
The Hyper-Architecture of Desire

The images are a kind of representation of architectural drawings. Like the models, they are more beautiful than they need to be to communicate the organization of the building; more beautiful than anything a practical architect would usually make. Their function is strictly polemical.

The intensive drawing of the project did not begin until 1960, when all the key models had been completed and the series of exhibitions had begun. Constant then started to explore the project in numerous ways. The representational techniques multiplied, just as the structural techniques had multiplied in the models. Almost all the models and the first hyper-architectural drawings had been at the intermediate scale of a sector, neither micro- nor macro-scale (with the exception of the Spatiovores which are the size of conventional buildings). But the graphic work now developed in both directions. One stream of drawings opened up the macro-scale of the huge megastructure working its eccentric way across an ever-expanding landscape. The other stream went further and further into the interior to explore the smallest micro-climates. Both kinds of representation started by making the project more substantial, more solid and technically viable, but ended up radically dematerializing it. The graphic physical realism of the models gradually gave way to the lightest of traces.

The exploration began in 1960 with a small series of ink drawings that emphasize the solidity of the project, as if everything in the building is made of cast concrete. One image looks up from the ground to the vast, flat, dark underside of a sector sitting on a massive cylindrical column, while others look into labyrinthine interiors with huge cut-outs in the floor and ceiling that allow stairways to head off in multiple directions. Every surface is solid and smooth. The structure is unmarked and seemingly uninhabited – like an abandoned world. The following series shows the different linear buildings floating on a forest of pilotis over a rough undulating landscape but there is now a sense of transparency with mysterious volumes suspended behind glass walls. A series of light images then appear. There is a minimal sense of a continuous ceiling and floor with small partitions spread at different angles throughout the space or we look along through openings in countless parallel screens with occasional ladders going up to hidden spaces. As we head further in, spaces are only defined by the eccentric intersection of five or six partitions, each of which is rendered as if transparent. Even bizarrely twisted structural supports are dematerialized. The intermediate scale impressions of huge spindly towers reminiscent of the advertising tower schemes and variations on the Spatiovores are equally light and sketchy. The project had become extremely delicate, a series of lacy overlaps. The aesthetic of multiple intersecting lines of movement that previously defined the megastructure was now to be found in the overlapping lines of the sketch – in the technique of depiction rather than in the spaces depicted.

Arrows soon fly into the drawings, marking some unspecified flow, while numbers appear like strange dimensions or readings. They start to take over. Flowing lines of movement sweep through the labyrinthine space. Dotted lines and formulas establish mysterious con-
Multi-Media Assault

Even the drawings that look most like traditional sections, with clearly defined foundations, columns, elevators, suspended platforms, etc., are cryptically notated. The drawings have become analytical diagrams of a spatial mechanism reminiscent of those by Marcel Duchamp and Frederick Kiesler.

A selection of thirteen of these drawings made between 1961 and 1962 were exhibited in a Rotterdam gallery in the summer of 1963. Meanwhile, Constant had prepared a key drawing that lies between architecture and painting. In 1962, a photocopy of a detailed plan was elaborated with paint. It shows the intersection of four sectors over a district in Amsterdam with the layout of all the roads, rail, and sports fields precisely marked on the ground below. Being a large image, all the internal divisions of the sectors are shown, with each space clearly defined and named, along with the stairways that link the levels of each sector to the adjacent one or to the ground and the roof-top heliport. The drawing captures both the precise relationship between the huge sectors and the relationship between the smallest spaces. It acts as a hinge between art and architecture and also between the micro- and macro-scales, seemingly allowing Constant to head off further in each direction.

In the following two years, the labyrinthine quality of the micro-scale was explored with a series of Dioramas and the macro-scale with pseudo-realistic drawings and a series of maps of chains of sectors in different locations. Standard maps were overlaid with transparent color to mark the megastructural web. In one map, the project moves around the historical center of Amsterdam. In another, it occupies most of the city. It then spreads itself out across the north of Holland. The Hague is infiltrated, followed by Rotterdam, and Antwerp. The whole of the Ruhr region of Germany gets covered with the spiderweb of structures. Munich, Paris, and Barcelona quickly succumb. Each sector then becomes a fragment of the map of a different city from around the world, echoing the psychogeographic maps by Debord and Jorn. In 1967, Constant laid another collage of diverse city centers over an ancient historical map of Middlesex. On another historical map, these sectors float apart from each other. Finally, in 1969, the appropriated sectors become three-dimensional objects attached in a chain to a large white background with the high-speed traffic lines flying across it in red. The identity between New Babylon and the original psychogeographic maps was complete.

In parallel to the development of these images, Constant started to prepare a series of realistic architectural elevations and perspectives of individual sectors and chains of sectors heading off to the horizon. This drawing technique, introduced in 1964, is a primitive form of three-dimensional realism. Some of the structures resemble the hanging sector model, but most are new forms of sector, huge tentlike constructions, for example, with fabric stretched over the tops and bottoms of a few massive columns. The relationship between models and drawings eventually became very close. The drawings made in 1966 precisely match the spatial quality of the models produced in the same year. Gradually, they were even given the same names as the models. Labels like Schets voor het esr (Sketch for the

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esr) resemble those of any architect. The Mobile Ladder Labyrinth (Mobile Ladder Labyrinth) and Ladder Labyrinth (Ladder Labyrinth) models of 1967 are likewise accompanied by a series of matching drawings. In a very large detailed architectural section of the Grote Gele Sector (Great Yellow Sector), every element is shown in exactly the same position as in the model produced in the same period.

Occasionally, Constant employed representational techniques foreign to the typical architect, as in the series of ten lithographs exhibited in 1963 in the Galerie d’Eendt in Amsterdam, and produced as a limited edition of 60 boxed sets with an accompanying text by Simon Vinkenoog. In making the lithographs, older drawings were recolored and different media were combined in the same image. Sketches were superimposed on photographs of the models to produce a completely different sense of space — reemphasizing the play between the structures and the landscape that had been so important in the first representations. In 1968, Constant produced a series of lithographs that combined different images of the project with text by Caspari. Other lithographs explored the geometry of the spider-web with holes actually burned through the drawings to define the spatial focus.

Clearly, Constant had not simply abandoned art for architecture. While becoming more like an architect than an architect, he held on to the identity of an artist. What makes his adopted persona hyper-architectural is precisely this artistic dimension; it is the routine behavior of the architect, rather than the forms, that has been transformed into an artwork. The project appropriates and challenges disciplinary expectations. As the lecture in London insisted: ‘New Babylon is not a town-planning project, but rather a way of thinking, of imagining, of looking on things and on life... The artist has always tried to represent the image of the world, but more important is to change the world itself and make it more livable.’

To stimulate discussion, Constant did not simply produce models of an imaginary world of future play. Rather, the project itself is conceived of as a model to be played with today — an ‘experimental thought and play model,’ as the catalog essay for the Bochum exhibition of 1961 insists.

Constant’s simulation of the architect’s persona was a multi-media performance. New Babylon was a veritable array of diverse representations. The sheer volume and variety of material was polemical in itself, as was already evident by the time of the Bochum exhibition when Constant insisted, for example, that publications ‘show as many directions as possible.’ The diversity was institutionalized when a New Babylon Archiv stamp was made and soon applied to everything. The project had to be understood as a single collection of heterogeneous material. It was the stamp rather than the forms that united the material. This institutionalization became official after the 1974 exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum when work on the project finally stopped. The curator Hans Locher — who after meeting Constant in 1958 had closely watched each step in the work’s evolution — had the foresight to organize the museum’s purchase of almost the entire collection. Since little of New Babylon had been sold over the years, it was possible to preserve the polemical density of representations as a singular artwork. The ever-restless New Babylon finally took up permanent residence.

162 Labyrinths, series of 11 lithographs by Constant, texts by Carlheinz Caspari.
163 Constant, manuscript of lecture at the ICA, London, 7 November 1963.
165 ‘My idea is that a publication of New Babylon show as many directions as possible. That such a publication has realistic plans, technical data and codes, as well as fantastic or poetic disciplines, already in this first outline. New Babylon should stop the separation of science and art, practice and fantasy.’ Letter from Constant to Herbert Froese, dated 13 September, 1961.

NEW BABYLON ARCHIV
The Electronic Legacy

Constant's impersonation of an architect had a unique impact on architectural discourse. Traces of his thinking are evident in a whole chain of experimental architectural practices: Archigram, Architecture Principe, Eventscape, Superstudio, Archizoom, Office of Metropolitan Architecture, and NATO, to name but a few. Its impact can be seen in the specific design proposals, the theoretical proposals, the organization of the groups, and the multi-media format they deploy. Indeed, New Babylon still resonates strongly with contemporary work.

Perhaps the most striking resonance is the way the project prefigures contemporary concerns with electronic space. Its fantasy of an infinitely flexible, ever-shifting, interactive spatiality is echoed in countless computer-based projects of recent years. This is not simply a conceptual parallel. The computer was at the very heart of New Babylon. In 1957, Constant had written in the Liga Bulletin that 'technique, electronics, construction, and movement' were already transcending their utilitarian meanings. At the opening of the Essen exhibition, 'Electronics, automation, cybernetics, space travel, chemicals' is the list of raw materials of the new way of life. From the beginning, Constant closely followed the arguments of Norbert Wiener, the leading theorist of cybernetics, repeatedly citing texts like The Human use of Human Beings to the effect that the computer will allow all work to be automated. All the changing desires of the playful inhabitants will be accommodated by electronics that both monitors peoples' desires and acts on them. The 'electronmachine' will be the 'slave' of the new society, as he puts it in the Bochum lecture of 1961. In 1964, he added: 'The only field of activity inaccessible for the computer is the unforeseeable act of creativity that makes man change the world and reshape it after his capricious needs.' And even then, the results of this creativity can only be monitored by computer. Constant's book manuscript argues that the only adequate representation of the project would be by the computer:

"Any three-dimensional representation would, in itself, only have the value of a snapshot, since even admitting that the model of each sector may be reduced to several plans and sections of the different levels, and that one manages thereby to constitute a sort of detailed atlas of the sectors, it would still be necessary, from one instant to the next, to record, using symbolic notations as in a ship's log, all the topographical modifications that are produced. Recourse to a computer will doubtless be necessary to resolve such a complex problem."

Electronics were crucial to New Babylon. Not only would the massive system of sound, light, and space fluctuation require the most sophisticated behind-the-scenes automation but it would also be part of the visible scenery. Spaces were dedicated to the playful use of electronics. Constant experimented with this possibility, dedicating one of the Spatiovores, for example, to the production of electronic music — an interest continued in the Eindhoven project which featured a huge electronic harp that would produce music in response to the vibration of its wires in the wind. Some plans designate specific spaces for play with radio and television; 'perfected telecommunications' would be needed between all spaces.

166 Constant, 'De eerste tekenen,' Liga Bulletin (June 1957).
167 Constant, manuscript of introduction given at opening of Essen exhibition, 9 January 1960.
168 Constant, manuscript of lecture to the Students Association at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen, 12 March 1964.

1 New Babylon Archiv stamp
2 Windharp (Windharp), 1965 / Design for the Evoluon square in Eindhoven / nylon, wood, metal / 200 x 200 cm (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
A new kind of 'transmitting and receiving audiovisual network' would be overlaid on the ever-shifting spatial network. Like the other technological systems, it not only makes the new playful lifestyle physically possible, but also becomes the subject of play:

A renewed, reinvented audio-visual media is an indispensable aid. In a fluctuating community, without a fixed base, contacts can only be maintained by intensive telecommunications. Each sector will be provided with the latest equipment, accessible to everyone, whose use, we should note, is never strictly functional. In New Babylon air conditioning does not only serve to recreate, as in utilitarian society, an 'ideal' climate, but to vary ambience to the greatest possible degree. As for telecommunication, it does not only, or principally, serve interests of a practical kind. It is at the service of ludic activity, it is a form of play.  

Constant had already pioneered the radio-controlled dérive in 1958. The walkie-talkie short circuited the physical space of the city, fostering the production of a different kind of city — another social space. The dérive itself can be understood as a mechanism for the production of a kind of virtual space, subverting the apparent physical order in favor of a different spatiality, as represented so clearly in Debord and Jorn's maps. The electronics in New Babylon would not subvert an established order, as no order is ever established. Rather, they act as just another device for producing space, operating — like floors, ladders, ramps, and furniture — as tools for generating new experiences. For Constant, the computer is a medium like any other: 'we should use computers, television etc. like a painter uses his brushes.'

Not by chance do many of the representations of New Babylon resemble a circuit board with its multiple overlapping lines of flow. This quality became literal at the end of 1968 when electronics were integrated into the last model of the project. A dense metal network 1.5 by 2 meters, and 1.5 meters high, was filled with electronic circuits, tiny lights, and speakers. A plexiglass control panel allowed the model to be played like a musical instrument. The overall sound would be the same as the soundtrack used in the lectures with additional small points of sound emitted from little speakers mounted in the structure and moved around at will. The idea was reminiscent of the Cybernetic Sculptures of Schoffer, which were equipped with an 'electronic brain' that responded with light and music to the environment through a number of sensors. But now the solitary user takes the active position of the computer, simulating the pulsating effects of collective desire.

New Babylon has to be understood in terms of the entire discourse in the early sixties about the relationship between electronics and architecture. Even the relatively conservative Liga debated the issue in 1960. The comparison that is often made between New Babylon and Cedric Price's Fun Palace project of 1962-1967, for example, has to go beyond the clear resonance between the idea of an endlessly variable framework for play to the less obvious level of cybernetic organization. Like New Babylon, Fun Palace was to be integrated by sophisticated computer programs. A 'Cybernetic Committee' of experts was established which made a number of detailed reports on themes like 'psychology and experimentation' and 'cybernetics and architecture.' In 1960, Schulze-Fielitz argued that his Space City...
would use ‘electronic calculating centers’ to orchestrate the structure’s ever-changing organization with ‘infinite possibilities of combination.’ Likewise, the Archigram projects that most resemble New Babylon were completely wired up. Having attended Constant’s lecture in London, Archigram members studied a copy of his Copenhagen lecture. Constant had contributed as much to this discourse as he had absorbed.

The effect of electronics on space, like that of the nineteenth-century techniques of steel and glass construction that mobilized modern architecture, was understood by the next generation of architects to be a new kind of freedom, a new kind of lightness. Most of the idyllic images of experimental architecture were underpinned by electronics, even in the work of those who never addressed the subject. The absence of many traditional architectural elements in the images is made possible by the fantasized structural possibilities of the new electronic technology. The only hint of the computer presence is often the absence of familiar elements in the spaces. This has made it easy for subsequent generations of architects to respond to the forms rather than the electronics that was understood to make those forms possible. Recent pronouncements about the computer’s role in architecture unwittingly duplicate polemical positions of the late fifties and early sixties.

Contemporary architects who are interested in virtual space and routinely authorize their work with repeated citations of Paul Virilio, for example, should not forget his earlier role as an architect and his own citations of New Babylon. Constant was a key reference point when Virilio and Parent formed the Architecture Principe office in 1963: ‘We were very much interested in Constant’s “New Babylon”... We read the situationists a lot. I have many issues of the International Situationist Review and of course the idea of “urban dérive” interested us very much. In fact my architecture was called “de sites de déviation.”’ In 1974, Virilio included a large section of Constant’s book manuscript in a collection of essays on Nomades et vagabondes. Likewise, admirers of the most nuanced accounts of architecture’s fluid role in the contemporary global economy should consider Rem Koolhaas’s interview of Constant on the nomadic sensibility of New Babylon in 1966, shortly before he became an architect. Three months later, Constant lectured to the Society of Dutch Architects at the opening of the new buildings at the Schiphol Airport near Amsterdam, proclaiming that the transitory spaces of airports were a precursor of the nomadic society of the near future. Much of the mentality of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism survived in Koolhaas’s Office of Metropolitan Architecture. The Architectural Association in London, which bred so many leading members of architectural discourse of the 1980s and 1990s, absorbed many lessons from the situationists in the seventies, including specific details from New Babylon.

Constant’s whole performance had always been understood in terms of such an effect, starting with his original conception of the Bureau as an ‘instrument of effective propaganda’ emphasizing research and its dissemination rather than design. In reality, it was just a name, a front for delivering messages, another of many channels to broadcast the polemic. Experimental architects tuned in.
It would be foolish to try to pin down this influence. Influence is by definition imprecise and, regardless, little is ever lost in architectural culture. Ideas circulate restlessly, although they often slip below the surface for a while. When even the fundamental and wide ranging work of Team 10 is skimmed over, it is no surprise that an isolated project like New Babylon has been left out of many of the standard histories. Notable exceptions include Reyner Banham’s Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past, and some collections of ‘visionary’ or ‘utopian’ architecture — as if the project could be safely isolated from the mainstream as an unrealizable fantasy.\(^{179}\) In fact, Constant always insisted that it was realizable — utopian in the sense of being designed for a future society but realistic in the technology it deploys. This point was already made in the very first description of the design in Internationale Situationniste.\(^{180}\) New Babylon is at once an idealistic artwork and a realizable technical proposition. As Constant put it in a letter to the curator of the Bochum exhibition: ‘It is not just the fantasy of an artist. It is a typical product of the technical mass culture and the realization is closely linked to practical questions of today and, more important, the coming time.’\(^{181}\) When lecturing to the architecture students in Copenhagen, he went as far as to insist that his vision of the future as an artist was actually more practical than those offered by contemporary architects:

The New Babylon plan, in its present form, is, still like a work of art, nothing but a suggestion. It only intends to give the minimum conditions for a behavior that is to remain as free as possible... The exhibition in this academy shows a selection of the material that is made with the intention to illustrate an urban world, entirely different from the present one. Considering that this present urbanity — like the society whose expression it is — is obviously declining, it would not be right to look at New Babylon as an utopian project. On the contrary, from all the projects concerning the city of the future — to make such projects seems to become a kind of fashion — I may say that New Babylon perhaps represents the only one that is based on the totally new social conditions that are offered by the complete mechanization of production-labor.\(^{182}\)

At the same time, the project is not meant to be realized as such. In January of 1965, Constant writes to the Liga reminding them that New Babylon ‘is just a symbol, a symbol for the integration of creative and social activity’ whose form is necessarily unclear.\(^{183}\) He had always proposed that even the basic structure was unpredictable and would be produced by teams of psychologists, architects, urbanists, engineers, and sociologists. At the end of 1965, he goes further, writing to Anthony Hill that it actually does not make sense to think of New Babylon as realizable, even by its inhabitants:

The particular task of the artist has always been — and still is — the fantastication of reality... In so far I could say New Babylon is still a work of art. However, there is a good deal of construction and rational thinking in this plan. But I know that the realization of such a plan could never be the work of one man, not even of one generation. I am inclined to think that New Babylon will never be realized, could never be finished, that the construction of New Babylon will be an interminable activity in which all the people that are to live will be involved. This dream, that I call New Babylon, is born out of the dissatisfaction of a modern artist who no longer believes in superior individual creativity.\(^{184}\)

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180 ‘If the project we have just traced out in bold strokes risks being taken for a fantastic dream, we insist on the fact that it is feasible from the technical point of view.’ Constant, ‘Another City for Another Life,’ in Andreotti and Costa, Theory of the Dérive, p. 95.

181 Letter from Constant to Herbert Froese, dated 13 September 1961. Earlier that year, he told an interviewer ‘If I live to see New Babylon. (...) I doubt it. (...) Maybe one part if they will let me start it.’ ‘Imaginaire stad met een totaal ander leven,’ Het Parool (30 March 1961).

182 Constant, manuscript of lecture to the Students Association at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen, 12 March 1964.

183 Letter from Constant to Liga Nieuw Beelden, dated 7 January 1965.

New Babylon is realistic yet unrealizable. For Constant, it was more a form of resistance to the current social and spatial condition than a specific proposal for a future world. It was always conceived as a form of propaganda, and in that sense it remained resolutely situationist. In 1966, Constant told a newspaper interviewer that the project’s unimaginable scale and expense is a necessary guerrilla tactic in the face of a functionalist society obsessed with efficiency:

Yes it costs a lot. That’s what people say. An artist is never cost-effective. It is always money thrown away — a total loss. If you make plastic dishwashing racks or buckets, you can easily make money. A plan that has just a medium size is simply impossible to realize. My idea has grown too big for my studio. The only solution is to choose resistance with a guerrilla technique to influence as many people as possible.\(^\text{185}\)

Yet even the project’s unrealizability has to be understood as a form of realism. There is a crucial connection between seemingly unbuildable futuristic speculations and routine architectural practice. Since so few architectural ideas get built and the ones that do are usually compromised, there is something of the utopian in every architect. The unrealizable visions of experimental architects make their way into mainstream architectural practice. Images by avant-garde architects are no longer very different from those of the mainstream. New techniques are absorbed immediately. Something of New Babylon has infiltrated even the most conservative practices. To reconsider the project might help to reconsider contemporary work. It is not just a matter of looking back at the formal strategies or the theoretical position from a contemporary perspective so that current discourse can see what it would like to see in its own past. Rather, it is a matter of looking more closely to see what the discourse has never wanted to see.

**Stained Architecture**

Whatever the future is, it usually looks very good in the hands of architects. Architects, for whom the future is always the present, seek support for their proposals by producing astonishingly optimistic scenarios. The weather is always good and the inhabitants ecstatically happy. At first, Constant might seem to be the most optimistic of all. Perhaps it was the optimism of his extraordinary conviction about a society of infinite play that bonded him to the architectural community. If we look more closely though, his future is not so perfect after all.

The most obvious clue is the way human figures occupy the project. When Constant turned to architecture, the technique of collaging photographs of people into drawings had long been a standard way to make fantasy spaces seem plausible. When a collaged figure strides towards us in Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren’s famous image of 1924, for example, the schematically drawn shopping and housing area behind him seems more buildable. If the space is already occupied by real people it becomes realistic. In a sense, it is the photograph, the medium that is understood to be the most realistic, that occupies the new space. Realism is inserted into fantasy to locate a project somewhere between the

\(^\text{185}\) Paul Hellmann, 'Constant: Guerillastrijd tegen de bestaande orde,' *Het Vrije Volk* (9 October 1965).
present and the future — which is where architecture, in the most practical sense, lies. The appropriated inhabitants are the same as those used in advertisements: happy, healthy, wealthy — basking in the permanent glow of modernity. But if the newly wed Marilyn Monroe and Joe Demaggio run happily down the street-in-the-air of the Smithson's Golden Lane Housing project, and their absurdly happy descendants populate the images of most architects, something else happens to the figures in the equally suspended world of New Babylon. At first, they are not even visible. When they appear, the news is not good.

The absence of human figures in the first representations was polemical. Constant argued that the New Babylonian could not be represented because it didn’t yet exist. New Babylonians would have to construct themselves. It was only when the drawings started to dematerialize the project that shadowy figures begin to appear. Eventually they become the center of attention, with New Babylon just a few intersecting planes in the background, but they remain vague — and vulnerable.

In one of the early drawings of 1960, a few stick figures appear in the space, their spindly bodies resembling the ladders in front of them. Two years later, a few blotchy figures can be seen, suspended above us or running through the space, only to return with a vengeance in 1965 when they completely fill the spaces that are now no more than a few quick lines. Hundreds can be seen in restless crowds on the multiple levels, or dispersed across the ground below. But they are still ghosts in a space that is itself phantomlike. Discrete figures finally come into focus against a few diaphanous planes in 1968. But their blotchy form now looks like blood stains. Any doubt is removed when they become red. There is a sense of ongoing violence. As we finally get close to the figures, close enough to make out faces, they have been piled up or are splattered across every surface as if there has been horrific carnage. Human life becomes just a stain of its extinction.

Stains had always played an important role in New Babylon. The ground below the first models was stained and marked, as were many of the shiny metal surfaces. Even the immaculate plexiglass is speckled with paint, scratched, graffitied, and stained on both sides. Similar splatters appear in drawings of 1962 and reappear throughout the years. Stains were even added to the most sophisticated photocollages — like the large blown-up map of the project heading from The Hague across to the coastline. Part of the effect of realism comes from these stains, imperfections in the new technological order that will eventually be identified with the bloody human body itself. New Babylon is an unsafe world. The space of desire is finally understood as a space of conflict. The issue was first addressed directly in Constant’s book manuscript:

New Babylon is an uncertain universe where the ‘normal’ man is at the mercy of every possible destructive force, every kind of aggression. But let us know that ‘normality’ is a concept linked to a certain historical practice, its content is therefore variable... The image of a free man who does not have to struggle for his existence is without historical basis... man’s aggressivity does not disappear with the satisfaction of his immediate material needs.  

The inevitably violent survival instincts within traditional societies give way to an

equally forceful 'creative instinct' in a society where survival is no longer an issue. If art is 'barely distinguishable' from criminality in the face of established order, such criminality becomes the collective way of life in New Babylon. But it is understood as play because there is no established order. It was no surprise that Constant would become an important mentor of the Provos in their attempts to challenge and ridicule any fixed order. They often referred to him, published an article on New Babylon, and interviewed him in their little magazine Provo. While the situationists had criticized the dependance on Constant, many of the Provos' strategic disruptions in the city became tactics in the 1968 rebellion in Paris. Constant's response to the struggle was to make violence even more a part of his project. In the face of the Vietnam War and the Provo actions of 1966, he had rejected the idea of an intrinsically violent human nature but accepted the strategic need for violence to achieve social justice. In the wake of 1968, revolutionary violence and postrevolutionary life became indistinguishable. The very idea of postrevolutionary life, with all its optimism, dissipated.

After the street battles, Constant became increasingly dissatisfied with the result of his experimental electronic model. Finding it too simplistic and idealistic to capture the elusive atmosphere of New Babylon, he destroyed it and emptied his studio of model-making tools and materials. Having polemically rejected painting for so many years, he started to paint again. The first painting, Ode à l'Odeon of 1969, transformed a key space of the Paris revolt into a New Babylonian space. The blurry occupants of the labyrinth are indistinguishable from the countless ladders. Like phantoms, they are melded into the spatial atmosphere. In Der blaue Draufgänger (The Blue Daredevil) of the same year, they start to emerge as blotches and splatters. A few of them finally come into focus in Erotic Space of 1971: a woman's bloody body lies naked on the ground; the outline of an aroused man hovers on the opposite wall; a mysterious figure lurks in the background. In Ingang van het Labyrint (Entrance of the Labyrinth) of 1972, the figures occupying the spiderweb of the space frame stretching to the horizon are nothing more than red blotches splattered on the ground. Blood runs out from behind pristine surfaces and is sprayed across the floor. In the same year, Le massacre de My Lai stages the infamous brutality against the high tech scaffolding of New Babylon, and Ontwaakte verworpen der aarde (Arise Ye Workers from Your Slumbers) literally piles the bodies up, completely blocking the space that was designed for infinite mobility. Two years later, the lithograph Le massacre further multiplies the carnage. Blood dominates the image. The painting Le viol glimpses a brutal sexual murder occurring behind a partition; La blouse hongroise (The Hungarian Blouse) depicts a space stained by two bloody figures; and Le voyeur captures somebody spying from behind one partition a sexual act occurring alongside another. A series of paintings, drawings, and lithographs use New Babylon as the site for blurring sexuality, spatiality, social life, and aggression.

This visceral explosion of desire, pleasure, and violence has to be understood against the background of the idealization of technology. The stains appear against the immaculacy of advanced electronics and statistics. In Erotic Space, electric cords grow out of the wall...
and disappear into the naked body and the pool of blood. A lithograph from the Caspari series again links blood, wires, and smoke. The real context of life and death in New Babylon is electronics rather than the more obvious titanium and nylon structures. While contemporary cyber-architecture is delivered with the routine euphoric optimism of the long-institutionalized architectural avant-garde, Constant relentlessly explored the hidden menace of his bright new social space and the technology that would make it possible. Pleasure becomes painful or pain becomes pleasurable, again.

Constant’s destruction of the large electronic model had marked the beginning of the end. Having followed the social pathology to the limit of ecstasy and then despair, the design that by definition could never be finished would soon stop. The ‘ex-artiste’ had shrugged off the architect’s persona when he returned to painting. Having once sold the early Cobra paintings to fund his hyper-architectural work, he sold off the architecture to fund his painting. The end came when the paintings were finally exhibited along with all the other representations at the 1974 exhibition at the Haags Gemeentemuseum. New Babylon was finally transformed into a historical artifact. Yet it was not a simple ending. And even less a simple artifact:

By the time I had more or less finished working on the New Babylon project for the exhibition in The Hague, I could, theoretically, do three things, I could go on with New Babylon, which as you say is never ready but that would have meant repeating myself. I could stop altogether and do nothing, and that was, theoretically, the most obvious choice after something like New Babylon. But I was incapable, of course, of doing nothing. And the third possibility was simply to go on working on whatever I felt like doing and that is in fact what I did. First watercolors and etchings and then more paintings, mostly not on the New Babylon theme, but in spite of myself, more or less unconsciously all sorts of elements crept in which I have always seen as events or happenings that belong to the world of New Babylon.190

Two decades of architectural work had evaporated, only to return as a ghost. It remains a haunting presence in our discourse today. That was always the point. Constant designed a provocation rather than a city. It is realized in its effect on others. As the architecture students in Delft were told in 1961:

`New Babylon is like a striptease. It stimulates action and therefore it is real.`191

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189 'Provos are the upstarts of the youth. If some fall out, there will be others to take over. I am against terror and counter-terror. Against terror because of my nature. But if the Viet Cong would work with peaceful options, they would be marched over. You have to. I think it is cynical to think that every human being in principle has it inside him to go at someone’s throat. There are, by the way, a lot of people who are ready to endanger their own position to fight for rights. But if we are only allowed to demonstrate here under the surveillance of the police then we have the feeling that we are being exercised like prisoners. The Provos attract policemen.' Constant, interviewed by Ton Neelissen, 'Toekomstproject van Nederlandse in Venetië bekroond,' Haarlems Dagblad (16 July 1966), p. 14.


Opstand (Revolt), 7 May 1970 / special commission by the newspaper on the occasion of the commemoration of liberation day (photo: Gustaaf Begas)
Spatial Colorism  [Original in Dutch, 'Spatiaal colorisme.' Published together with texts by Aldo van Eyck, accompanied by three silkscreens in an edition of 50, published on the occasion of the exhibition Voor een Spatiaal Colorisme at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam in 1952. Translated by Robyn de Jong-Dalziel]

In a reaction to the 'building' of the nineteenth century, where form was often buried under decoration to such an extent as to render the content unrecognizable, the modern architect has ended up concentrating primarily on spatial form, regarding color as secondary and making it subordinate to form.
The architect sees size, proportion, and structure as the basic elements of 'pure' spatial form. It is chiefly these elements that underpin an architectural design in which space is conceived as colorless.
The execution of a design based primarily on form begins with a conflict: the conflict between idea and matter, between form and color.
The architect is inclined to keep the color passive; he minimizes the number of colors and avoids intense colors. But color is unavoidably introduced by way of material, finishing, and furnishings.
This color, added at a later stage, is a chance element as far as the design is concerned, and does not make any real contribution to the spatial plasticity.
As a consequence, color's enormous space-creating potential is reduced to a matter of chance and because of this the spatial effect itself is always deficient.
Eliminating color, which is just as important a determinant of space as architectural form, precludes unity of form and color.
The realistic spatial conception is the conception of space in color.

It goes without saying that the spatial use of color has nothing to do with the use of color for decorative or 'functional' purposes.
Nor can the use of color as a means of correcting a defective size or form by means of optical illusion be counted as a plastic use of color because in this instance form remains passive with respect to color. Nonetheless, the use of color as a corrective carries an implicit recognition of its threedimensional qualities.
Spatial form and spatial color can only form an indissoluble unity if they develop at the same time and in relation to one another.
What holds for painting on a flat surface also holds for the spatial conception of color:

**Color is nothing but the color of the form and form is nothing but the form of the color.**

So a spatial conception of color entails more than the use of color in the creation of architectural spatial effects. The absolute unity of form and color, in other words the purely plastic use of color, takes the architect into the domain of painting.
The result, however, is an architecture based on a visual reality in which form and color are one, rather than on abstracted formal elements; and painting in which color is not used for personal expression but is systematically used for immediate plastic effect.

Spatial colorism is therefore a totally new plastic art with its own independent laws, and with a potential far outstripping that of both architecture and painting. Spatial colorism elevates the schematic form to physical form and is for this reason an indispensable expressive factor in the human creation of space in the broadest sense of total human settlement.

Even the concept of color plasticity familiar in painting acquires new meaning in space. The spatial conception of color not only puts an end to centralized composition but also to the 'simultaneity' of color effects: the experience of color plasticity will take place in time.
Moreover, the 'scale,' the ratio of color to human dimensions, becomes crucially important when the closed character of the painting is replaced by the space around us.

The development of spatial colorism as a spatial conception and the realization of space in color, demands close contact between painters and architects.
Furthermore it is important that, rather than remaining specialists in their own carefully circumscribed field, they should work together as a 'team' in pursuit of a common goal.
This goal is not the amalgamation of architecture and painting, as in the baroque, but a higher order of three-dimensional reality that surpasses both and in which color and space are inconceivable one without the other.

Spatial colorism is not a theory but a practice.
It is useless to talk about collaboration so long as we do not know what demands both architecture and the visual arts must satisfy in order for this collaboration to be of any benefit. In the visual arts domain alone, there already exist such unbridgeable differences that it is impossible to speak of visual art in terms of a single clear concept.

The idea of an amalgamation with architecture arose at a time when visual art had reached a point in its development when the concept of space acquired a more direct significance than it had enjoyed so far. Even so, there would probably have been no question of collaboration had it not been for de Stijl. De Stijl resisted individualism in the visual arts and architecture. An individualism that was held responsible for the decline of plastic form in favor of nebulous 'expression.' This Geltungsdrang of the individual, this expressionism, had and still has to be stopped. In architecture, the opponents of expressionism found direct support in the economic advantages of mechanization and, partly because of this, costly expressionism was short-lived there. But in the visual arts, which provided the initial impetus, the situation is rather different.

At the present moment, expressionism — abstract and figurative — is on the offensive and, paradoxically enough, is finding some support among architects: waverers who are not philosopher enough to refrain from this unnatural marriage with a visual arts phenomenon that stifles architecture under the pretext of collaboration. Today's architecture is apparently still too impoverished in terms of plasticity not to be afflicted by an inferiority complex when faced with this turbulent stream of artistic hocus-pocus. Salvation must come from the visual arts but not, of course, in this form. There is only one possible route to collaboration between architecture and other plastic arts and it is signaled by mechanization, the same mechanization that previously protected architecture from dilution.

Mechanization is in command and the logical consequence of this is a new universal and objective aesthetic. The demands of this new aesthetic amount to absolute unity of construction, function, form, and color. This unity of all space-making factors erases the boundaries between the various plastic arts, so rendering further discussion of 'collaboration' superfluous. Architecture has no need of plastic enrichment in the form of decoration or emblems, no need to deck itself in borrowed feathers. No, what architecture draws from the visual arts is a new lifeblood that rejuvenates and strengthens it and allows it to derive artistic benefit from mechanization. Architecture must become a new plastic art whose universal nature enables it to take the place of painting and sculpture which are drowning in subjectivism. A new visual art sufficient in itself and incorporating everything that can objectively be realized in form, color, and three-dimensional effects. An art that with a single leap is able to bridge the gap with society because it has, by its very nature, an immediate function that allows it to be assimilated into daily life. An art that appeals to the imagination of the masses because it is able to exploit fully the inexhaustible potential of technology and is thus able to deliver what the modern human being expects of art: harmony, imagination, and a sense of space.

Where does the architect, the visual artist, stand in all this? The time when the community was a sounding board for the individual is over and done with and the roles are now reversed.

The community sets the individual a task: to form the habitation, a fundamental form that encompasses all facets of life. As soon as one rejects the merging of individual artworks in a more or less impaired whole, and starts to reflect on this new and gigantic task, the distinctive features of personality and profession lose their relevance. The architect must become an artist and the artist a constructor in order to tackle the creative work as part of a team, together with specialized technicians and engineers. But a lot will have to happen before individual artists are able to work as part of a group without imagining themselves lost. To reach this point is the first and essential step, and perhaps this is also the point of all this talk about collaboration.
Ambiance de jeu (Ambience of Play)
brass, oil paint on wood / 12 x 155 x 155 cm
private collection / long-term loan to Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague
(photos: Bram Wisman)
We are living in a time of profound transformation taking place in different domains, which cannot fail to have far-reaching consequences for contemporary architecture. This is an appeal to architects to warn them against becoming dispersed between the science of the engineer and the inventiveness of the sculptor, thereby making themselves superfluous, and to encourage them rather to face the new conditions head on, eyes open.

Today, in the wake of a period of experimentation in every possible direction, aesthetics have managed to break with a formal limitation as a result of the relatively recent shift from figurative representation to abstraction. Experimental painting has come out in reaction against such tendencies as neo-plasticism, and has succeeded in once again freeing human imagination from all its various taboos, thus making possible a new step in artistic creativity.

In the course of this same post-war period, scientific techniques have developed to such an extent that construction methods represent virtually no further obstacle at all to the realization of very free forms, involving an absolutely original conception of space. One need only mention concrete or steel casts, thin sheets of steel-reinforced concrete, stainless or non-oxidizing metals and their welds, to get some idea of the means currently available to a free and audacious imagination.

Furthermore, the rectangle — for a long time the basis of all architectural aesthetics — is losing its meaning for a number of different reasons. Which is why it is important in large-scale constructions that the wind-resistance of rounded forms compare very favorably with that of flat surfaces. On top of which, concrete performs better in sheet-form than it does in the girder-form customarily in use today. Scientific techniques seem only to be awaiting an aesthetic with a clear outlook for their deployment.

Contemporary architecture — thanks to the happy coincidence of these two aesthetic and technical conditions — has no further reason whatsoever to remain confined within the severe doctrine of functionalism imposed on it, on the one hand, by an obsolete imagination and, on the other hand, by what were still rudimentary techniques forcing the architect to use methods of decoration to arrive at the aesthetic aspect he was after. For a long time, architectural aesthetics — lacking construction possibilities large enough to allow a freedom of plastic expression — dealt only with the surface of the form, being unable to enter the skeleton, thus leaving architecture a second-rate decorative art.

For the first time in history, architecture has been able to become a veritable art of building. An art whose plastic expression depends upon the organization and assemblage of its elements — in much the same way as a painter organizes his brush strokes. It is only logical that at the outset this tendency, already present in functionalism, would manifest itself through the use of materials such as steel and glass, enabling clear and apparent construction.

But today, architecture has at its disposal unlimited building techniques which make it into an absolutely independent art of sculptural and pictorial decoration, without, however, falling into the sterility of functionalism. It will be able to make use of techniques as if they were an artistic material of the same status as sound, color, and speech are for the other arts. It will be capable of incorporating into its aesthetic the manipulation of volumes and voids of sculpture, and the spatial colorism of painting, in order to create one of the most complete of all the arts, at once lyrical in its means and social in its very nature. It is in poetry that life will reside.
All works are from the collection of the Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, unless otherwise stated.
Ontwerp voor zigeunerkamp (Design for a Gypsy Camp) / stainless steel, aluminum, plexiglass, oil on wood / h 21 cm ø 130 cm
(photo 1, 3: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys / 2: Bram Wisman)
Constructie in oranje (Orange Construction)
metal, ink on plexiglass, oil on wood
23 x 110 x 100 cm (photo 1, 2: Jan Versnel / 3, 5, 6: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys / 4: Bram Wisman)
The eleven points below, which set out a minimum definition of situationist action, are to be discussed as a preparatory text for the Third SI Conference:

1. The situationists must take every opportunity to oppose retrograde forces and ideologies, in culture and wherever the question of the meaning of life arises.

2. Nobody shall consider their membership in the SI as a simple agreement of principle; the essential activity of all participants must relate to perspectives elaborated in common, to the necessity of disciplined action, in the practical as well as the public sphere.

3. The possibility of unitary and collective creativity is already announced in the decomposition of the individual arts. The SI cannot justify any attempt to renovate these arts.

4. The SI's minimum program is the development of complete decors, which must extend to a unitary urbanism, and research into new modes of behavior in relation to these decors.

5. Unitary urbanism is defined as the complex, ongoing activity which consciously recreates man's environment according to the most advanced conceptions in every domain.

6. The solution to problems of housing, traffic, recreation, can only be envisaged in relation to social, psychological and artistic perspectives which combine in one synthetic hypothesis at the level of daily life.

7. Unitary urbanism, independently of all aesthetic considerations, is the fruit of a new type of collective creativity; the development of this spirit of creation is the prior condition of unitary urbanism.

8. The creation of ambiances favorable to this development is the immediate task of today's creators.

9. All means are usable, on condition that they serve in a unitary action. The coordination of artistic and scientific means must lead to their total fusion.

10. The construction of a situation is the edification of a transient micro-ambience and of the play of events for a unique moment in the lives of several persons. Within unitary urbanism, it is inseparable from the construction of a general, relatively more lasting ambience.

11. A constructed situation is a means for unitary urbanism. Just as unitary urbanism is the indispensable basis for the construction of situations, in both play and seriousness, in a freer society.
Gele sector (Yellow Sector) / metal (iron, aluminum, copper), ink on plexiglass, oil on wood / 21 x 82.5 x 77.5 cm (photo 1: Jan Versnel / 2-5,7: Bram Wisman / 6: Har Oudejans)
Rode sector (Red Sector) / metal (iron, steel, aluminum, copper), ink on plexiglass, oil on wood / 24 × 96.5 × 77.5 cm (photo 1: Rob Kollaard / 2: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys / 3, 4: Har Oudejans)
New Babylon [1958-1959]

The crisis of today’s society is indivisible. The dominant social relations cannot adapt to the accelerated development of the productive forces, and this antagonism reigns over culture as well as politics and the economy. The efforts expended at every moment, and not ineffectively, to hide this banal truth, oblige us to recall it at the outset. It is on this basis that an activity of our time can be understood. Everywhere, the creation of a higher level of life opposes its necessities to the habits of thought and behavior. Since we have taken our stand with those who promote this creation, we cannot naively use any of the forms of the superseded cultural totality. We must regard the most widely used practices with astonishment, and see how they converge to form the general meaning of an established way of life. For example, what is called art criticism. We agree with that which tended, in the extremist movements whose succession has shaped modern art, to throw a framework of life into question, to replace it. More precisely, we are now partisans of the program defined by the Situationist International. Considering that it is time to begin constructing complete situations, rejecting the fragmentary, worn-out means of artistic expression, we can be agitators; never judges or lawyers at the comical tribunals of contemporary taste. This commentary for the photographs of a few objects built by Constant will therefore differentiate itself first of all from art criticism.

Art criticism, whose appearance is directly linked to the bourgeois conditions of artistic commerce, clearly must continue in our day, along with those conditions. But the same process which, by degrees, pushed the various traditional aesthetic branches to their destruction has equally reduced the grasp on reality that art criticism can have and of itself, that is, independently of work on art history: a judgment of the present and a recognition of the future. All real critique fundamentally questions the decomposition of cultural superstructures, and the world of decomposition does not need critique. Thus at once the raison d’être and the arsenal of means employed by the art criticism of so-called modernism now boils down to the confused exposition of an incommunicable enthusiasm. The professional rule is to employ, to this end, an obscure derivative of the poetic language of forty years ago, served with personal anecdotes, equally impoverished but which humanize it. After rehearsing these few salient features of today’s art criticism, I must say on the contrary that for our situationist comrades, for Constant and myself, the three-dimensional explorations in question here can in no way be an object of enthusiasm, as they are but scattered elements on the path toward a future construction of ambiances, a unitary urbanism. It is easy to understand the meaning of Constant’s work, not through the lyrical exposition of a spectator’s preferences, but by considering what he has written himself on his positions and perspectives, which are also our own. And we will obviously not encourage a personality cult by way of the customary confidences, for we seek to go beyond the division of artistic labor.

The central point of our enterprise, in this moment of its constitution, is the obligation to break with no spirit of return from all the vanguardist fashions with which we are familiar, or which we ourselves might have spread. The half-success of certain innovations, and indeed, the half-success of our youth — I am not thinking here of successes of a social, that is to say, economic, order — risk binding us to a freedom of ideas and a freedom of gestures which remain insufficient. A diminished boredom is not yet our game. We must not restrict the scope of our desires to the already-seen which coaxes us back emotionally, thus letting our generally difficult and incomplete approach to the known desires contribute to their further embellishment. Against such defeatism, Constant wrote in 1949 in the journal COBRA that ‘when we say desire in the twentieth century, we mean the unknown.’ He designated the universal arm of permanent experimentation: ‘For those of us whose artistic, sexual, social, and other desires are farsighted, experiment is a necessary tool for the knowledge of our ambitions — their sources, goals, possibilities, and limitations.’ We know that the later development of one of the major currents that would compose our present grouping (the International of Experimental Artists, and then, after its dissolution in 1951, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus) was, at each stage, dominated by this debate over the watchword of experimentation. Some made it an unreal label covering any normal personal production. Others sought to give it verifiable application. Constant, who demanded in his intervention at the Alba Congress in 1956 that the new architecture be a poetry for lodging, showed that by making use of the latest technologies and materials, ‘for the first time in history, architecture has been able to become a veritable art of construction.’ In 1958, in a discussion of the orientation of the si, he declared: ‘For my part, I consider that the shocking character demanded by the construction of ambiances excludes all traditional arts… We must therefore invent new techniques in all the domains… to unify them later in the complex activity that will be engendered by unitary urbanism.’

These stances mark the advance of the experimental conception beyond abandoned artistic forms, toward collective work, toward new modes of cultural intervention, and in its supreme phase, toward an uninterrupted and conscious transformation of the entire material environment; that is, a transformation on the very terrain offered to the experimental methods by the powers to which humanity is now gaining access. Even before this progressive radicalization of the means, the general line had come clearly into view, as the above-quoted text of Constant bears witness: ‘Freedom appears only in creation or in strife – and these have the same goal at heart – fulfillment of life.’

We have thus become aware that we are at a turning point in the history of social practice. In everyday life, in the cultural totality which is produced by this life and which reacts creatively upon it, the near future will belong to the overthrow of the separated and durable arts/spectacles, in favor of unitary and transitory techniques of intervention. In the perspective of this change of terrain, of this qualitative rupture, many have left the artistic domains which they had spontaneously embraced but in which they experienced the exhaustion of aesthetics. Constant long ago abandoned painting, to construct objects susceptible of integration to a habitat responding to new concerns of play; and then, finally, scale models for a unitary urbanism.
'During the transition period, creative art finds itself in permanent conflict with the existing culture, while at the same time it heralds a future culture... The bourgeois spirit still dominates life as a whole, it even goes so far as to supply prefabricated popular culture to the masses. Never has the cultural void been so manifest as it is since the war,' we read in the manifesto of the Dutch experimental group, drafted by Constant in 1948.4 The ten years following this declaration have demonstrated, to the point of derision, the regular oozed of this cultural void, whipped up by circus attractions; and its incapacity for self-renewal; and the poverty of a dominant thinking that no longer controls and no longer understands its epoch; the poverty and resignation of the masses who have assimilated the derivatives of their bosses' idea of happiness. Why then do we wish to overthrow the existing culture, to leave behind the plane where it has always unfolded with alternate moments of success and relative void, rather than betting on the transitional nature of the crisis, rather than helping to reform it? This culture has produced its own gravediggers with the more-or-less conscious vanguards that preceded us. It will necessarily disappear, along with the framework of life that is collapsing everywhere, whatever is to follow. 'In fact,' writes Constant, 'this culture has never been capable of satisfying anyone, neither a slave nor a master who has every reason to believe himself happy in a luxury, a lust, where all the individual's creative potential is centered.' And that is the primary motive that obliges us, when the personal choice is left us, to choose our camp, to scorn the dominant society: even the masters are incapable of finding any way to please themselves in it. Their freedom is static, bounded by the limits of their own reign. Freedom can only be theoretical for the enemies of freedom. In the same text, Constant rejects the rigid trial of comprehensibility — 'a popular art cannot now match the conceptions of the people, because as long as the people do not actively participate in artistic creation they can only conceive the historically imposed formalisms'6 — and expresses on the contrary the essential of our interests: 'we do not want to be “understood” either, but to be freed...' Constant's work, in its unfinished, 'scale model' aspect, like all the tendencies of situationist activity in general, perfectly illustrates the falsity of bourgeois artistic freedom. The artist has, at best, the freedom to ply his trade as an artist, that is, to carry out normalized production, matching the needs of a given stratum of the dominant culture's highly differentiated public. A truly vanguard project today poses the problem of new trades, which can hardly be exercised within the frame of bourgeois society, and whose predictable development, given the far greater means it would demand, is not even reconcilable with the capitalist economy. These trades are no longer, strictly speaking, trades. They are involved in the transition to the universe of leisure. The unused, anarchic technologies that our epoch has thus far invented, and their future developments, will have to be made available for them. I have already said that 'there is no freedom in the employ of time without the possession of modern tools for the construction of everyday life. The use of such tools will mark the leap from a utopian revolutionary art to an experimental revolutionary art.'7 Thus we are linked to the revolutionary enterprise by an inner necessity: 'We are condemned to experiment by the same causes that drive the world into war.'8 Clearly our position is not easy. And uncertainty reigns as to the positive results that we may achieve. Will we move, the first, all the way to the higher games ahead? Will we at least know how to work usefully in that direction? If not, the intermediary constructions will be worthless, commodities remaining simple commodities, memories remaining trivially memories. We are separated from the dominant society. We are also obliged to separate ourselves from the dominant artistic circles, meaning not only those which dominate classical bourgeois consumption, but also those which, in the same frame, are reputed to be modernist. The individuals who make up this artistic stratum are naturally in a state of competition between each other. But if our task is pursued as it demands, we will find ourselves in total contradiction with their economic interests as a group. 'A new freedom will be born,' as already announced by the manifesto of the Dutch group, 'which will allow men to satisfy their desire to create. Through this development the professional artist will lose his privileged position: which explains the current resistance of artists.'9 Artistic repetitions are a noble habit. Yet the human need for the new has never been so strong as in our epoch, and never so objectively valued.

We are separated from the degenerated workers' movement, and from the intellectuals who serve it with the class weapons of bourgeois culture. Nowhere is a revolutionary thinking, taste, or ethics being spread. But the current balance cannot indefinitely contain the forces unleashed by technological progress, which is now reaching a new and decisive turning-point. No more than it will be able to fully employ these available forces, capitalism and its variants, despite its ruses for the training of a consumer proletariat, will not be able to abolish the reality of exploitation. The revolutionary movement will form again, and we believe that our positions will be part of it. We are separated from the consolations felt by the old culture, for example from the glory of the avant-garde, and radically from the esteem of our elders who did so much for revolt and fine language. But what did Constant have to say? 'We have found friends without losing enemies. Are enemies indispensable? They are, and they will be until our problems are vanquished: our enemies make us conscious of our strength and of our weakness.'10

The methods for the conscious transformation of our environment are still young. In culture and everyday life they have just appeared. The situationists call the most advanced individuals in all the concerned sectors to unite themselves through such a project.

NOTES
1 'C'est notre désir qui fait la révolution,' COBRA. (Organ du front international des artistes expérimentaux d'avant-garde), no. 4 (November 1949) [English translation by Lucy Lippard in Herschel B. Chipp: Theories of Modern Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 601-601].
2 'Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives,' Internationale Situationniste, no. 2 (December 1948).
3 'C'est notre désir...'
4 Reflex, no. 1 (1948).
5 'C'est notre désir...'
7 'Thèses sur la révolution culturelle,' Internationale Situationniste, no. 1 (June 1949).
8 'C'est notre désir...'
9 Reflex, no. 1.
10 In the first issue of COBRA (April-June 1949).
Oriënt sector (Orient Sector) / metal, ink on plexiglass, oil on wood / 17 x 77.5 x 60.5 cm (photo 1, 2, 4, 5: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys / 3: Bram Wisman)

Plattegrond van de oriënt sector (Map of the Orient Sector) / pencil and ink on paper 40 x 51 cm
Inaugural Report to the Munich Conference  [Original in French, ‘Rapport inaugural de la conference de Munich,’ presentation to the Third Situationists Conference, held from 17-20 April 1959 in Munich. Published in Internationale Situationniste, no. 3 (December 1959), pp. 25-27. Translated by Stephen Wright]

Since the experiments carried out around 1953 by the lettrists, playing with what was permissible behavior in the urban milieu of the day, the notion that the ambient milieu was a conscious construction, related to life and its changing habits, has led to the idea of unitary urbanism. If we speak of urbanism in this context at all, it must be understood that the very concept of conscious creation, and its relation to a superior life, spurs us to breaking off definitively with current notions of urbanism. If we are to study and practice creative change in the urban milieu, in connection with a qualitative change in behavior and life-style, it will have to stem from truly collective creation, at the level of art.

Current cultural conditions, the decomposition of the individual arts, the impossibility of renovating or prolonging these arts, has produced a creative vacuum which can only favor our endeavor. The disappearance of traditional artistic forms and the progressive organization of social life have led to an ever greater lack of prospects for play in daily life. Our refusal of this state of affairs pushes us to seek new conditions of play and to reconsider the whole problem of culture — if we are to end up with a playful overall theory and a conscious practice of ambition-building.

We know that collective work is necessary for the accomplishment of our ideas and we are counting on the creative dissatisfaction of the most advanced contemporary artists, a dissatisfaction which is our common bond.

The idea of a unitary urbanism stems both from experiences such as drifting and psychogeography — invented and practiced by the lettrists — and from the research done in construction by some modern architects and sculptors. In both cases, the need to develop projects for a complete decor, as well as the integral unity of behavior and surroundings, has led to collective action.

In 1958, in a declaration made in Amsterdam, we established several points in an attempt to define both unitary urbanism and our current tasks with regard to it. This declaration proposed experimenting with a complete decor which was to extend to a unitary urbanism, and the quest for new ways of behaving in relation to such decor, such as the minimum program of the Situationist International. According to ‘The Amsterdam Declaration,’ we should therefore consider the situationist program as falling short of the mark if no practical activity is possible in this domain.

A situationist praxis with regard to unitary urbanism has to be our primary target — and the principal goal of our current meeting. We must not part company without examining together the possibilities which already exist in terms of practical experiments.

Unitary urbanism, states ‘The Amsterdam Declaration,’ is defined within the bounds of complex and permanent activity, consciously recreating the environment of man, drawing on the most developed ideas from various realms. This permanent activity cannot be transported into a future more favorable than the present, but our immediate task is to get this activity underway through the efficient execution of our program. Within the program itself, we can identify three separate tasks which have either already begun or can be undertaken right away:

Firstly: the creation of ambiances favorable to the propagation of unitary urbanism. It is our duty to tirelessly denounce the withering of the individual arts, and force artists to make their choices and to change trades.

Secondly: we have to carry out creative collective work by training teams and putting forth real proposals.

Thirdly: collective creation has to be supported by the permanent study of the problems we are envisaging and the solutions we will be putting forth.

The architect, like all those working in our enterprise, finds himself up against the need to change trades: he will henceforth be a builder not of single forms but of complete ambiances. What makes contemporary architecture so boring is its principally formal preoccupations. Architecture’s problem is no longer the function/expression opposition; that particular question is far behind us today. Even as he uses existing forms and creates new ones, the architect’s principal concern has got to become the effect that it is going to have on the dwellers’ behavior and existence. All architecture will then be seen as part of a broader and more complete activity; ultimately, architecture, like the other arts, will actually disappear to the benefit of this unitary activity.

The new urbanism will find its initial animators in the poetic and the theatrical fields, amongst artists, sculptors and architects, as well as within the ranks of advanced urban planners and sociologists. None of them, however, will be able to entirely achieve our vision. The input of all those who will live and build this life which we consider the very material of future creation will be required.

The reason we are putting forth such ambitious perspectives as those just outlined is not that we want to limit ourselves to predictions and prophecies. That kind of idealist attitude is the greatest danger we are up against at the present time. It leads to the risk of not making the shift to practice — indispensable if we are to move forward.

The life we are currently leading has to organize all the possible conditions for the development and the realization of our ideas. Unitary urbanism is not cultural work, but rather a permanent activity, which began with the notion of a unitary urbanism. Unitary urbanism has been coming into existence for several years now. From the outset, all the ideas we have developed in relation to it, the experiences derived from it, the studies and psychogeographical maps and the ambiance models have led to its development. We intend to accelerate this development by implementing the appropriate measures.

To this end, we have agreed to found a research bureau for unitary urbanism in Amsterdam, to carry out teamwork and study practical solutions. This work has to be sharply distinguished from the sort of teamwork which already exists amongst individual architects today, collective creation being for us not a unity, but rather an infinite quantity of variable elements. The Bureau de recherches pour un urbanisme unitaire must come as a first step toward more carefully elaborated proposals, grounded in reality, which both illustrate our ideas and constitute the micro-elements of what unitary urbanism is to become.

The Bureau’s success will depend on its capacity to attract competent collaborators who understand the spirit of what we are after, as well as on how effective we are in carrying out projects which will stand as the criteria of efficiency for the type of work we want to do.
Ambiance de départ (Ambience of Departure)
metal (iron, steel, copper), plexiglass, oil on wood / 10 x 99 x 75.5 cm (photo 1, 3: Victor Nieuwenhuys / 2: Rob Kollaard)
Klein Labyr (Small Labyrinth) / metal (aluminum, iron), plexiglass, wood, oil, chalk
70 x 35 x 56 cm (photos: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
Sectorinterieur (Sectors Interior) / metal (iron, aluminum, zinc), plexiglass, wood, oil, ink
20 x 60 x 60 cm (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
Industrieel landschap (Industrial Landscape)
mixed media (iron, steel, aluminum, copper),
plexiglass, oil on wood / 5.5 × 65.5 × 53.5 cm
(photo: 1, 2: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys / 3, 4, 5: Bram Wisman)
Sector constructie (Sector Construction)
metal / 280 × 160 × 60 cm / destroyed
(photo 1, 2, 3: Bram Wisman / 4: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
The need to build a large number of cities quickly, a need brought about as a result of the industrialization of underdeveloped countries and the acute housing shortage after the war, has made urbanism into one of today’s key cultural problems. We would even go so far as to consider that no cultural development is possible without new conditions in our everyday surroundings. It must first be pointed out that the initial experiments undertaken by teams of architects and sociologists were thwarted by a lack of collective imagination, which accounts for the arbitrary and limited approach followed in those experiments. Urbanism, as it is understood by today’s professional planners, is reduced to the practical study of housing and traffic as isolated problems. The total lack of alternatives involving play in the organization of social life prevents urbanism from attaining the level of creation and the gloomy and sterile appearance of most modern neighborhoods is a shameful reminder of this.

2. The situationists, explorers specializing in play and recreation, understand that the appearance of cities is of importance only as regards the psychological effects that it can produce, which should be taken into account along with all of the other factors to be planned. Our conception of urbanism is not limited to construction and its functions, but rather takes in all of the uses that can be found, or even imagined, for it. It is obvious that these uses must change along with the underlying social conditions and that our conception of urbanism is therefore first and foremost a dynamic one. We also reject the emplacement of buildings in static surroundings that passes at present for new architecture. On the contrary, we believe that all static, unchanging elements must be avoided and that the variable or changing character of architectural elements is the precondition for a flexible relationship with the events that will take place within them.

3. Bearing in mind the extent to which future recreational pursuits and the new situations that we are beginning to build must profoundly affect the basic idea of any urbanistic study, we can already expand our understanding of the problem through experimentation with certain phenomena linked to the urban environment: activity in a certain street, the psychological effect of different surfaces and constructions, the rapidly changing appearance of a space produced by ephemeral elements, the speed with which ambience changes and the potential variations in the overall ambience of different neighborhoods. The dérive, as practiced by the situationists, is an effective means of studying these phenomena in existing cities and arriving at preliminary conclusions. The psychogeographical notions gathered in this way have already led to the creations of plans and models of a highly imaginative sort that could be called architectural science fiction.

4. The technical inventions that humanity has at its disposal today will play a major role in the construction of the ambience-cities of the future. It is worth noting that significantly, to date, these inventions have in no way contributed to existing cultural activities and that creative artists have not known what to do with them. The potential offered by cinema, television, radio, and high-speed travel and communication has not been exploited and their effect on cultural life has been deplorable. The investigation of technology and its exploitation for recreational ends on a higher plane is one of the most pressing tasks required to facilitate creation of a unitary urbanism on the scale demanded by the society of the future.
Spatiovore (Space Eater) / metal, ink on plexiglass, paint on wood / 65 x 90 x 65 cm / private collection (photo 1: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys / 2, 3: Bram Wisman)

page 114:
65 x 30 x 65 cm / private collections
(photos: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
Another City for Another Life [Original in French, 'Une autre ville pour une autre vie,' published in Internationale Situationniste, no. 3 (December 1959), pp. 37-40. Translated by Paul Hammond]

The crisis in urbanism is worsening. The construction of neighborhoods, ancient and modern, is in obvious disagreement with established forms of behavior, and even more so with the new forms of life which we are seeking. The result is a dismal and sterile ambience in our surroundings.

In the older neighborhoods, streets have degenerated into freeways, leisure activities are commercialized and denatured by tourism. Social relations become impossible. The newly-constructed neighborhoods have but two motifs, which dominate everything: driving by car and comfort at home. They are the abject expression of bourgeois wellbeing, and all ludic preoccupations are absent from them. Faced with the necessity to build whole towns quickly, cemeteries of reinforced concrete are being constructed in which great masses of the population are condemned to die of boredom. So what use are the extraordinary technical inventions the world now has at its disposal, if the conditions are lacking to profit from them, if they add nothing to leisure, if imagination is wanting?

We crave adventure. Not finding it on earth, some men have gone to seek it on the moon. We prefer to wager first on a change on earth. We propose creating situations there, new situations. We count on infringing the laws which hinder the development of effective activities in life and in culture. We are at the dawn of a new era and are already attempting to sketch out the image of a happier life, of a unitary urbanism; the urbanism intended to bring pleasure.

Our conception of urbanism is therefore social. We are opposed to the conception of a ville verte, a ‘greened town’ where well-spaced and isolated skyscrapers must necessarily reduce the direct relations and common action of men. Conurbation is indispensable for the direct relation of surroundings and behavior to be produced. Those who think that the rapidity of our movements and the possibilities of telecommunications are going to erode the shared life of the conurbations are ignorant of the real needs of man. To the idea of the ville verte, which most modern architects have adopted, we oppose the image of the covered town, where the plan of roads and separate buildings has given way to a continuous spatial construction, disengaged from the ground, which will include groups of dwellings as well as public spaces (permitting changes in use according to the needs of the moment). Since all traffic, in the functional sense, will pass below, or on the terraces above, the street is done away with. The large number of different traversable spaces of which the town is composed form a complex and enormous social space. Far from a return to nature, to the idea of living in a park as individual aristocrats once did, we see in such immense constructions the possibility of overcoming nature and of submitting the climate, lighting and sounds in these different spaces to our control.

Do we intend this to be a new functionalism, which will give greater prominence to the idealized utilitarian life? It should not be forgotten that, once the functions are established, play will succeed them. For a long time now, architecture has been a playing with space and ambience. The ville verte lacks ambiences. We, on the contrary, want to make more conscious use of these; and so that they correspond to all our needs.

The future cities we envisage will offer an original variety of sensations in this domain, and unforeseen games will become possible through the inventive use of material conditions, like the conditioning of air, sound and light.Urbanists are already studying the possibilities of harmonizing the cacophony which reigns in contemporary cities. It will not take long to encounter there a new domain for creation, just as in many other problems which will present themselves. The space voyages which are being announced could influence this development, since the bases that will be established on other planets will immediately pose the problem of sheltered cities, and will perhaps provide the pattern for our study of a future urbanism.

Above all, however, the reduction in the work necessary for production, through extended automation, will create a need for leisure, a diversity of behavior and a change in the nature of the latter, which will of necessity lead to a new conception of the collective habitat having the maximum of social space, contrary to the conception of a ville verte where social space is reduced to a minimum. The city of the future must be conceived as a continuous construction on pillars, or rather as an extended system of different structures in which are suspended premises for housing, amusement, etc., and premises destined for production and distribution, leaving the ground free for the circulation of traffic and for public meetings. The use of ultra-light and insulating materials, as are being experimented with today, will permit the construction to be light and its supports well-spaced. In this way, one will be able to create a town on many levels: lower level, ground level, different floors, terraces, of a size that can vary between an actual neighborhood and a metropolis. It should be noted that in such a city the built surface will be of 100% and the free surface of 200% (parterre and terraces), while in traditional towns the figures are some 80% and 20%; and that in the ville verte this relation can even be reversed. The terraces form an open-air terrain which extends over the whole surface of the city, and which can be sports fields, airplane and helicopter landing-strips, and for the maintenance of vegetation. They will be accessible everywhere by stairs and lifts. The different floors will be divided into neighboring and communicating spaces, artificially conditioned, which will offer the possibility of creating an infinite variety of ambiences, facilitating the dérive of the inhabitants and their frequent chance encounters. The ambiences will be regularly and consciously changed, with the aid of every technical means, by teams of specialized creators who, hence, will be professional situationists.

An in-depth study of the means of creating ambiences, and the latter’s psychological influence, is one of the tasks we
are currently undertaking. Studies concerning the technical realization of the load-bearing structures and their aesthetic is the specific task of plastic artists and engineers. The contribution of the latter is an urgent necessity for making progress in the preparatory work we are undertaking.

If the project we have just traced out in bold strokes risks being taken for a fantastic dream, we insist on the fact that it is feasible from the technical point of view, that it is desirable from the human point of view, that it will become indispensable from the social point of view. The increasing dissatisfaction which dominates the whole of humanity will arrive at a point where we will all be forced to execute projects whose means we possess; and which we will contribute to the realization of a richer and more fulfilled life.
New Babylon [1959]
Groep sectoren (Group of Sectors) / collotype and ink / 57 x 68 cm

Groep sectoren (Group of Sectors) / metal (iron, copper), ink on plexiglass, oil on wood 4.5 x 100 x 100 cm (photos: Bram Wisman)
Groep sectoren (Group of Sectors)
collotype and pencil / ca. 57 × 68 cm
This area, which is situated on the edge of the city, gets its name from the color of a large part of its floor surface, notably on the eastern second level. This particularity adds to the rather joyful atmosphere, which predisposes the islet towards its adaptation as a zone for play. The different levels – three in the east, two in the west – are supported by a metal construction, disengaged from the ground. Titanium has been used for the construction bearing the floors and the buildings within; nylon for the footways and to cover dividing- and partition-walls. The lightness of this construction explains not only the minimum use of supports, but also a great flexibility in the handling of the different parts, and the complete suppression of volumes. The metal structure may be considered as the basis for an arrangement of interchangeable, dismountable element-types and furniture, favoring the permanent variation of the environment. Thus the following description will restrict itself to the general framework of the arrangement. The structure consisting of superimposed levels means that the greater part of the surface must be illuminated and climatized artificially. Yet nowhere has it been sought to imitate natural conditions, but instead to profit from this circumstance by creating climatic conditions and forms of lighting. This becomes an integral part in the ambient games that are one of the attractions of the Yellow Sector. It should be noted, furthermore, that in many places one emerges suddenly into the open air.

One can arrive in this part of the city either by air, the terracing offering a series of landing strips; by car, at ground level; or lastly by underground train – according to the distances to be covered. Crossed in all directions by freeways, the ground level is devoid of buildings, with the exception of various pilotis which support the construction, and a round building of six storeys (A), which supports the overhanging terrace. These supports, around which one has foreseen areas for the parking of the means of transport, contain the lifts which go up to the upper levels of the city or to the basement floors. The building (A) which houses the technical services, is separated from the rest of the islet and is only accessible from the terraces or the ground level. All the rest communicates internally and forms an expansive common space, except for only two buildings on the periphery of the city, containing apartments (B and C). Between these apartment buildings, whose windows look out onto the landscape, are to be found, at the north-east angle of the town and extending beyond the upper terraces, the great arrival hall (D) and a metal construction covered in sheet-aluminum of an extremely free form, whose two floors contain the passenger station and warehouses for the distribution of goods. While the hall is open to the air, the interior of the area itself is entirely covered.

The eastern part is divided vertically into two covered floors, plus the part of the terracing for the aerodrome. By means of furniture acting as dividers, the floors are arranged into a great number of rooms – communicating horizontally as well as vertically, by means of stairs – whose varied ambiences are continually changed by situationist teams, in conjunction with the technical services. Intellectual games, above all, are practiced there.

The western part appears immediately more complicated. There are two labyrinth-houses, one large and one small (I and M), which take up and develop the ancient forces of architectural confusion: the water effects (G), the circus (H), the great ballroom (N), the white plaza (F) beneath which is suspended the green plaza, which enjoys a splendid view of the freeway traffic that passes below. The two labyrinth-houses are formed by a great number of irregularly-shaped chambers, spiral staircases, distant corners, wastelands, cul-de-sacs. One goes through them adventurously. One can find oneself in the quiet room, clad in insulating material; the loud room with its vivid colors and ear-splitting sounds; the room of echoes (radiophonic speaker games); the room of images (cinematic games); the room for reflection (games of psychological resonance); the room for rest; the room for erotic games; the room of coincidences, etc. An extended stay in these houses has the tonic effect of a brainwashing and is frequently undertaken to erase the effects of habits.

The water games are found in the open air between these two houses, the terracing above having an opening which permits the sky to be seen. Jets of water and fountains are interspersed here with hoardings and constructions in bizarre shapes, including a heated grotto of glass where one can bathe in deepest winter while watching the stars. By taking passage K, which instead of windows is equipped with large optical lenses that greatly magnify the view of the neighboring district, one arrives at the grand ballroom. Or instead one passes along the terraces around the water effects, which jut out over the white plaza, visible below, where demonstrations are held; and which also give access to the green plaza on the floor below. In descending below this plaza the public transport may be found which communicates with the other neighborhoods.
Paysage artificiel (Artificial Landscape)
metal (iron, steel, copper), ink on plexiglass, oil on wood / 5 x 60 x 55 cm (photo: Rob Kollaard)

Hangende sector (Hanging Sector) / metal (iron, steel, copper, aluminum), blind rivets, oil / 100 x 130 x 80 cm (photos: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
128 New Babylon [1960]
1. Ondersteuning van een sector (Support of a Sector) / ink on paper / 32 x 46 cm
2. Labyrinth met trappen (Labyrinth with Stairs) / ink on paper / 46 x 32 cm
3. Trappen en ladders (Steps and Ladders) / ink on paper / 32 x 46 cm
4. Twee sectoren (Two Sectors) / ink on paper / 32 x 45.8 cm
5. Gezicht op een sector (View of a Sector) / washed ink on paper / 32 x 45.8 cm
1 Mobiele wanden (Mobile Walls) / ink on paper / 32 x 46 cm
2 Interieur New Babylon (New Babylon Interior) / ink on paper / 32 x 46 cm / private collection
3 Untitled / ink on paper / 42 x 61 cm
4 Labyrintisch interieur (Labyrinthine Interior) / ink on paper / 42 x 51 cm
Unitary Urbanism  [Original in Dutch, ‘Unitair Urbanisme,’ unpublished manuscript of a lecture held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam on 20 December 1960. Translated by Robyn de Jong-Dalziel]

The post-war years have witnessed tremendous activity in the field of urban development: villages have become towns, towns have turned into metropolises, metropolises have become regions of Asia, Africa and South America, industrialization has entailed the erection of a growing number of wholly new cities. But even in the already industrialized countries of Western Europe and North America, the continuing mechanization of life on the one hand, and population growth on the other, has resulted in a drastic change in the appearance of the big city. The huge influence over everyday life that this state of affairs gives to town planning accords it a central place in contemporary culture. Or rather: causes it to play a key role in the cultural crisis that characterizes the present age. For although town planning has become a more important factor in culture than ever before, it cannot be said to have enriched everyday life or culture. On the contrary, we must begin by stating that the influence town planning currently exerts on people’s lives appears to be of a negative character, that the cultural crisis is intensified and that town planning has contributed to this, that the great deficiency of culture, of social life, is felt more acutely than ever. I would even go so far as to claim that the continued existence of culture currently depends on a revolutionary intervention in our everyday environment and in our way of life. For one of the prime causes of the cultural crisis is the manifest discrepancy between the prevailing way of life and humanity’s biological development. The city, as the foremost exponent of this way of life, provides the clearest illustration of this discrepancy.

The failure of modern town planners can be attributed to their opportunism, their passive attitude to the problems confronting them, their uncritical deference to an obsolete cultural convention, to the existing image of society. What nowadays counts for town planning confines itself to the more or less aesthetic solution of current socio-economic problems; for the most part housing and traffic problems. For pragmatic reasons, that is for the sake of a quick provisional solution, town planners isolate these problems from the totality of social life, they see them as detached from the cultural issue. The result is that town planners lag behind their times, that they are forever out of step with developments. For example, in looking for solutions to the housing issue, town planners almost invariably take the family as their starting-point. Yet the family has long ceased to be the most important binding factor in society, and changing morals are leading to the formation of new social groupings that are unable to assert themselves adequately in today’s urban environment. This must certainly be seen as one aspect of the anarchism of today’s youth, of the gangs of disaffected young people prowling our city centers, etc. Another function of town planning, traffic, is so dominated by the needs of the private car that no consideration is given to the possibility, indeed, one can already say the necessity, of socializing traffic. After New York, Paris too is finding itself forced to close off large sections of the city center, perhaps even the entire center, to private traffic, and to replace it with a dense network of small public transport vehicles. While town planners continue to attach exaggerated importance to the interests of private cars, Paris bus stops have in recent years carried a request to motorists from the Préfecture de police urging them to make more use of the buses so as to ease traffic congestion in the city center. But the most telling example of the extent to which the town planners’ pragmatism has distanced them from the reality of life, and stands in the way of a creative approach to urbanism, is undoubtedly the Athens Charter. In this declaration drawn up in 1933 by the CIAM (with Le Corbusier in the lead) and since then neither updated nor amplified, urban planning is summed up in four functions: living, working, transport, and recreation, with total disregard for everything to do with culture. Here is a very clear demonstration of the town planners’ deferential attitude to the mechanistic and commercial tendencies dominating this age. Here is the proof that today’s town planners are indeed to blame for the failure of the modern city as a human habitat, for the disappearance of a social space in which a new culture could arise.

Are they perhaps aware of this? Is this why they are so intent on making up for the huge deficiency of the built environment with green belts and landscaping? Do they imagine that human beings, whom they have helped to rob of their living space, are to be fobbed off with a few bits and pieces of pseudo-nature? Where does this idea of the ‘garden city’ come from anyway?

When we examine the origins of this idea, we find that it is connected with such phenomena as the reform movement, vegetarianism, naturism, nudism, and so on, that it developed as a nineteenth-century reaction to mechanization, a manifestation of fear of the machine. A certain Ebenezer Howard thought he could curb the pauperization of the proletariat in the slums of the emerging English industrial cities with his garden allotments movement. This was the time when groups of laborers sought to defend their daily bread, which they earned with their own hands, by smashing machinery to smithereens. The time, too, of the new art, art nouveau or Jugendstil, which had its roots in the utopian socialism of John Ruskin and William Morris, which felt compelled to hark back to a past which had more to offer than the machine. But even though the machine has not let itself be checked, even though it has survived the ideas of Morris and Ruskin, even though it is presently opening up unlimited perspectives for humanity, for culture, the garden city idea lives on. Not Ebenezer Howard’s garden city, however: the nineteenth-century rural garden city degenerated under the pressure of events into the traffic city, embellished with parks and trees, where social contacts became increasingly difficult, where human beings grew lonely. All that remains of the garden city in our own day are traffic-free enclaves, islands in a sea of traffic where the pedestrian leads a legally protected but languishing existence, comparable to that of the North American Indians on their reservations. What is understood by ‘garden city’ is a mere fiction! In reality the modern town planner regards the city as a gigantic center of production, geared to the efficient transport of workers and goods, to the accommodation of people and the storage of wares, to industrial and commercial activity. The rest, that is to say creativity, life, is optional and comes under the heading of recreation and leisure activities.

The fact that the constant growth in leisure time in this age
of automation poses an acute problem, that young people are protesting more and more vociferously against the in-terminable boredom of present-day life, must in itself be sufficient reason for us to overhaul those famous urban planning functions and to resist a view of the city as a machine for living, ‘a machine à habiter’ as Le Corbusier put it. Human beings are more than machine fodder; life is more than well-oiled participation in the production process. The slavish existence of living, working and recreation cannot possibly constitute the starting point for building our living environment, the starting-point for a creative urbanism. These functions, however essential they may be, are subordinate to the all-embracing function of life: creativity, the urge to manifest oneself, to turn life into a unique event, to realize life as such. Town planning is not industrial design, the city is not a functional object, aesthetically ‘sound’ or otherwise; the city is an artificial landscape built by human beings in which the adventure of our life unfolds. Rather than comparing it to a workman’s tool, therefore, it would be appropriate to propose as an alternative to the functional city where culture, a new culture, has no chance, is based on faith in humanity, in these elusive masses to whom everybody seems to feel superior but who are nonetheless destined to be the bearers of the coming culture. Culture can no longer rely on the exception.

The new culture will either be a mass culture, or there will be no culture at all. It is the masses, the burgeoning masses, who are becoming increasingly influential, who hold the future in their hands and who are also the main victims of the current state of affairs; it is these masses, to whom we all belong, who must achieve the unity between lifestyle and environment that is absolutely essential for a new culture — for unitary urbanism.

What is unitary urbanism? Unitary urbanism is not only town planning, nor art, nor style; nor does it correspond to concepts like integration and the synthesis of cultural forms, which are much discussed nowadays, not even when this integration concerns the totality of social life. For this integration presupposes the presence in contemporary culture of useful practices, of directly applicable concepts, like architecture, poetry, social ties, moral principles. Yet there is nothing to integrate, because there is nothing! Which is why at this stage I would prefer to define unitary urbanism as a very complex, very changeable, constant activity, a deliberate intervention in the praxis of daily life and in the environment; an intervention aimed at bringing our lives into lasting harmony with our real needs and with the new possibilities that will arise and that will in turn transform these needs. So I am not simply opposing a different aesthetic, a different kind of ‘form-giving’ to static, material functionalism, to the aesthetic of the modern city. Unitary urbanism is flexible; it respects our freedom to change our way of life, it adapts to every situation, every need, to every technical, geographical or psychological possibility, it is the objectification of the creative urge, the collectivization of the art work, the materialization of a dynamic lifestyle. A lifestyle, in other words, which recognizes no goal in life, which is not intent on giving life a meaning, but which makes life itself the goal, which looks for the fulfillment of this life in daily praxis, a lifestyle, which aims to be the creation of our life. This conception of life is essential to unitary urbanism, just as the conception that places the meaning of life beyond this life, in the super-terrestrial, the abstract, is essential to that fragment of human history which is determined by the struggle for material existence and which seems to be nearing its end.

There are consequently two distinct aspects to unitary urbanism: a transformation of our habits, or rather of our way of life or lifestyle, and, connected with this, a profound change in the way our material environment is produced, a dynamic urbanism. Since the first-mentioned condition is bound up with a process that takes time, it follows that the second cannot be realized immediately either. Hence, the New Babylon project, which you will have an opportunity to see after the interval, is an imaginary project; it anticipates history; it is a futuristic project; it is based on a desirable course of history and is therefore also in a sense a utopian project. Nonetheless, I prefer to call it a realistic project because it distances itself from the present condition which has lost touch with reality, and because it is founded on what is technically feasible, on what is desirable from a human viewpoint, on what is inevitable from a social viewpoint. Because it is a reaction to a declining culture and a response to facts that signal a crucial change in the notion of culture.

Let us take a closer look at these facts in relation to town planning. Human beings inhabit the earth’s surface and exploit it; they change the earth from nature into culture. What are the circumstances under which they currently operate; what is the result, up to now, of humanity’s presence, of its interventions? Where will those interventions lead? If we calculate the average habitability of all points on the earth’s surface, the correlation between nature and human habitation, which so dominates contemporary town planning, presents a far less attractive picture than when considered exclusively from the relatively favorable climatological and geographical conditions prevailing in a densely populated, highly industrialized region like Western
Europe. This picture becomes even less attractive if we take account of climate, of seasonal change, of weather conditions and natural phenomena injurious to human beings. When we try to express the habitability of the earth — under natural conditions and during one seasonal cycle — as a percentage of the total surface area, we are forced to conclude that this figure bears absolutely no relation to the size of the earth's population and that it is most certainly disastrously out of step with the number of people estimated to be populating the earth in 50, 100 or 200 years' time. This disparity already manifests itself today and under the current manner of inhabiting the earth, in the overpopulation of climatologically favorable regions. But faced with the prospect of a world population estimated to exceed 7 billion a century from now, faced too with the prospect of needing to exploit the earth's surface more intensively in order to provide all these people with the basic necessities of life, we can no longer restrict ourselves to these few regions when it concerns town planning, that is to say, when it concerns not just housing but the very lives of these multitudes. Yet human beings are not simply faced with the necessity of inhabiting less attractive regions; they also have the means to make these regions habitable, to render themselves independent of nature.

The world has acquired a new dimension; nature's role is played out; nature now is simply raw material, controlled by human beings and used in accordance with their needs. And these needs can no longer be met by nature alone; technology already furnishes us with material conditions that are far superior to natural conditions; we are already completely dependent on technology for the bare necessities. And, owing to the force of circumstances, our needs are continually increasing, not just quantitatively, but also qualitatively, in the same measure as our connection with nature is declining. Technology replaces nature, technology becomes nature, becomes the medium, the sense by which we interpret nature. Not only are human beings, with the help of technology, preparing to leave the earth's surface and to go adventuring in outer space; they are even roaming, flying over, the earth's surface itself, in every direction, without omitting a single spot. And wherever they go, which is to say everywhere, nature gives way to technology. As such, the living space of each individual is getting bigger and bigger, their radius of action is extending further and further afield, the tracks they leave behind them form an increasingly complicated pattern. Human beings are leaving the closed community for a nomadic existence that will cover ever larger areas. Their existence is becoming more adventurous, their impressions more varied, their horizon wider, their need for change, for excitement, greater. Should we deduce from all this, as some urbanists are doing, that the huge urban concentration has had its day? Those who think this forget that population growth keeps pace with the increase in the radius of action of each individual, and that when the inevitable saturation point is reached, individuals will be forced to indulge their greatly increased urge for expansion within a limited area. This will entail the formation of enormous, perpetually expanding conglomerations which, to a limited extent, must nonetheless permit a tremendous spatial expansion.

Taken to its logical conclusion, this means that the city might eventually expand to cover the entire surface of the earth, but also that this surface will have to be far more intensively used. What we lose in geometrical space, we must recover in the form of psychological space. By intensifying the use of space we will be able to increase the living space of every individual, despite the increase in the number of individuals. Where, in such an intensive exploitation of the earth's surface, is the contrast between city and landscape; where can we still expect to find untrammeled nature; where is the outdoor life? Faced with the certainty that nature cannot remain inviolate, we must use the means at our disposal not simply to replace nature, but to surpass her. Our planning must even now take account of a total exploitation of the earth's surface, with unlimited development. But also with an unrestricted freedom to move around, with an undisturbed (and undisturbing), unlimited increase in traffic, on the ground and in the air.

Faced with this prospect, even the prosaic problems of the town planner — traffic and housing — call for revolutionary solutions. But an even more fundamental and all-embracing question is: how are all these people going to live? How will they be able to express themselves, manifest themselves, develop; in short, what possibilities will they have to realize their lives? Before looking at this question in more detail, we must first mention a factor that is crucial to any attempt to answer it: the so-called second industrial revolution, automation.

It is generally acknowledged that automation (by which we mean the mechanization of all routine work, including regulation and control of mechanical processes), the systematic automation of production, will lead to a colossal increase in so-called free time. Fear of the social consequences of this increased leisure time is one of the reasons why automation is progressing at a slower pace than is technically feasible. We may nonetheless assume that automation will not only remain a technical possibility, but that it will, within the foreseeable future, become a social fact, and town planning should even now be addressing this fact. Whatever the case, the development of the robot to perform slave labor (Norbert Wiener compares the electronic machine to the imported slaves of antiquity), will sooner or later bring humanity, which is to say the masses, unprecedented freedom, an undreamt-of opportunity for the free disposal of time, for the free realization of life. For it goes without saying that it will no longer be possible to speak of 'free time' once essential work is so much in the minority, and so much less monotonous, that it is no longer experienced as an onerous duty. Thus, we also reject all theorizing about the use of leisure which springs from a worn-out ethic stating it a duty to 'earn one's daily bread by the sweat of one's brow.' When a major part, the greatest portion, of our life, is no longer taken up with non-creative work, it no longer makes sense to speak of free time as if it were a matter of spare moments that have to be spent one way or another. For it is in this time that the largest part of our life will be realized: this time will be our life.

Life is activity. The freedom won as a result of the disappearance of routine work is a freedom to act. Obviously, it will be a creative activity that replaces work. The fulfilment of life lies in creativity. We do not of course see this creativity in the same sense as a contemporary art work. The individual work of art, seen from the vantage point of an unsatisfied, unfulfilled life, represents higher things, the more fulfilled, the exceptional. The manifestation is based on permanence, on the ideal of eternity. Unsatisfied by the existing situation, it tries to drown it out, to surpass it. The lived art work, in the sense of unitary urbanism, is exactly the opposite: it exists in time, it is the activation of the tem
porary, the emergent and transitory, the changeable, the volatile, the variable, the immediately fulfilling and satisfying.

Seen from the vantage point of unitary urbanism, the traditional art work is no more than a consolation, a surrogate that is no longer necessary. It is quite evident, therefore, that existing cultural forms have no role whatsoever to play in the realization of unitary urbanism. Returning to town planning, one can now ask: which urban function is essential for the development that we foresee, which urban form corresponds to the changes society is undergoing, how does this unity of lifestyle and environment, unitary urbanism, come about? Answering these questions leads us to a previously neglected function of town planning that unitary urbanism makes its chief and most characteristic theme: social space. While it is true that in recent years, and particularly in America, social space has been turned into a study — ecology — this study has confined itself to registering facts, to analyzing social space, insofar as it still exists in today's cities. Ecology is a static method that attempts to derive the laws of social space from statistical data. Ecology studies the conglomeration in its present form as if it were a quintessential rather than a fortuitous form of human cohabitation. But ecology takes no account of the fact that the city shapes its inhabitants every bit as much as the inhabitants shape their city. It takes no account of the fact that people are to a large degree determined by the environment in which they live, it disregards the psychological influence exerted by the environment.

For unitary urbanism, however, all this is of overwhelming importance. Indeed, unitary urbanism goes even further: having noted the psychological influence exerted by the environment, it resolves consciously to apply this influence, to use the environment to psychological effect, ultimately to achieve an interplay between environment and life. Which brings us to psychogeography. The concept of psychogeography distinguishes itself from ecology by its creative character. Psychogeography does not merely record facts, it also tries to identify and explain the unconscious influences exerted by the urban atmosphere and ultimately to use them as a means of activating our environment. It turns these influences into an artistic medium by which our environment is created. As an example of the fact that the psychological atmosphere is independent of the ecological definition of an urban district, I mention here St. Germain des Prés. The atmosphere of this bourgeois quarter of Paris was so profoundly altered by a small group of intellectuals, the so-called existentialists, that it acquired international fame and even became a tourist attraction. For ecology this phenomenon is of only minor interest because the inhabitants remain the same and all the action takes place in the streets and in the cafés which are dominated by individuals from other quarters. But if the built environment is included among the psychological influences on ambience, it becomes clear that unitary urbanism has some powerful resources at its disposal in its construction of social space.

Let us take a closer look at this concept of 'social space.' Historically, the street was more than a mere traffic artery. Its additional function, which may even have been more important than its role as thoroughfare, was as a collective living space where all the public events — markets, festivals, fairs, political demonstrations — took place, as well as encounters and contacts between smaller numbers of individuals, in short, all those activities that do not belong to the more intimate, private domain. The inn and the café, which sometimes spilled over into the street, were continuations of this collective space, public places where people were able to get away from the traffic on the street. The tremendous increase in traffic robbed the street of this social function. As a final refuge there remained the café, but the street itself became a traffic route and thus a sharp dividing line between isolated units of housing. This might perhaps account for the cultural significance of the café in the last century. The overriding importance that unitary urbanism attaches to social space, is related to the role of the frequent personal contacts which it considers vital for culture, for the mass culture that is to come. The realization of life in the sense of unitary urbanism, depends to a large extent on the place of social space in urban planning. It is here, after all, that most of the events that influence and determine daily life take place. It is here that a deliberate intervention in the material environment has most effect, only here can this intervention become a collective game aimed at the creation of our environment.

The cultural significance of social space makes it necessary to isolate this function from the purely utilitarian functions, especially those of traffic and production, to which social space has been sacrificed in today's industrial cities. The creation and maintenance of an extensive social space is, given the prospect of mass culture, the prospect of more free time — or rather a freer disposal of life — given also the prospect of an as yet unlimited increase in population and traffic, an absolute prerequisite. This is why I based New Babylon on a strict separation of traffic and industrial space on the one hand and residential and social space on the other. This separation is vertical because I accepted the principle of a covered city, composed of layers and supported on pilotis, that leaves the ground level entirely free. The actual urban body containing living spaces and collectively used spaces is consequently raised above the ground, inaccessible to traffic, which for its part has 100% of the ground level at its disposal. Unconstrained by buildings, the traffic is free to take the shortest route, but visitors to the city will have to leave their vehicles and take one of the numerous elevators to the top. The factories, fully automated, are for the most part built underground. The plan of New Babylon reveals a decentralized, reticular structure consisting of an irregular stringing together of numerous sectors, each covering an area of 5 to 10 hectares, which stretches for hundreds of kilometers in every direction and in which a population of on average 10 million people resides. Each sector consists of several levels topped by a terrace roof which may contain an airstrip, a heliport or sports fields. In view of their huge size, the levels are largely inaccessible to sunlight; so the interior of the city is artificially lit, ventilated and air-conditioned. There is no attempt to effect a faithful imitation of nature, however; on the contrary, the technical facilities are deployed as powerful, ambience-creating resources in the psychogeographical game played in the social space.

The typically linear structure of the plan means that inhabitants are never further than a few hundred meters from free, undeveloped space. Yet it is also possible to spend days, even weeks, traveling on foot through the endless expanse of the urban body, from space to space, from ambience to ambience, experiencing the adventure of New Babylon, finding accommodation in the residential precincts that are present in every sector; or traveling by vehicle at ground
level from one quarter to another, traversing bits of landscape or passing beneath the city and coming up again somewhere else. Only 15% of the internal space of the urban body is taken up by permanent housing or hotels; the rest is social space. These social spaces must be thought of as gigantic halls, one above the other, hundreds of meters long, which can be subdivided into bigger and smaller spaces, varying in size from a room to a public square, highly diverse and differing in atmosphere. The movable walls are an active element of the psychogeographical game referred to earlier. They are used to construct veritable labyrinths of the most heterogeneous forms in which one finds special halls for radiophonic games, cinematographic games, psychoanalytical games, erotic games, games based on chance and on coincidence. Even a short trip through the social space of New Babylon is more fruitful than a long journey through the unified world we know. A long sojourn in New Babylon would surely have the effect of brainwashing, erasing all routine and custom. There are no customs in New Babylon; it is obvious that a culture based on a dynamic game with life, that takes this life itself as its theme, that uses the activities of life as raw material for creativity, precludes all routine, all custom, all convention. The New Babylonian culture is based on the ephemeral, on the transience of an experience, and the contrast between this and new experiences. For this reason, even living and traffic cease to be purely utilitarian functions and become part of the game. Living becomes rest, the pause after a climax, the bridge between two activities; traffic becomes a means of increasing the pace, of accelerating action, of intensifying the contrast. New Babylonians play a game of their own devising, against a backdrop they have designed themselves, together with their fellow townspeople. That is their life, therein lies their artistry. They realize that it is the non-utilitarian element of play that is important for life, their ethics are based on freedom.

As I was under no obligation to adapt my city to given socio-economic conditions, an obligation that has wrecked the plans of modern urbanists, I have reversed the roles and painted my city against the background of a society based on freedom. I have therefore taken no account of land subdivision, of land and home ownership, of the many speculative and commercial elements that play a role in the construction of a city. I have excluded everything that prevents a city from becoming a work of art. Nonetheless, New Babylon is just as real as any work of art. In essence it is the realization of an old dream, a dream that figures in all tendencies, all movements, all endeavors in the history of art this century, and which, in its simplest form, one could refer to by its Wagnerian name: das Gesamtkunstwerk, the total work of art.
1. Schets voor een constructie (Sketch for a Construction) / ink on paper / 45.1 x 65.1 cm
2. Spatievorm / ink on paper / 45.1 x 65.1 cm
private collection
3. Sectoren New Babylon (New Babylon Sectors) / ink on paper / 45.1 x 65.1 cm / collection Wil Heins, Rotterdam
4. Torens (Towers) / ink on paper / 45.1 x 65.1 cm
private collection
1 Untitled / ink on paper / 43 x 63 cm
2 New-Babylon / ink on paper / 43 x 63 cm
3 Courants d'air (Air currents) / ink on paper 43 x 63 cm
4 Rood vlak (Red Plane) / color etching, aquatint / 10.3 x 13.4 cm / edition of 20
5 Untitled / ink on paper / 43 x 63 cm
6 Constructie (Construction) / ink on paper 27.3 x 45.8 cm
1. Diorama I / wood and mirrors / 43 x 43 x 17.5 cm
   collection Béatrice and Daniel Gervis, Paris
   (photo: Jean Dubout/Galerie Daniel Gervis, Paris)

2. Diorama II / wood, oil, glass / 63 x 63 x 17.5 cm
   private collection / long-term loan to Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague
   (photo: Rob Kollaard)

3. Diorama III / wood, oil, glass / 53.5 x 53 x 17.5 cm
   private collection / long-term loan to Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague
   (photo: Rob Kollaard)
Discipline or Invention? [Unpublished manuscript, sent to the students of Pratt Institute, New York, 1962]

The theme seems tendentious. It suggests that artists and architects at this very moment should be free to choose between the creative and spontaneous invention of new forms on the one hand, and on the other the self-denying servitude imposed by history and by common sense. This is not properly the situation we are in now. What do you mean by ‘disciplined’ architecture? Something like Mies van der Rohe’s lake shore apartment buildings? And what means invention? Churches like Le Corbusier ‘made’ in Ronchamps? Or perhaps a new architecture following the fashion of modern ‘action painting’, or shaped after the model of abstract sculptures? Before we should decide if there really is any choice for you, for us, if there really is more than one way to go, we have to make clear how free architecture can be, what the conditions of so-called freedom in art are, and also we must know the real nature of what is usually called discipline. We have to examine if these conceptions are still of our time, if they perhaps must be rejected, if any other new way could be traced, if we dispose of possibilities allowing us to surmount this traditional controversy.

But is this controversy still important at all? Is invention in our days represented by the informal and do we find discipline in the boring functional architecture which is called modern? We might find out that the real problem of this period is another one.

Culture has reached a critical point. In less than a century, mechanization has destroyed a way of living almost as old as humanity. This way of living was based on the domination of nature, on the labor necessary to explore the sources of natural richness. Human morals were concentrated on utility. Art and culture meant an escape out of the hardness of the struggle for life. They remained the big game, reserved for the few. The artists stayed out of the social processes of industrialization, their profession being beyond the reach of technolog. Their reaction towards mechanization allowed two possible attitudes: the tendency of free imagination, originally related to handicraft, was first started by the ‘arts and crafts’ movement in 19th-century England, continued until the prewar surrealism, and still survives in contemporary barbarism in painting and sculpture. This reaction has proved to be based on a wrong supposition. Human imagination is by far not so free, but depends on our interpretation of the mere facts, that is to say, on our aptitude to accept the world we live in, or not.

In a period of transition, like ours, the conditions of life can change so rapidly that we are inclined to disbelieve in the world and its future. This is the attitude of the present beat-generation. But imagination does not exist by its own, independent from our material circumstances. Creative imagination demands power to realize, and our imagination fails today for lack of power, because of the isolation of the artists in the present society. Look how poor and self-repeating the surrealist paintings have been, and modern abstract expressionism still is.

The other reaction to mechanization, apparently more realistic, was first represented by the Dutch ‘De Stijl’ movement during World War 1. The neo-plasticists tried to establish an unpersonal aestheticism, adapted to the needs of machine-production. Their aims have run out into the modern industrial design. Morally we can say that they continued the utilitarian conception of life and society.

But it is not the artists who decide the way society goes. The disciplined attitude of the neo-plasticists and constructivists seems old-fashioned now, because the effects of mechanization are very much different from what they expected in the preceding period. A second industrial revolution evolves, which also reaches the non-productive activities. For the artists there is no longer a choice, technology gets hold, also of their lives; nobody is untouched. In the present period, automation changes the conditions of the industrial society, and influences the personal life of all of us.

When we read that the American electricians union has obtained the 25-hour-week, one could ask how these workers will spend the other half of their time. The answer will show us perhaps, that freedom is the most difficult way of living that man can lead. For freedom can only be realized in creation and creation means discipline.

The aim of democracy is: to obtain for everybody what the culture-supporting few, of the old world in past centuries, had as a privilege.

The future of culture will very much depend on the extent to which the energies which no longer will be needed for the production of food and primary goods, will be spent in creative activities. The new culture will be a culture of everybody.

Of course, the architecture, and especially city-planning, will have much more to do with the new, free way of living that automation will enable, than individual arts like painting or poetry. The fact that these arts in this century are declining, a decline which will probably go as far as their complete disappearing, is not without relationship to the changes in society due to mechanization.

Actually, the case of the architect doesn’t much differ from that of other artists. Though his profession offers the best conditions for teamwork, and though he is professionally concerned with the sociological problems of mass-culture, his individual influence undoubtedly diminishes. The special character of architecture and urbanism, however, give these arts a central position in the problems of this transitional period.

The gigantic task, the planners in our era will have to prepare, is to shape the environment of a creative living humanity, to establish the material conditions of a free and creative life.

Thus, the problem young architects have to face, is not so much the aesthetics of building. Free invention of forms and history-based discipline, or any synthesis of these two conceptions, are condemned to be very soon out of date. In the circumstances we soon will live in, architecture cannot be limited to designing buildings.

If we consider that our present cities, as a whole, are functional in an arbitrary way, that the landscape in the highly developed countries is more and more dominated by industry and by traffic, it might occur to us how essentially the face of the world will have to change to harmonize with the coming needs of humanity.
Vergelijkende plattegrond New Babylon/Amsterdam Ookmeer (Comparative Map New Babylon/Amsterdam Ookmeer)
pencil, chalk, ink, collotype / 99 x 106.5 cm
1 Schematische voorstelling van een sector
(Diagram of a Sector) / ink on paper
32 x 46 cm

2 Constructie (Construction) / ink and pencil on paper / 39.5 x 64 cm

3 Laby (Labyrinth) / ink on paper / 39.8 x 42 cm

4 Twee vormen (Two Forms) / ink on paper
32 x 46 cm

5 Untitled / ink on paper / 29.8 x 42 cm / private collection

6 Figuren in een labyrint (Figures in a Labyrinth) / ink on paper / 31 x 45 cm / collection Wil Heins, Rotterdam

7 Interieur met trappen en deuren (Interior with Steps and Doors) / washed ink on paper
27.4 x 45.6 cm
1  Labyratoire (Labyratorium) / ink on paper  
   48 x 69 cm
2  Schets van Spatiovoren (Sketch of Spatiovores)  
   ink on paper / private collection
3  Schets voor een plattegrond (Sketch for a Map)  
   pencil and ink on paper / 88 x 132 cm / private collection / long-term loan to Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague
New Babylon / series of 10 lithos with texts by Simon Vinkenoog / 40 x 76 cm each / edition of 50

Page 150:
New Babylon / Amsterdam / ink on map / 53 x 62 cm

Page 151:
New Babylon / Amsterdam (special commission of 1968) / ink on map / 200 x 300 cm / collection Amsterdams Historisch Museum, Amsterdam
1. New Babylon/Holland / ink on map / 50 x 59 cm
2. New Babylon/Rotterdam / ink on map / 48 x 61 cm
3. New Babylon/Zuid-Nederland (South of Holland) / ink on map / 49 x 63 cm
4. New Babylon/Antwerpen (Antwerp) / ink on map / 52 x 64 cm
5. New Babylon/Ruhrgebiet (Ruhr Region) / ink on map / 52.5 x 63.5 cm
New Babylon [1963-1964]

1. New Babylon/Köln (Cologne) / ink on map / 50 × 60.9 cm
2. New Babylon/München (Munich) / ink on map / 48 × 58 cm
3. New Babylon/Paris / ink on map / 47 × 61 cm
4. New Babylon/Barcelona / ink on map / 47 × 63 cm
5. New Babylon/Den Haag (The Hague) / watercolor on paper / 200 × 300 cm
1. Sketch for a Sector (pencil on paper / 45 x 64 cm)
2. Sketch for a Sector (pencil on paper / 43.5 x 65 cm)
3. Sketch for Self-supporting Sector Construction (pencil on paper / 45 x 62.5 cm)
4. Sketch for a Sector with Pavilion Roof (pencil on paper / 48 x 65 cm)
1. Landschap met Spatiovore (Landscape with Spatiovore) / pencil on paper / 89 x 140 cm
   private collection / long-term loan to Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

2. Untitled / ink on paper / ca. 30 x 52 cm
   private collection

3. Vogelvlucht groep sectoren I (Birdseye view Group of Sectors I) / ink, pencil, and pen on paper / 39.4 x 53.2 cm

4. Vogelvlucht groep sectoren II (Birdseye view Group of Sectors II) / ink and pencil on paper / 38.2 x 56.3 cm

5. Vogelvlucht groep sectoren III (Birdseye view Group of Sectors III) / ink and pencil on paper / 50 x 65 cm

6. Künstliche Landschaft in New Babylon (Artificial Landscape in New Babylon) / ink on paper / 30 x 42 cm
The social model

The question of knowing how one would live in a society that knows neither famine nor exploitation nor work, in a society in which, without exception, anyone could give free rein to his creativity — this troubling, fundamental question awakens in us the image of an environment radically different from any that has hitherto been known, from any that has been realized in the field of architecture or urbanism. The history of humanity has no precedent to offer as an example, because the masses have never been free, that is, freely creative. As for creativity, what has it ever meant but the output of a human being?

Yet let us suppose that all nonproductive work can be completely automated; that productivity increases until the world no longer knows scarcity; that the land and the means of production are socialized and as a result global production rationalized; that, as a consequence of this, the minority ceases to exercise its power over the majority; let us suppose, in other words, that the Marxist kingdom of freedom is realizable. Were it to be, we could no longer ask the same question without instantly attempting to reply to it and to imagine, albeit in the most schematic manner, a social model in which the idea of freedom would become the real practice of freedom — of a ‘freedom’ that for us is not the choice between many alternatives but the optimum development of the creative faculties of every human being; because there cannot be true freedom without creativity.

If we situate all known forms of society under a single common denominator, ‘utilitarianism,’ the model to be invented will be that of a ‘ludic’ society — this term designating the activities that, relieved of all utility as well as all function, are pure products of the creative imagination. Now, it is as a creator, and only as a creator, that the human being can fulfill and attain his highest existential level.

In imagining a society in which each man is free to create his life, to give it shape according to his deepest aspirations, we will not have recourse to the forms and images of this long period of history in which man has had to sacrifice the greater part of his creative energy in an unceasing struggle for existence. Our social model will be, indeed, fundamentally different from preceding models; it will also be qualitatively superior. Let us begin with some basics:

- Automation of all ‘useful,’ repetitive activities frees, at the mass level, an energy that can henceforth be directed towards other activities.
- Collective ownership of the land and the means of production, and rationalization of the production of consumer goods, facilitates the transformation of this energy into creative activity.
- With productive work disappearing, collective timekeeping has no more raison d’être; the masses will, on the other hand, have a considerable amount of free time.

The network

It is obvious that a person free to use his time for the whole of his life, free to go where he wants, when he wants, cannot make the greatest use of his freedom in a world ruled by the clock and the imperative of a fixed abode. As a way of life, homo ludens will demand, firstly, that he responds to his need for playing, for adventure, for mobility, as well as all the conditions that facilitate the free creation of his own life. Until then, the principle activity of man had been the exploration of his natural surroundings. Homo ludens himself will seek to transform, to recreate, those surroundings, that world, according to his new needs. The exploration and creation of the environment will then happen to coincide because, in creating his domain to explore, homo ludens will apply himself to exploring his own creation. Thus we will be present at an uninterrupted process of creation and re-creation, sustained by a generalized creativity that is manifested in all domains of activity.

Starting from this freedom in time and space, we would arrive at a new kind of urbanization. Mobility, the incessant fluctuation of the population — a logical consequence of this new freedom — creates a different relation between town and settlement. With no timetable to respect, with no fixed abode, the human being will of necessity become acquainted with a nomadic way of life in an artificial, wholly ‘constructed’ environment. Let us call this environment New Babylon and add that it has nothing, or almost nothing, about it of a ‘town,’ in the traditional sense of the term. The town is a form of urbanization characteristic of utilitarian society: a fortified place for protection against a hostile external world, it becomes, as a mercantile center, an ‘open town’; then, with the advent of mechanization, a center of production — and at all these different stages it is the place where a stable population resides, rooted there by a particular way of life. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule: certain relations between towns enable a small number of individuals to change their place of residence, and in so doing trigger a process of acculturation in which the town acquires, aside from its utilitarian function, the function of a cultural center. But this phenomenon is relatively infrequent and the number of individuals involved is not great.

The culture of New Babylon does not result from isolated activities, from exceptional situations, but from the global activity of the whole world population, every human being engaged in a dynamic relation with his surroundings. There are no a priori links between anyone. The frequency of each man’s movements and the distances he will cover depend on decisions he will make spontaneously, and which he will be able to renounce just as simultaneously. Under these conditions, social mobility suggests the image of a kaleidoscopic whole, accentuating sudden unexpected changes — an image that no longer bears any similarity to the structures of a community life ruled by the principle of utility, whose models of behavior are always the same. In our case, the urban must respond to social mobility, which implies, in relation to the stable town, a more rigorous organization on the macro level, and at the same time a greater flexibility at the micro level, which is that of an infinite complexity. Freedom of creation demands in any case that we depend as little as possible on material contingency. It presupposes, then, a vast network of collective services, more necessary to the population in movement than to the stable population of functional towns. On the other hand, automation leads to a massive concentration of production in gigantic centers, situated outside the space of daily life. The centers of production outside this space and the collective facilities inside it determine the general lines of the
macro-structure in which, under the influence of indeterminate movements, there will be defined a more differentiated and necessarily more flexible micro-structure.

From these two preconditions—the optimum organization of material conditions and the maximum development of each person's sense of initiative—we can deduce the essentials of a structure that is no longer composed of nuclei, as in the traditional settlement, but is organized according to the individual and collective covering of distance, of errancy: a network of units, linked one to the other, and so forming chains that can develop, be extended in every direction. Within these chains are found the services and everything pertaining to the organization of social life, in the 'links' of the network, the entirely automated units of production, from which man is absent.

The basic elements of the network, the sectors, are autonomous units of construction, which nevertheless inter-communicate. The sector network is perceived from within as a continuous space.

New Babylon ends nowhere (since the earth is round); it knows no frontiers (since there are no more national economies) or collectivities (since humanity is fluctuating). Every place is accessible to one and all. The whole earth becomes home to its owners. Life is an endless journey across a world that is changing so rapidly that it seems forever other.

**Realization**

The building of New Babylon can only begin once the economy is exclusively aimed at the satisfaction of our needs, in the widest sense of the term. Only such an economy permits the complete automation of non-creative activities, and thus the free development of creativity.

The implementation of New Babylon is a slow process of growth of a sectorial world that progressively replaces pre-existing urban structures. At first one sees, in among the conglomerates, isolated sectors appearing that become poles of attraction for the former to the extent that, with the time consumed in work diminishing, the settlement becomes disorganized. During this time, the sectors are meeting places, socio-cultural centers of a kind; then, as their number is augmented and the links that unite them increased, activity within the sectors becomes specialized and increasingly autonomous in relation to the residential areas.

A New Babylonian way of life then begins to be defined, which takes off when the regrouped sectors make up a network: a structure that can compete with the settlement structures, whose significance is progressively downgraded as man ceases to take part in the production process. The same phenomenon being produced in many places, one will see many sectors group together, unite and form a whole. From then on, fluctuation will increase.

In the first phase, the distance between sectors and groups of sectors increases the demand for rapid means of locomotion. Crossing residential areas from one sector to another must be as brief as possible. Later, when the sectorial world is unified and fluctuation intensifies, there is no longer need to move quickly to change milieu. The flexibility of internal space in the sectors allows of multiple variations in environment and ambience across relatively constrained surfaces. As to the means of transport, they will not be so indispensable to movement. A new function emerges to expand their original function: from being a tool for work they become tools for play.

**Topography**

Given the scale of social space in the sectorial network, and its continuity, the space of rapid movement no longer coincides with the New Babylonian way of life. The latter is traversed by a slow and continuous flux, displacement being but one of the forms of activity within the sectors. But undoubtedly one would still seek to move rapidly from time to time, by land for shorter distances, or by air. For air transport one can imagine, on the terrace roofs, airplane runways and heliports. As to rapid circulation on the ground, we have to imagine a road network as independent as possible from the sector network. A multi-level lay-out would guarantee the autonomy of networks and thoroughfares. The best solution for decongesting the ground consists in raising the sectors on pilotis, spaced as widely apart as possible. One advantage of this construction is that it permits the arrangement of an unbroken sequence of terrace roofs. In this way, a second open-air level is created, a second artificial landscape above the natural landscape.

Given their huge size, the sector interiors depend on the system of distribution of energy needed for lighting, ventilation and air conditioning, but this 'dependency' implies a freedom from the monotonous alternation of day and night, which humanity has sought since the dawn of time.

Taken as a whole, New Babylon presents itself as a network of huge links, the greater part of which are raised above the ground. On the ground, a second network, traffic. The 'links' are areas generally devoid of building, though with the exception of centers of production and the installations that have no place in the sector's social space; like, for instance, transmitter antennae, and perhaps drilling rigs, historic monuments, observatories and other facilities for scientific research. Part of these vacant areas is given over to different working of the ground itself and to rearing livestock; another part to nature reserves, wooded parks. The network structure facilitates access to these, the intervening distances being each time relatively small.

The topographical surveying of New Babylon poses problems that cannot be resolved by using the traditional means of cartography. Given, on the one hand, its organization on many levels (ground, inside the sectorial volume, terrace roofs), the connections between levels, the nature of communications and the solutions of continuity created between the levels can only emerge in model form. On the other hand, the structures are anything but permanent. In effect it is more a question of a micro-structure in continuous transformation, in which the time factor, the fourth dimension, plays a considerable part. Consequently, any three-dimensional representation would, in itself, only have the value of a snapshot, since even admitting that the model of each sector may be reduced to several planes and sections of the different levels, and that one manages thereby to constitute a sort of detailed atlas of the sectors, would still be necessary, from one instant to the next, to record, using symbolic notations as in a ship's log, all the topographical modifications that are produced. Recourse to a com-
puter will doubtless be necessary to resolve such a complex problem.

The sector
The sector is the smallest element, the basic unit of the New Babylonian network, one of the 'links' in the chains that make it up. As one might expect, its dimensions are markedly greater than the dimensions of the elements (buildings) that make up the towns, such as they are known. The scale of these elements depends on the system of social relations. In rural communities, where human relations and family ties are tightly enmeshed, the basic element is the independent family residence. In industrial towns, given the social character of production work, relationships are established at school, in the place of work or leisure, in political and other meetings – which supplement family ties. Thus each member of a family creates personal ties outside of it. Under these conditions, larger residential units are seen to appear, blocks for many families, sometimes equipped with communal services. But there, as in rural communities, one is dealing with a sedentary population, a regular way of life. When the family group disintegrates and the division of time and space is no longer socially determined by productive work, when one can decide the place and duration of one’s stay, the ultimate ties are broken. For all that, the more or less lasting relations between people will not have disappeared, but restrictive social relations will have been replaced by more varied and changing emotional ties. More so than in stable communities, the fluctuating society favors fortuitous contacts and encounters.

The sector is a basic construction (macro-structure) in which an environment is constructed. Qwa support, the macro-structure must allow the greatest freedom in the permanent construction (micro-structure) of the interior space. In its simplest form, the sector incorporates a number of superimposed horizontal spaces linked to each other and to the ground by vertical elements, and one or more fixed nuclei for services. This space could be taken up by a more complex structure resulting from the articulation of variable smaller spaces. As an alternative to the support structure, one can also imagine a 'floating' structure, a suspended sector secured to one or more masts. Another possible alternative, the self-bearing structure, requires a limited number of points of support, which is an advantage, but, since the module and the dimensions of the micro-structure depend more directly on the macro-structure, the organization of interior space is no longer as free. The choice of one or the other solution – a sector on pilotis, or a suspended or self-bearing sector – also depends in certain measure on the geographical position.

The macro-structure, then, houses a moveable interior structure. Since the dimensions of the sector are important, any demolition or transformation of the basic structure is of necessity an ambitious undertaking. However, the ludic life of the inhabitants of New Babylon presupposes frequent transformation of the interior of the sectors. For this to take place without problems, the containing structure would have to be as neutral as possible, and, from the construction point of view, the variable contained structure would have to be completely independent of the former.

The variable structure grows out of the moveable assembly systems (walls, floors, terminals, bridges, etc.) light and therefore easy to transport, which can be as easily mounted as dismounted, thus re-usable. Any assembly project requires both the normalization of the module and the standardization of production. The dimensions of the macro-structure are determined by the module of standard elements. But this does not mean, of course, limiting the possible combinations or simplifying the forms, since a great number of standard assembly types and systems can be combined in a multiplicity of ways.

With these few data, a schematic idea of the sector can be arrived at. It is a mainly horizontal skeleton, extending over ten or twenty hectares at some 15-20 meters above the ground: the total height is somewhere between 30 and 60 meters. Inside, one or more fixed nuclei contain a technical center and a service center that is also a hotel reception center with individual rooms. Some of the sectors are provided with sanitary and teaching facilities, warehousing and distribution facilities for articles of everyday use. Others, with libraries, scientific research centers and anything else that may be necessary. The nuclei occupy a part of the sector; the rest, the most important part of New Babylon, is a social space with moveable articulations: the playground of homo ludens.

A volume with the span of a New Babylon sector is more independent of the external world than a construction built on a smaller scale. Daylight, for instance, only penetrates a few meters there, a large part of the interior being artificially lit. The accumulation of solar heat and the loss of heat in cold weather occur so slowly that the changes in ambient temperature barely influence the temperature inside. The climatic conditions (the intensity of lighting, temperature, the hygrometric state, ventilation) are all under technical control. Inside, a variable range of climates can be created and modified at will. Climate becomes an important element in the play of ambience, all the more so since the technical apparatus is accessible to everybody and the decentralization (of distribution) encourages a certain autonomy of the sector or group of sectors. Smaller centers are preferred to a single center, which facilitates reproducing the most diverse climates and, why not, inventing new ones as a contrast, changing the seasons, transforming them according to an infinitely varied synchronization according to the metamorphosis of space.

The audiovisual media will be used in the same spirit. The fluctuating world of the sectors calls on facilities (a transmitting and receiving network) that are both decentralized and public. Given the participation of a large number of people in the transmission and reception of images and sounds, perfected telecommunications become an important factor in ludic social behavior.

The New Babylonians
Creativity and aggressivity They wander through the sectors of New Babylon seeking new experiences, as yet unknown ambiances. Without the passivity of tourists, but fully aware of the power they have to act upon the world, to transform it, recreate it. They dispose of a whole arsenal of technical implements for doing this, thanks to which they can make the desired changes without delay. Just like the painter, who, with a mere handful of colors creates an infinite variety of forms, contrasts and styles, the New Babylonians can endlessly vary their environment, renew and vary it by using their technical implements. This comparison reveals a fundamental difference between the two ways of creating. The painter is a solitary creator who is only confronted by another person’s reactions once the creactive act is over. Among the New Babylonians, on the other hand, the crea-
tive act is also a social act: as a direct intervention in the social world, it elicits an immediate response. The artist’s individual creation seems, to other’s eyes, to escape all constraint and ripen in isolation. And it is only much later, when the work acquires an undeniable reality, that it will have to confront society. At any given moment in his creative activity, the New Babylonian is himself in direct contact with his peers. Each one of his acts is public, each one acts on a milieu which is also that of the others and elicits spontaneous reactions. All action, then, loses its individual character. On the other hand, each reaction can provoke others in turn. In this way interventions form chain reactions that only come to an end when a situation that has become critical ‘explodes’ and is transformed into another situation. The process escapes one person’s control, but it matters little knowing who set it off and by whom it will be inflected in turn. In this sense, the critical moment (the climax) is an authentic collective creation. The yardstick, the time-space framework, of the New Babylonian world is the rhythm in which each moment succeeds the last.

From homo faber’s point of view, New Babylon is an uncertain universe in which the ‘normal’ man is at the mercy of every possible destructive force, every kind of aggression. But let us note that ‘normality’ is a concept linked to a certain historical practice; its content is therefore variable. As for ‘aggressivity,’ psychoanalysis has granted it considerable importance, going so far as to define an ‘instinct’ of aggressiveness. The area of study thus found itself reduced to the man who struggles for his existence, to the human being engaged in that inmemorial combat he, like other species, is still engaged in. The image of a free man who does not have to struggle for his existence is without historical basis. The instinct of self-defense has also been postulated as the primordial instinct of the human being, and of all that lives. And it is to that instinct that all the others are related.

Aggressivity is a manifestation of the will to power, which is the attribute of a highly developed being (man) capable of foresight and who, in a world where his existence is threatened, can organize in time, that is to say, according to a plan, a safe place for himself. For that reason, man’s aggressivity does not disappear with the satisfaction of his immediate needs. It is, apparently, in the most industrialized, ‘rich’ countries that aggressive behavior regresses the least, above all among the propertied class. To shed light on this apparent contradiction between material security and the persistence of aggressivity, it would perhaps be necessary to admit the existence of an ‘instinct’ other than that of self-defense: the creative instinct, which appears with the sublimation of primordial instinct whenever material conditions are sufficiently favorable for self-defense to be transformed into open spontaneity.

The objective impossibility of realizing a creative life within a utilitarian society, based on the suppression of creativity but nevertheless containing all the conditions favorable to its development, permits us to understand why aggressivity finds itself apart from the struggle for existence. In contemporary society, the propertied class itself cannot act in a creative manner, and it is easy to understand that it feels more frustrated than the masses, who own nothing yet struggle for their future freedom. The goal of these struggles being the transformation of existing society, conflict itself is creation.

The creative instinct In speculating on the possible advent of a ludic society, one presupposes from the beginning that every human being feels the latent need to manifest his creativity, and that it appears in the sublimation of primary instinctual forms. This need is not satisfied in our static society, where its accomplishment through creation can only be potential. All education that prepares the future adult for the ‘useful’ role he will play in society tends to repress the creative instinct. However, it often comes about that ‘utility’ disappears with the development of technology, even before the child arrives at the end of his studies. Under these conditions ‘education’ can only play a negative role in the repression of all spontaneous creativity. If this were not the case, the adult would be more creative than the child, while in reality the opposite is true.

But can one conceive of an education aiming at the development of creativity? It is permissible to doubt and to ask oneself if all education, or what is designated by that term, is not extremely limited, if its principle function is not to restrain freedom, which is the fundamental condition of creativity. The only education favorable to creation is that which unfetters the development of creativity. But homo ludens dispenses with education. He learns by playing.

Those who cannot adapt to the structures of utilitarian society condemn themselves to isolation. These are the ‘asocial’ types, a term often synonymous with ‘criminal.’ ‘Criminality’ presupposes transfiguration of constituted sociocultural relations, which explains the different interpretations of which it has been the object. Crime, ‘the criminal act,’ disturbs the order of these relations and society reacts by eliminating the guilty person. When, from a totally different perspective, ‘the criminal act’ is considered as an expression of a frustrated will to power, which is transformed into creativity when sublimated, the ‘crime’ becomes no more than an abortive attempt at creation. The attitude of the criminal vis-à-vis reality is no more passive than the artist’s, since he too intervenes in a given situation. But while the creative act brings together destruction and construction, lending them balance, the criminal privileges destruction.

Yet the artist’s intervention displays, at least as regards utilitarian society, an ‘asocial’ attitude whose effect is barely distinguishable from that of the crime. In New Babylon, where no ‘order’ is respected, community life takes shape within the dynamic of permanently changing situations. This dynamic activates forces that in utilitarian society are repressed or at best tolerated. That is why it is unthinkable that a life like that in New Babylon could be imposed on contemporary society, even for the briefest length of time. When social conventions are no longer respected, as during carnival, it is not creativity that increases but aggressivity: an aggressivity directly proportional to the pressure exerted on creativity by the society.

Every reason for aggressivity has been eliminated in New Babylon. The conditions of life favor sublimation, and activity becomes creation. This superior form of existence is only possible in a world of total freedom where the human being no longer struggles to maintain a certain level, but concentrates his activity on the permanent creation of his life, which he directs toward an even higher level.

The New Babylonian The struggle for subsistence has divided humanity into interest groups that are often competing but always opposed to the idea of joining together in large groups, harder to defend. The prolonged division into races, tribes, nations, social classes is also explained by the historical conditions of this struggle. In a society that no longer knows the struggle for subsistence, competition disappears at both the individual and group level. Barriers and fron-
tiers also disappear. The way is open to the intermixing of populations, which results in both the disappearance of racial differences and the fusion of populations into a new race, the world-wide race of New Babylonians.

The New Babylonian disposes of a complete freedom of action, but this liberty is only actualized in relations of reciprocity with all of his peers. A ludic society based on the community of interests of all human beings knows none of the individual or collective conflicts that characterize utilitarian society. Conflict of interest, competition and exploitation are, in this context, notions devoid of content.

The New Babylonian community comprises the totality of the inhabitants of New Babylon, and it is their simultaneous activity that creates the new collective culture.

Even when he covers enormous distances, homo faber moves in a social space limited by the obligations to return to a fixed abode. He is ‘tied to the land.’ His social relations define his social space, which includes his home, place of work, the home of his family and of his friends. The New Babylonian escapes these constraining ties. His social space is unlimited. Because he is no longer ‘rooted’ he can circulate freely: much more freely since the space he traverses endlessly changes space and atmosphere with the result that it is constantly renewed. Mobility, and the disorientation it produces, facilitates contacts between people. Ties are made and unmade without any difficulty, endowing social relations with a perfect openness.

On some elements of New Babylonian culture The essence of New Babylonian culture is playing with the elements that make up the environment. Such play is possible due to the integral technical control of all those elements, which thus become a conscious creation of the environment.

The components of the environment are numerous and of different kinds. In order to imagine them in all their diversity, it would be necessary to begin by distinguishing several groups, proceeding from two separate criteria: an objective criterion and a subjective criterion.

A Elements of spatial construction, which determine its appearance and are the object of prior planning. They can be grouped within the category of ‘architectural elements.’ (Examples: the form and dimensions of space, the building materials, their structure, their colors.)

B Elements defining the quality of space. Being more malleable, they cannot be planned to the same extent. These are the ‘climatic conditions’ (temperature, humidity, atmosphere, etc.)

C Elements that, without deciding the quality of space, influence the perception of space. Their utilization is aleatory and their effect of brief duration. These are ‘psychological elements.’ (Examples: movement, eating and drinking, the use of verbal or other communication, etc.)

Another classification, using more subjective criteria, distributes the environmental elements according to the influence they exert on us. Here one discerns visual, sonorous, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory elements.

But whatever the criteria, it is difficult to isolate an element, to separate it from the rest. And a great number of important elements can form part of many different categories. Thus, among the elements chosen according to the first criterion, the structure of space is linked to climatic conditions as well as to movements in space. The pleasure taken in eating and drinking is not the same in every space, whatever the climate.

As to the second criterion, it enables us to discover even more complex associations. A structure, for instance, can be perceived by the sight and by the touch; language is addressed equally to the hearing and to sight. Food and drink to taste, but also to smell, to sight, to touch. To these elements others are added, acting one on the other in close interdependence. Dissociative analysis is only justified from the viewpoint of technical control. Being sensitive to an environment, to an atmosphere, one does not imagine distinguishing between the elements that make it up, just as when looking at a painting one does not separate out the different materials used by the painter.

Forms of behavior It is well known that behavior is strongly influenced by environmental elements. In psychiatry the manipulation of these elements is called ‘brainwashing.’ In New Babylon, where each person can freely use the technical apparatus and actively participate in the collective organization of space, these elements cannot be chosen according to a pre-established goal. Any initiative in one direction or another can, at any moment, be detoured by different, even opposed initiatives.

If the New Babylonian can transform the environment and the ambience by using the available technical material, if in so doing he can temporarily influence the behavior of others, he in turn undergoes their influence. In any event, the effect of his intervention does not last long, since being a provocation each intervention cannot remain without response.

An objection could be raised, creativity not being the same for all, that the influence of the most active and gifted will be stronger than that of the less energetic and inventive. This objection, however, is characteristic of a utilitarian mentality, which sees in the superiority of intelligence and energy the surest means of acceding to power. In a collective culture, the individual act intermingles with general social activity. It cannot be isolated and the result bears no trace of this. Collective culture is a composite culture, a product of the close and organic interdependence of all creative activity. It is the contrary of the competitive culture we know, which takes the absolute superiority of the strongest, of ‘genius,’ as the unit by which to measure all activity—which results in an unparalleled waste of creative energies.

Let’s imagine, then, that at a given moment x number of individuals find themselves inside one of the sectors. That the sector is divided into many spaces of different size, form, and atmosphere. That each of these spaces is at the point of being transformed: being built, destroyed, mounted, dismounted... That all the individuals present actively participate in this incessant activity. That each person can circulate freely from one space to another. That the sector is being crossed incessantly from one part to another by new people and by those who, after having stayed there awhile, leave. Such mobile complexity of both the spatial conditions and the composition of the ‘population’ determines New Babylonian culture.

The sectors constantly change form and atmosphere according to the activities that are taking place there. Nobody can return to what was before, rediscover the place as he left it, the image he’d retained in his memory. Nobody now falls into the trap of habit.

Habits, the totality of which constitute a social ‘model of behavior,’ are what, in utilitarian society, privilege a static way of life: they are so many automatisms. However, the dynamism of a life of permanent creation excludes all automatism. Just as an artist cannot and does not want to repeat one of his works, so the New Babylonian who creates his life cannot exhibit repetitive behavior.
The dynamic labyrinth

While in utilitarian society one strives by every means towards an optimal orientation in space, the guarantee of temporal efficiency and economy, in New Babylon the disorientation that furthers adventure, play, and creative change is privileged. The space of New Babylon has all the characteristics of a labyrinthine space, within which movement no longer submits to the constraints of given spatial or temporal organization. The labyrinthine form of New Babylonian social space is the direct expression of social independence.

The ambience of an environment possessing certain specific plastic and acoustic characteristics depends on the individuals who find themselves there. A single individual can passively submit to this ambience or change it according to his mood at the time. But with the entrance of a second person, a new presence is felt and the interaction of the two presences excludes any passivity. The quality of the environment and its ambience no longer depends on material factors alone, but on the manner in which they will have been perceived, appreciated and used, on the 'new way of looking' at them. And when a third or fourth person comes to take his place alongside the others, the situation — being more complex — escapes the control of any of the people present. As the number of visitors gradually increases and the composition of the group alters, complexity also increases, while the individual control of space decreases.

The collective use of space entails qualitative change since it tends to reduce passivity. The activity of the occupants of a space is an integral part of the ambience that, being static, becomes dynamic. In a social space where the number of individuals is ceaselessly changing, along with the relations between them, each and every person is prompted to change his personal ambience. All these impulses, brought together, represent a force that manifestly acts on the ordering of space, and in New Babylon, where space is public, it acts continuously. Space in its entirety will thus submit to the most unexpected influences, and one can imagine that a similar process unfolds simultaneously in infinitely diverse ways in a multitude of spaces, whose number is as variable as the links created between them. One arrives, then, at the image of an immense social space that is forever other: a dynamic labyrinth in the widest sense of the term.

Technology

Technology is the indispensable tool for realizing an experimental collectivism. To seek to dominate nature without the help of technique is pure fiction. As is collective creation without the appropriate means of communication. A renewed, reinvented audiovisual media is an indispensable aid. In a fluctuating community, without a fixed base, contacts can only be maintained by intensive telecommunications. Each sector will be provided with the latest equipment, accessible to everyone, whose use, we should note, is never strictly functional. In New Babylon air conditioning does not only serve to recreate, as in utilitarian society, an 'ideal' climate, but to vary ambience to the greatest possible degree. As for telecommunications, it does not only, or principally, serve interests of a practical kind. It is at the service of ludic activity, it is a form of play.

In order to grasp this, let us take the example of a local café, a very quiet café whose atmosphere would suddenly become animated when some new arrival puts money in the jukebox. In New Babylon, each person can at any moment, in any place, alter the ambience by adjusting the sound volume, the brightness of the light, the olfactory ambience or the temperature. Should a small group enter a space, then the ordering of that space can become something else. By articulating many small spaces, one can create a space of more ample dimensions, or vice versa. One can also change the form of a space with new entrances, or by blocking the old ones; by adding or removing stairs, bridges, ladders, ramps, etc. With a minimum of effort, one can arrive at any desired modification. Moreover, one has at hand a varied range of partitions of different materials, textures and colors; different too in their thermo-acoustic qualities. The stairs, bridges and pipes are themselves of varied construction and form. Through the combination of irregular, barely practicable surfaces, of smooth ramps, narrow passages, acute angles, etc., certain spaces become selective. This would be the case with those one gets to by a rope ladder or pole, and which will be the favorite places of children and young people. The marginal sectors, which perch on the side of a mountain or along the coastline and which are, given their situation, less frequented, will be the preferred choice of retired or sick people.

The sectors must be as independent as possible from the viewpoint of their construction and their technical facilities. This is important, since any sector must be able to be reconstructed without damage to the neighboring sectors to which it is linked by mobile bridges. The large electric or nuclear power stations that supply the sectors are sited, of course, as far as possible from the network.

The intensification of space

In New Babylon, where the nature and structure of space changes frequently, one will make much more intensive use of global space. The volume of social space and of social activity in space has two consequences: the space available for individual use is greater than in a society with a sedentary population; yet there is no more empty space, space unused even for a brief time, and, as one makes creative use of it, its aspect changes so much and so often that a relatively small surface offers as many variations as a trip around the world. Distance covered, speed, are no longer the yardsticks of movement; and space, lived more intensely, seem to dilate. But this intensification of space is only possible due to the creative use of technical means — a use that we, who live in a society where use has a finality, can hardly imagine.

To succeed in life is to create and re-create it incessantly. Man can only have a life worthy of himself if he himself creates. When the struggle for existence is no more than a memory, he will be able, for the first time in history, to freely dispose of the whole of his life. He will be able, in complete freedom, to give his existence the form of his desires. Far from remaining passive toward a world in which he is content to adapt himself, for better or worse, to external circumstances, he would aspire to creating another one in which his liberty is realized. In order that he may create his life, it is incumbent on him to create that world. And that creation, like the other, entails the same uninterrupted succession of re-creations.

New Babylon is the work of the New Babylonians alone, the product of their culture. For us, it is only a model of reflection and play.
1 Babylon-Domazlice (reisschets) (Travel Sketch) / ink on paper / 30 x 42 cm
2 Figuren in ruimte (reisschets) (Figures in Space — Travel Sketch) / ink on paper / 30 x 42 cm
3 New Babylon / pencil, crayon / 141 x 129 cm / collection Kröller Müller Museum, Otterlo
4 Homo Ludens / pencil on paper / 133 x 133 cm
5 Schets voor het E.S.R. (Sketch for the E.S.R.) / pencil on paper / 127 x 140 cm / collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
A growing discrepancy can be observed between the standards applied in allocating urban space and the real needs of the community. Town-planners and architects still tend to think in terms of the four functions of the city as defined by Le Corbusier in 1933: living, working, traffic, and recreation. This over-simplification reflects opportunism rather than insight into and appreciation of what people actually want today, with the result that the city is rapidly becoming obsolete. At a time when automation and other technological advances are reducing the demand for manual labor, plans go forward to build working-class districts suitable only for passing the night. While privately owned cars are multiplying so swiftly that their very numbers render them practically useless, more and more living space is given up to provide parking facilities. The Buchanan Report, *Traffic in Towns,* shows that 'full car-ownership' in a small city like Leeds (513,800 inhabitants in 1963) would require so much space that the problem of overcrowding would be unsolvable. Although air pollution threatens the very existence of plants, animals, and even human beings, people still talk optimistically about 'garden cities.' And while Jeremiahs bemoan the problem of increasing 'leisure time,' the restrictions laid upon the space available for public recreation deprive young people of all opportunity to use the leisure they have.

2 A logical consequence of the growing amount of leisure time is that the idea of recreation is becoming meaningless. Recreation is the recouping of energy lost during the working process. As soon as there is a surplus of energy available for activities other than work, recreation becomes pointless and makes way for the possibility of true creativity — the creation of a new way of life, of a new environment. That is the reason why the youth of today no longer turn to hobbies and clubs for relaxation but seek excitement in communal initiatives.

3 These collective endeavors can never take place in the country but only in the city, for it is not silence and solitude that the young are after, but encounters with others in a social environment. The phenomenon of bumper-to-bumper roadside picnics proves that the country outing is more a flight from the functional city than an excursion to enjoy the beauties of nature. Amsterdam's Forest Park becomes a social environment on hot Sundays in August. If urban space were planned to meet the needs of a leisureed society, these flights from the city would become unnecessary. Paradoxically enough, when townspeople trek *en masse* to the great outdoors, the difference between town and country disappears. A camping area is a form, however primitive, of a city.

4 The social environment of the city is being threatened by a chaotic traffic explosion, which is itself the result of carrying proprietary rights to ridiculous extremes. The number of parked cars at any given moment far exceeds the number on the move. Use of a car therefore loses its major advantage: rapid transport from one place to another. The storage of private property on public ground — which is what parking is — gobbles up not only the space required for the flow of traffic but increasingly larger chunks of living space as well. Efficient use of the motorcar can be achieved only by collective utilization of the total number of cars, and this total must be limited to the number actually needed. It is a scandal that countless people have to walk, even in bad weather, when more than enough cars to transport them are standing idly parked at the side of the road, obstructing traffic and worse than useless.

5 Traffic's wholesale invasion of social space has led, almost imperceptibly, to violation of the most fundamental human rights. The traffic code has degraded the individual who proceeds by the only natural means of locomotion to the rank of 'pedestrian,' and has curtailed his freedom of movement to such an extent that it now amounts to less than that of a vehicle. So much public space is forbidden ground to the pedestrian that he is forced to seek his social contacts either in private areas (houses) or in commercially exploited ones (cafés or rented halls), where he is more or less imprisoned. In this way the city is losing its most important
function: that of a meeting-place. It is highly significant that the police try to justify their measures against ‘happenings’ on the public thoroughfares by arguing that such manifestations impede traffic. This is an implicit acknowledgment that high-speed traffic is king of the road.

6 The acculturation process takes place within the social environment; if this environment does not exist, no culture can form. The more numerous and varied the contacts, the more intensely does the acculturation flourish. Chombart de Lauwe was the first to point out this function of certain urban areas (especially old districts), which he termed ‘acculturation zones.’ He noted in particular that the culture-forming process is strongest in those districts where the population is looked upon as anti-social, and that the contact between different groups – a contact which gives rise to new culture-forming elements – is most intense in districts where there is evidence of social dislocation.

7 The fact that all bureaucrats are enamored of order, of a regulated society, leads them to destroy acculturation zones. Baron Haussmann slashed his boulevards through such zones in Paris in order to facilitate the rapid movement of troops. In Marseilles, the Nazis tore down the old harbor quarter to break the resistance of the citizens. The present redevelopment of city centers and the deportation of inhabitants to the suburbs has a similar effect.

8 The so-called ‘garden-city movement,’ propagated in about 1900 by the English town-planner Ebenezer Howard, was based on the assumption that industrial production could be raised if workers were given improved housing and living conditions. The prerequisites for the movement’s success – the wish to be near nature, a love of work, the closeness of family ties – are no longer valid today. Garden cities are therefore obsolete before they are even finished. Instead of the rural idyll that Howard had in mind, suburbs built on this plan are mere dormitories – places to sleep in and to escape from at the first opportunity, that is, at the first stroke of leisure time. Isolated housing units marooned in a sea of traffic become ghettos for a population whose sole contact with the rest of the world is through the controlled ‘communications’ media of press, radio, and television.

9 A person’s living quarters become less important to him as his radius of action expands and his amount of leisure time increases. When productive labor was introduced in the New Stone Age, man was transformed into a sedentary creature, but now that the need for manual work is disappearing, there is little reason to be tied down to one place for long periods. At the same time, however, there is a growing demand for temporary accommodation – hotels, and even caravans and tents. The proportion of dwelling space to the total social space requires immediate reassessment in favor of the latter, for the needs of an emerging race of nomads must be satisfied.

10 The nature of the social environment will depend on the way in which the newly released energy is put to use. In any event, this space will be the setting of play, invention, and the creation of a new way of life. Utilitarian norms such as those that apply in the functional city must yield to the norm of creativity. In future, man’s way of life will be determined not by profit but by play.

11 The above points explains why the teen-age revolt against the fossilized standards and conditions of the past is aimed chiefly at the recovery of social space – the street – so that the contacts essential for play may be established. Idealists who think that these contacts can be arranged by organizing youth clubs, publications, or hiking groups are seeking to substitute prescribed patterns of behavior for spontaneous initiatives. They are opposed to the most important characteristic of the new generation, creativity – the desire to create a behavior pattern of their own, and ultimately to create a new way of life.

NOTES
1 London: her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1963. This report was commissioned by the British Ministry of Transport and was under the direction of Professor Colin Buchanan.
Groot labyr (Large Labyrinth) / oil on metal (aluminum, iron), plexiglass / 84 x 75 x 105 cm
(photos: Bram Wisman)

Joy Riding / pencil and color crayon on paper
120 x 120 cm
1 Twee figuren in een landschap (Two Figures in a Landscape) / pencil and watercolor on paper / ca. 30 x 42 cm
2 Spiegelalbriinth (Mirror Labyrinth) / crayon on paper / ca. 40 x 60 cm
3 Greeten uit New Babylon (Greetings from New Babylon) / litho / 52 x 68 cm / edition of 30
4 New Babylon / pencil on paper / 102 x 147 cm / collection Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam
5 Early version of Fragment van een sector (Fragment of a Sector) / 62 x 144 x 162 cm
The word ‘construction,’ used in relation to art, evokes the image of an activity that is essentially opposite to the common concept of painting as a means of personal expression. In the slang of Parisian art critics, the term ‘abstraction froide’ – cold abstraction – was used during the fifties, to accentuate the ‘cool’ climate of any non-individualist conception of art. The counter-term ‘abstraction chaude,’ or warm abstraction, was never used and would have sounded ridiculous. This can only be explained if we consider the negative and disappointing meaning of the term ‘abstraction froide.’

The constructivist movement in art arose in the first period of mechanization, the tendency of constructivism being typical for industrializing countries. Constructivist artists are very much aware of the presence and the influence of machines, and many of them feel solidarity with the workers in industry – they are inclined to want to be workers themselves. There is a romantic side to this worshiping of machines and mechanical craftsmanship. But if we consider the historical fact that artists have always been dependent on the non-working upper classes in society, we can understand that constructivism could only derive from a social revolution that put labor forward as the source of richness and culture. Hence it was the most logical form of art in Russia during the years that followed the revolution of 1917.

And in the other countries of Europe where industrialization began to have its impact on daily life, constructivist ideals arose that were always connected with interest in the life of the working classes; sometimes with feelings of solidarity with the proletariat and with ideals of a new socialist society. We may therefore consider the ‘arts and crafts’ movement in England in the nineteenth century as a forerunner of constructivism, although the ‘arts and crafts’ movement was distinctly against machinework. We should not forget however that the role machines play in constructivist art is rather superficial.

The works of constructivist artists are handmade, and if they use products of industry as their material the same thing can be said of the arts and crafts people who used such products as machine-woven threads, plywood and chemical colors. In spite of the machine cult that characterized some earlier constructivists, especially in the Soviet Union, their relationship to mechanization should be seen against the background of social changes that affect the social position of artists as well. The constructivists more than any other artists are aware of the decline of individualism, and they strongly feel the need of an objective style that allows them to get hold of social problems that are connected with the new position of the artist in industrial society. The extreme consequence of the constructivist tendency was the functionalist doctrine that consciously reduced creativity to a function of labor, and thus gave up art itself as the adventurous, the ludic activity it really is. Functionalism has proved to be a very resistant theory that still subsists in architecture, and certainly in town planning, as the dominating conception. I think, however, that the meaning of constructivism in our day is essentially other than that of the constructivist movement in the beginning of this century. The process of mechanization in the higher developed countries has gone so far now that human labor will no longer be the principal force of production. Automation, especially, allows an increase of free time that makes the idealization of labor senseless. The main problem of our time is not the organization of industrial work but the recreation of the unemployed ‘worker.’ But a worker who is unemployed continuously ceases to be a worker. Not the laborer but the player, not ‘homo faber’ but ‘homo ludens’ is the type of man to whom the future belongs.

This entirely new situation incites us to a new interpretation of construction that goes in an opposite direction to the way that once led to functionalism. The ideology of constructivism – parallel to that of socialism – is no longer bound to the idealization of labor, but on the contrary will lead to the ideal of the liberation of the former laborer from the need of production, the liberation of the laboring masses whose creative forces until our time have been wasted in activities that were simply necessary to keep mankind alive. The task of the artists – at least in the highly developed industrial countries, but sooner or later all over the world – is the preparation of a culture that will activate the total creative force of all humanity.

If we think of the establishment of such a culture, we are no longer speaking of spare time for the laborers, in relation to the creation of a culture, for the simple reason that the distinction between ‘laborers’ and ‘cultured’ upper class is an old-fashioned one that will be abolished. Labor can be done by the machines, and the machines can be controlled by cybernetic units. Creation is the specific faculty of man, a capacity that will employ the total energy of everybody. The construction of a new type of culture, that in the real and positive sense will be a mass-culture, is the only purpose of a further development of constructivism. Constructivism has nothing to do with a demonstration of individual fantasy, as is the case with the American ‘happening.’ It will go beyond the present conception of material construction and beyond the conception of a sociological and psychological construction. The artists of today have abandoned the art of painting – and of sculpture and architecture as well – because they don’t believe any longer in the ‘expression’ of their personality, without an integration of this personality in a more complex system that will enable any individual to reach a higher level of creative power. This higher level will be the collective culture of a future society in which there will no longer be laborers and creators, but in which labor and creation will be synonymous. I have called this future society New Babylon and I have tried to trace its most characteristic features in the maps and the models of urban mass-culture I have made during the past ten years.
Sectoren rondom een bos (Sectors around a Forest) / watercolor and collage on photograph
99 × 80 cm

New Babylon op historische kaart van Middlesex (New Babylon on the Historical Map of Middlesex) / watercolor on photograph
81 × 99 cm
1 Sectoren in berglandschap (Sectors in Mountainous Landscape) / plexiglass, oil on wood 7 x 63.5 x 86.3 cm
2 Souvenir de Norvège (Souvenir of Norway) pencil, crayon, pastel and watercolor on paper 133 x 150.5 cm / collection Centraal Museum, Utrecht
3 Grote gele sector (Large Yellow Sector) metal (iron, aluminum, copper), plexiglass, oil on wood / 38 x 131 x 155 cm (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)

Pages 178-179:
Doorsnede voor grote gele sector
(Section for Large Yellow Sector) / collotype 62 x 145 cm
Grote gele sector (Large Yellow Sector)
metal (iron, aluminum, copper), plexiglass,
oil on wood / 38 x 131 x 155 cm
(photos: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
Ladderlabyrinth (Ladder Labyrinth) / brass, plexiglass, wood / 71.5 x 96.5 x 86 / collection Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg (photos: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)

Ladderlabyrinth (Ladder Labyrinth) / etching 11.8 x 14 cm
Mobiel ladderlabyrint (Mobile Ladder Labyrinth) / brass, ink on plexiglass, oil on wood / 73 x 96 x 67.5 cm (photos: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)

Mobiel ladderlabyrint (Mobile Ladder Labyrinth) / pencil and watercolor on paper 99 x 110 cm
1 Schets voor een mobiel labyrinth (Sketch for a Mobile Labyrinth) / pencil, watercolor, crayon 100 x 125 cm / collection Centraal Museum, Utrecht / on loan from Provincie Utrecht

2 Sector van New Babylon (New Babylon Sector) / dry point etching / 11.9 x 13 cm private collection
Labyrismen (Labyrinths) / series of 11 lithos with texts by C. Caspari / 38 x 48 cm each edition of 79
Landschap in New Babylon (Landscape in New Babylon) / litho / 40 × 58 cm / collection Centraal Museum, Utrecht
pages 194-196:
*Fragment van een sector (Detail of a Sector)*
metal, plexiglass, wood / 62 × 144 × 162 cm
(photos: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)

*Fragment sectoren keten (Fragment String of Sectors) / collage*
1. Ode à l'Odéon (Tribute to Odeon) / oil and aluminum paint on canvas / 190 x 200 cm
   private collection / long-term loan to Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague
2. Labyrintische ruimte (Labyrinthine Space) / color crayon / 130 x 122 cm / private collection
3. Der blaue Draufgänger (The Blue Daredevil) / oil on canvas / 190 x 200 cm / collection
   Instituut Collectie Nederland, The Hague
Among the buildings that form a city — buildings of many natures and functions — there are some that play a very special part. These buildings, or groups of buildings, have an atmosphere of their own which deviates from that of the rest of the city, their function is in a sense contradictory to the function of the city, they represent an intrusion on the principle of the city, they are, as it were, cities within cities. These buildings have to do with departures and arrivals — stations, harbor installations, airports.

The city, in the usual sense of the word, is a place to live, a settlement, a habitat, a place where a number of people have organized their existence in a community, where they have created the provisions that such an existence calls for, where they find that which they need in order to go on living: work, shelter, transport facilities, distribution centers for consumer goods, recreation, and possibilities of development. There are four functions of the city as defined by Le Corbusier: living, working, recreation, and traffic to and from work. This characterizes the atmosphere of the modern functional city, the atmosphere of life and work, the living atmosphere of Homo faber. Everything in the functional city is directed at production: the factories and offices, the working-class dwellings in the suburbs, public transport between the residential areas and centers of work, conveniences like shops, hospitals, clinics, educational institutions. Everything in these functional cities is aimed at utility, everything has to be efficient. The functional city is the most highly developed form of the settlement, with the highest productivity since Neolithic man started to produce his own goods and to build the first villages. Since man was forced to give up his nomadic way of life, the earth has been covered by an increasingly dense blanket of constructions. Natural vegetation has had to make way for the living-layer of stone which has become the new home of the sedentary, working, human being. The city is — and has been since its invention — specifically a place to stay.

That is why the buildings that have to do with departures, with traveling, are buildings with a special atmosphere, with a divergent function. Traveling signifies a break in the pattern of everyday life. The traveler abandons his settlement. He goes to other places, where he is not at home, where he is not sedentary, not a resident. He resumes, perhaps, the nomadic existence he led before he was obliged to settle in one fixed place. Travel is increasing in direct proportion to the diminution of work. With the increase in leisure time, the action-radius of every individual is expanding. As people become less tied down geographically by their work, so they give up their sedentary way of life, the old urge to wander resurfaces.

Mechanization is not restricted to the production processes, it extends equally to transport, which becomes more and more rapid — in response to the demand for quick travel to destinations that are further and further away. When the holidays start and city-dwellers leave their work for a few weeks, there is a peak in the use of transport. The city is deserted by its workers and tourists from other cities. All participants in this process are travelers in a strange environment where their usual norms and standards have lost value, they are displaced and have only each other to turn to. Contacts are made which, in normal circumstances, would be more difficult to establish. Conversations are held between strangers who will never meet again.

In short, airports play the part of ‘social space’ in a way that has become impossible in the functional city of today. Once it was at the annual fair that people could meet, the place where contacts were made; the social space for the citizens of the world, the ‘acclimatisation zone’ where the dissemination of culture took place. Later, the railway stations became the centers of social intercourse. Even now metropolitan railway stations are meeting places for those who stand out-
side the urban community. The so-called ‘guest workers’ meet and make contact with each other in railway stations by preference; this has induced the authorities in a city like Amsterdam to decree the hall of the central station out of bounds for non-travelers. Perhaps the lack of understanding by preference; this has induced the authorities in a city like Amsterdam to decree the hall of the central station out of side the urban community. The so-called ‘guest workers’ meet and make contact with each other in railway stations by preference; this has induced the authorities in a city like Amsterdam to decree the hall of the central station out of bounds for anyone who is not leaving or arriving. But the airport is becoming an international meeting place, a social space not only for travelers but also for citizens of all kinds, where everyone will sense that special atmosphere, that taste of nomadic life, for which we have been nostalgic ever since we turned to a sedentary way of life. Traveling has been until recently the privilege of the élite. In the past it was a costly undertaking, regarded as the crowning of a gentleman’s education; traveling widens the horizon and expands the view, it was rightly thought. The acculturation process was unthinkable without traveling; isolated cultures were, and are, doomed to die. Rabelais, Lawrence Sterne, Casanova, and Jules Verne, conscious as they were of the deadliness of the constricting local norms, described traveling as a cultural experience. The importance of what we experience today should therefore not be underestimated: the acculturation of the masses is the consequence of mass traveling.

This acculturation process can be seen in the interest in foreign languages and ways of life, or in foreign food. One can dine in a Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, Italian, Yugoslav or Greek restaurant in Holland, it is as easy to get vodka, tequila, or slivovitch as the old Dutch drinks, people drink wine with their meals, record shops sell folk music from all over the world. On the other hand the tourists visiting less industrialized countries inevitably affect the original culture of those countries.

The tourist introduces a new atmosphere into societies that had, until recently, a closed set of norms, thereby contributing to the downfall of those norms, and internationalization is taking place on the basis of this mutual influence. In ‘The lonely Crowd’ David Riesman attacks the neo-traditionalists who base their ideas about the city on ‘social’ ideals, who want to shut people up in communities where their social relations must be concentrated in the neighborhood, while they themselves — according to Riesman — choose to eat a French dish this day and an Italian one the next, read books in four languages, and collect art from all cultures.

The central problem in city-planning is thus transferred from the settlement. The neighborhood as it has developed in today’s garden cities no longer fits in with new needs and habits. Sedentary man is dying out; we are becoming nomads once more, wandering over the earth, not looking for rest but for dynamic motion. The traveler is regarded with envy and when he comes home he finds it difficult to reconcile himself to his old routine. Places of departure and arrival — especially airports — are places of adventure and nostalgia. So the airport is not just a utility building for the efficient entry and exit of passengers, but also a romantic décor for the potential nomad that we all are — it offers an escape from the settlement. An airport, because of its opposite nature, reflects better than any other building the atmosphere of the age that is dawning, of automation and non-working man, and hence of the new nomad, homo ludens, playing man. Was it not those who did not have to work for their living who were regarded as the builders of past cultures? What we see today, at least in the industrialized countries, is not so much an ‘Umwertung der Werte,’ a reversal that allows new values to emerge, but more a democratization of culture. Homo ludens is no longer a man in an exceptional social situation, but any man. And his life-pattern will include fluctuation, wandering over the face of the earth: until now a pastime reserved for those who did not work.

The new city will not be a settlement; it will be the décor of this new life. And in that sense the airport of today can be seen as the anticipatory image of the city of tomorrow, the city of man ‘passing through.’

The airport is a city within the city, a city of wanderers within the city of settled men. The traveler must find everything he needs in the airport, and above all, that which is conducive to social contact. His needs will change and expand. The use of the term homo ludens anticipates the development of a non-working, leisure-oriented society. I have until now emphasized the adventure of travel, and neglected its utilitarian aspect. The businessman is evidently in a different situation from that of the tourist or student. I have deliberately stressed the ‘joyriding’ aspect of travel, because I believe it has not been given enough consideration. In every trip, even the most hasty business trip, there is an element of adventure, and this element gains importance as man acquires more free time. Homo ludens is the master of his time, and his existence therefore depends on the processes that reduce labor — processes that are fast developing. The free man of the coming era will make different demands on his environment. Efficiency as far as material provisions are concerned is of course a conditio sine qua non, but there will also emerge a need for creative play. I have tried to represent the airplane as an important feature in the game of life, as a means for the art of living. I believe that the airplane even now is regarded as such by increasing numbers of people. And that is why I have called the airport the anticipatory image of the city of tomorrow, the play-town of homo ludens, the décor for a new mass culture.
1 New Babylon / pencil and watercolor
   50 x 65 cm / private collection
2 New Babylon / pencil and watercolor
   50 x 65 cm / private collection
3 Symbolische voorstelling van New Babylon
   (Symbolic Representation of New Babylon)
   collage / 132 x 133 cm
1. Reeks sectoren (Series of Sectors) / photo collage / 120 x 132 cm
2. Klein laby and Sector constructie / photo montage
3. Landschap (Landscape) / crayon, ink, aluminum paint / 120 x 131 cm
Untitled / pencil and ink on paper
ca. 119 x 125 cm

Demonstratie (Demonstration) / ink on paper
119 x 131 cm
A Few Propositions Concerning The Concepts 'Face Of The Earth,' 'Urban Development,' and 'Art' [Original in English. Summary notes of 'Le visage de la terre,' lecture held at the 23rd Association Internationale des Critiques d’Art, Amsterdam, 22 September, 1971]

1. The change in the 'face of the earth' has historically been accompanied by conflict among men, the struggle for power between man and man, between group and group. Therefore the changes in the appearance of the earth, although brought by men, are almost always brought about at the expense of other men. Thus the urbanization of North America, for example, cannot be dissociated from the extermination of the Indians.

2. The historic moment when the face of the earth will be subject to a systematic change in accordance with the wishes and needs of humanity as a whole can only be realized by a world-wide revolution which will put an end to the situation where men have power over men. The condition for this, i.e. the main issue at stake, is the socialization of the earth's surface and all its means of production.

3. Without this prospect of revolution, it is impossible to arrive at a value-judgment of the numerous forms of construction and destruction that together bring about a change in the face of the earth. 'Change' in itself can be no criterion for the interests of humanity, not even a criterion for creativity, as long as the effect of the intervention does not come under human control. The impending atomic devastation, which would cause the greatest change in the face of the earth that we can imagine, would also signify the absolute zero of human creativity.

4. In looking at changes on a smaller scale — for example so-called 'town and country planning' within the area of a country like Holland — we see that neither the wishes or interests of the population, nor even the creativity of the planners, play a decisive role in the 'planning.' On the contrary, the redistribution of Dutch soil is determined by financial interests. Holland is, in terms of the relationship between its surface-area and size of population, the most densely populated country in the world. This has led, in a short span of years, to such a deterioration in environmental conditions that the population has taken up arms in protest. The pollution of air, water and soil has become of a direct threat to human life, both here and in other industrial countries. This threat can only be removed by removing its cause, i.e. by an international rationalization of production, which is possible only if the means of production become common property.

5. The slum-clearance programs in town-centers in Holland and other industrial countries lead in effect to a deportation of the population to areas further away where land is for the time being cheaper, to an unrooting of the inhabitants and a conscious destruction of their traditional environment for the benefit of land speculators. This state of affairs is a direct consequence of the continued existence of land-ownership and of the fact that the development of the land is determined by the returns on the value of the property. If this tendency is allowed to continue indefinitely we shall be able to look forward to a future where Dutch soil has become too expensive for Dutchmen to live on it, and a forced emigration will take place to cheaper land elsewhere.

6. The withdrawal of land from man's use, the 'dehumanization' of the earth such as is happening at the moment in industrial countries, means, in effect, the absorbing of available living space, an appropriation similar to that which Marx, ridiculing Adam Smith, called 'the so-called original accumulation' in Das Kapital. Indeed, we can nowadays talk of an 'original accumulation' of space in the sense Marx meant it — the deprivation of the weak by the strong. For example, space originally collectively used, such as streets and squares in towns now overrun by motor-traffic, is now slowly becoming the exclusive domain of parked vehicles. This space is eventually annexed by municipal authorities and subsequently let out as parking space or turned over to car-parks.

7. The enlisting of the help of artists to design new urban development schemes may benefit the aesthetic quality of these areas, but cannot offer a substitute for a lost environment. An environmental atmosphere fit to live in is the result of the relation between material surroundings and the behavior pattern of the inhabitants, a relationship which can be frustrating as well as stimulating. It is conceivable that artists could have a stimulating role to play in close cooperation with the population. The initiative would, however, have to come from the people themselves, and that implies a freedom that does not yet exist.

8. The traditional role of the artist as a specialist in creativity goes hand in hand with a social structure in which the creative urge of the majority of the people is thwarted by the struggle for existence. Automation offers material opportunities for the establishment of a society where man is free of this struggle, where he no longer needs to spend his energy on nothing more than keeping body and soul together. In such a society, creativity will not longer be the exception but common practice, which means that creative activity will no longer need to be directed at producing objects — 'works of art' — that stand outside daily life. Instead, daily life itself, including the environmental conditions of daily life, will become the object of creative change.

9. Although artistic experiments such as 'happening,' 'environment,' and 'land-art' indicate that artists are already feeling the need to collectivize the creative process, there is evidence that such experiments are doomed from the outset as long as they remain mere spectacle, i.e. as long as they are not the product of a real collective. Only then will we be able to talk in terms of a transformation of environment and not, as is now the case, of the transformation of a visual object brought about by one or more individuals for passive observers. Environmental change can only be brought about by the participation of all those concerned, as an essential part of everyday life.

However, collective creativity, like that of the individual, is dependent on freedom. Collective freedom can only be based on collective ownership, ownership of the means of production that make this freedom possible.

10. Post-revolutionary freedom, based on the full profit of an automated production apparatus for the whole of humanity, will allow a creative potential to develop which will defy comparison with any previous culture. The mass-culture of an era of leisure will be of a completely new type, compared with which earlier class-structured cultures will seem insignificant.
Combinatie van Sectoren (Combination of Sectors) (photos: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)
Autodialogue on New Babylon

[Original in French, 'Autodialogue à propos de New Babylon,' published in French and English in Opus International, no. 27 (September 1971), pp. 29-31 and pp. 79-80]

You have always maintained that New Babylon could never be achieved in present society and that in any case, your project would not work, under present social conditions. So it is a utopian project. I notice however, that you have concentrated on this project for more than twelve years; as if you were turning your back on present day human problems, as if you were escaping from them. In my opinion: instead of taking refuge in a culture he entirely invents, an artist owes it to himself to seek the artistic expression of the culture which he is part of.

Unfortunately this alternative does not exist. I am unable to see any culture today, which one could be part of, and that is why I took the road to New Babylon. One cannot chose between existing culture and a so-called revolutionary culture, which still remains to be invented. The real choice is between the complete abandon of all creative activity and the preparation of a future culture, desirable, though as yet unachievable. It is true that, to choose the latter position, one has to believe in the success of the revolution.

What other artists are doing in protest against present society; undermining art, the 'arteurs' actions, occupying of museums, all these seem to me to be more effective than creating an image of a future society, which runs the risk of being idealized.

The fact that no-one appears shocked proves the ineffectiveness of that kind of display. What threatens bourgeois society is not an abandonment of the creative spirit, but that spirit itself. To change society one needs, above all, imagination.

What you say seems to me to be inconsistent. If you object to all modern artistic activity, how can you claim to defend creativity? With what right do you replace the notion 'art' with 'New Babylon'?

Art is only a historical form of creativity. This form is typical of what I call 'utilitarian' society; the society in which nearly all of humanity is forced to produce, in order to subsist. In utilitarian society, the relative freedom enjoyed by a creative individual is conditional on the enslavement of the working masses. If the enormous creative potential of the masses were one day to be aroused and put into action today's so-called 'art' would lose all meaning.

It is very possible that the future will see a culture of the masses. But how can one pick out today the form it will take tomorrow?

You seem to think that with the establishment of mass culture, behavior will be defined once and for all, just as past or present repressive forces have tried, or wanted to try to do. It is the opposite which is true. The creativity of the freed masses would prevent any fixed behavior pattern. The life of recreation of New Babylon is to be found in the continual changing of behavior. The project only envisages the creation of the material conditions capable of giving free rein to recreational activities. Planning as we know it will prove to be out of date. From now on we need to study an alternative, capable of developing a free environment.

But how can one know these conditions now? Your plans and models give the impression of a technocratic world, whose scale alone arouses fear. But will not man need a less artificial environment, more linked to nature, in the future?

Fear of technology is reactionary. Liberation of the masses is only rendered possible by technological development. Without automation of production, the masses' creative potential remains an illusion. Technology is a necessary condition for New Babylon. What is more, I think that in the world to come, nature will no longer be able to offer a satisfactory environment for cultural fulfillment.

But if the future behavior of the masses and the artificial environment needed to facilitate it are two unknowable factors, what then is the use of providing, as you do, images or illustrations of New Babylonian life?

Above all, my project serves as a provocation. Towns as we know them will never be able to become areas for a recreational life. To create this space in a post-revolutionary period, a new principal of urbanization will be needed,
based on the socialization of land and the means of production. The essential thing about New Babylon is its urbanistic principal.

- New Babylon’s structure is based on a network, whilst existing towns are centralizers. Is this difference really essential when it comes to a life of recreation?
  - Automation of production means that man ceases to be a producer. He is no longer forced to be fixed, sedentary. His life can again become nomadic, as it was before Neolithic times. Independent of nature, he can create his entourage at will.
- The New Babylonian network represents the traces left by his passage across the surface of the earth. In the plans one can clearly distinguish these urbanistic trails, and the natural or artificial landscape which they mark.
  But all the same, one cannot spend one’s life following trails! Everyone feels the need to concentrate on some activity; to preserve goods acquired, or manufactured. Even the nomads…
  - If men preserve goods and take them with them when they move, it is because these goods are difficult to acquire or replace. One does not transport that which one finds everywhere in abundance. So the question is, to find out if it will be possible to produce in abundance the goods, which man needs to live decently wherever he wants to go. Is it utopian to maintain that the conditions for such an abundance are there; provided that production is rationalized; which is only possible in a socialized economy?
  - My principal objection is that, from time to time everyone feels the need to be alone; to isolate themselves; to make love, rest, or in the case of illness. To be continually on the road is impossible, unbearable. You speak of the masses, yet these same masses are made up of human beings, each one different from another, with a diversity of needs. New Babylon does not offer any possibility for individual withdrawal.
  - It is present day society which really obliges us to isolate ourselves. It imposes solitude upon us through the lack of communication. But communication is the first requirement of creativity. At present, individual social space is extremely limited and without any relation to actual space. In New Babylon these two notions overlap, thanks to fluctuations of the population. You see a problem arising, where I only see the solution to a problem. Of course in New Babylon an individual can easily manage to retreat temporarily, just as in any other system of urbanization.
  - Thus the largest part of New Babylon’s urban space is destined for collective use as a social area. But what relationship does this area have with a culture of the masses? Ought one not fear that all these ephemeral contacts between individuals will hamper, rather than stimulate creativity.

- Within the present day social structure, each individual finds himself in permanent competition with all the others. The consequence of this is a considerable loss of creative power. But the compounding of all the creative forces into a dynamic collectivity will offer the individual inexhaustible inspirational matter. The individual act will doubtless be lost, but an infinitely richer and more varied activity will result from this. It is a process which will be far beyond the capacities of the solitary individual and which will permit him to reach a higher level than his own personal rung.
  - But could this phenomenon not happen in a completely different environment? In the one which already exists? For example, I am thinking of certain ‘happenings.’
  - A bad example, because the ‘happening’ does not work, precisely because of that lack of social communication. Despite the artists’ intentions, happenings remain poor spectacles for passive spectators. Urban construction is the expression and mirror of social structure, one cannot change it without first changing society. My projects are not just mere architectonics. They are the foundations for a greater liberty; to be used for a greater flexibility of very varied surroundings, which unite and separate continuously. The true builders of New Babylon will be the New Babylonians themselves.
Cezicht op New Babylonische sectoren (View of New Babylonian Sectors) watercolor and pencil on photomontage / 135 x 223 cm (photo: Victor E. Nieuwenhuys)

1. Sectoren New Babylon (New Babylon Sectors) color etching / 9 x 11 cm
2. New Babylon etching / 15 x 23.5 cm
3. Technologisch landschap (Technological Landscape) / pencil, aluminum paint / 121 x 133 cm
4. Ladderlabyrinth (Ladder Labyrinth) / oil on canvas / 165 x 175 cm / collection Mrs. P. Kerkhoven, Amsterdam
5. Erotic Space / oil and aluminum paint on canvas / 164 x 174 cm
1 Ingang van het Laby (Entrance of the Labyrinth) / oil on canvas / 165.5 x 175 cm
2 Labyrinth / oil on canvas / 165 x 175 cm private collection
3 Espace en destruction (Space Destroyed) oil on canvas / 119.5 x 129.5 cm / collection Centraal Museum, Utrecht / on loan of the Instituut Collectie Nederland
1 De toeristen (The Tourists) / oil on canvas / 190 x 200 cm / private collection
2 Spiegelzaal (Hall of Mirrors) / pencil and watercolor on paper / 122 x 153 cm / private collection
3 La révolte (The Uprising) / oil on canvas / 70 x 90 cm / collection Cobra Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Amstelveen
1. Ontwaakt, verworpen de aarde (Arise Ye Workers from Your Slumbers) / dry point etching / 14.5 x 19 cm
2. Le Massacre de My Lai / oil on canvas / 120 x 130 cm / private collection
3. Orgie (Orgy) / charcoal and pastel on canvas / 122 x 135 cm / collection Wil Heins, Rotterdam long-term loan to Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam
4. Terrain Vague 1 / oil on canvas / 120 x 130 cm / private collection
Terrain Vague II / oil on canvas / 190 x 200 cm

Terrain Vague III / oil on canvas / 140 x 150 cm

collection Ton Berends, The Hague
The Principle of Disorientation


Translated by Robyn de Jong-Dalziel]

Static space

It goes without saying that in the utilitarian society effective orientation is a prime consideration in the design and construction of the built environment for space can only function efficiently as work space if it is clearly organized. If use of time is judged in terms of output — as it always is in the case of production work — it stands to reason that unproductive time must be kept to a minimum. The unavoidable traveling between workplace and home will therefore have to be as short as possible. Every time-consuming search, every detour, every delay or adventure will be regarded as ‘lost time’ by homo faber. The more efficiently and functionally space is organized, the better he will like it. This efficient layout will also need to be stable, in keeping with a regular pattern of behavior based on the rhythm of work. All urban planning notions and theories to date have been based on this principle of orientation.

Dynamic space

But in the context of a ludic society, in which an explosion of creative activity leads to constantly changing behavioral patterns, such a requirement makes no sense at all. A static organization of space would not only be pointless, it would be quite unfeasible. Ludic activities would, by their very nature, serve to dynamize space. Homo ludens takes an active stance vis-à-vis his surroundings: he seeks to intervene, to change things, he travels extensively and wherever he goes he leaves traces of his ludic activities. Space for him is a toy rather than a tool. And as such he wants it to be as mobile and variable as possible. Instead of organizing space so as to enable him to reach a pre-determined goal in the shortest possible time, he will make space increasingly complicated and intensify his use of it. Space is for him a place for exploration, adventure, and play. The opportunities for disorientation will increase the potential for exploration and so promote a highly intensive use of the space. As a result of this intensification, space and time will be placed in a new, dynamic relationship.

The labyrinth

In the labyrinth, disorientation is actively sought. In its simplest, classic form the plan of a labyrinth shows the longest possible route, in a given space, between the entrance and the center. Every part of this space is visited, but only once: the classic labyrinth admits no choice. The whole point is to use the space as intensively as possible while prolonging the time it takes to reach the goal. One possible effect of this prolongation is the loss of all sense of time, especially when the route to be followed is everywhere the same and devoid of identifying features. This effect can be intensified by prolonging the time element still further and ensuring that every point within the available space is visited more than once. The result is a labyrinth with dead ends and false leads that force users to retrace their steps, extending the route in an endless variety of ways. But there is only one ‘right’ path, the shortest route from entrance to center. The labyrinth remains a static construction and behavior inside it is not much more than a passive surrender to the structure of the space. But when we contemplate a large-scale blossoming of human activity, in the sense of creative interventions and unpredictable inventiveness, it is possible to imagine a labyrinth that is more than just a complicated spatial structure, which actually changes shape as a result of these activities: a dynamic labyrinth. Activities in such a labyrinth are not determined by the spatial form, as in the static labyrinth; rather, the spatial form is generated and modified by the activities that evolve within it. It is no longer a question of reaching a pre-determined goal, but of exploring the space itself. ‘Straying’ no longer has the negative sense of ‘getting lost,’ but the more positive sense of discovering new paths. Instead of a single route leading to a fixed point, there are many points which shift vis-à-vis one another, so that the labyrinth is continually changing shape. This introduction of the factor ‘time’ gives rise to a new dimension: because it is constantly changing, space — measured in terms of time — gets relatively larger; conversely, time — measured in terms of the experience of space — gets relatively longer.

The dynamic labyrinth

The static labyrinth has been around for a long time and there are countless well-known examples. Of the dynamic labyrinth, however, we know virtually nothing — understandably so, since a dynamic labyrinth cannot be designed, it cannot originate in the mind of a single individual. It arises in the first instance as a non-stop process that can only be initiated and maintained by the simultaneous activity of a great many individuals. And this implies a social freedom and, concomitantly, a massive creative potential, that are inconceivable in the utilitarian society.

In a ludic society, urbanization would automatically take the shape of a dynamic labyrinth. The constant modification of human behavior would of itself require and bring about a constant change of decor. An attempt to realize a dynamic labyrinth in the current social set-up can at best lead to the design of an experimental space aimed at provoking spontaneous reactions from visitors. It must be remembered, however, that the experimental space will be a fairly unsophisticated enclave within a utilitarian environment, and that the experimental subjects, recruited from the working population, will be too strongly conditioned by their utilitarian background to be capable of switching suddenly to creative activity. Genuine interventions in the spatial structure will be few and far between. The main point of such experimental spaces is the opportunity they afford for gathering comparative material on people’s reactions to their environment. It is important to realize, however, that the people involved are not free, are creatively inhibited, and find themselves in a situation which does not make for easy communication.

The essential precondition for a dynamic labyrinth, namely the simultaneous creative activity of a large number of individuals, resulting in a collectively generated situation, cannot, of course, be realized in the context of an experimental space. The experimental space is no more than an (imperfect) object of study.
The significance of disorientation

As noted at the beginning, orientation is only relevant in the context of a regular life pattern that gives rise to constantly recurring points of recognition, a lifestyle in other words where there is very little change. In the opposite case, where there is no question of regularity and the pattern is continually changing, in the case thus of someone who lives 'creatively,' the need for orientation decreases as the possibility of intervening in and actually creating that environment increases. This implies firstly an enormous social freedom that is lacking in the present situation, and secondly the awakening of the creative power at present only latent in the vast majority of human beings. It goes without saying that a sociologist investigating the present situation can do no more than record the fact that today’s frustrated individual displays a similar lack of initiative in an unfamiliar, ‘abnormal’ environment that offers little scope for orientation. The sociologist’s task – to investigate the existing social reality – is thereby at an end. Objections must be raised should the sociologist attempt to draw conclusions from these observations with a view to influencing urban planning. Plans have more to do with the future than with the present and if no account is taken of foreseeable changes in behavioral patterns and of the cultivation of as yet undeveloped potential, planning is pointless: every plan will be obsolete before it can be realized. For the investigation of the variable factors in human behavior it is vital that ‘normal’ behavioral patterns be interrupted, that a short circuit should occur between ‘daily habits’ and an environment so designed as to exclude all compulsive behavior from the outset, in other words, a disorienting environment.

Disorientation in the urban space

The whole point of orientation is to shorten the time it takes to reach a clearly pre-determined goal. Those who wander around a city without any particular goal tend to welcome the unexpected, the moment of surprise, and they display a preference for complex urban structures that favor aimless strolling. The latter occurs during holidays, for example, when the regularity of the normal working day is replaced by a free disposal of time. Few people remain in familiar surroundings during such periods of leisure. Vacationers not only display a distinct tendency to visit unknown cities and regions, but also exhibit a marked preference for surroundings that differ strongly from those in which they work, and the less functional these holiday surroundings are the better. They regard their experiences as their own discoveries, as something they themselves have achieved, and herein lies the value of their travels. But when the automation of work causes ‘free’ time to expand until it accounts for the greater part of a lifetime, a growing and mass demand for exploration will not be satisfied by increased tourism. In the first place, the frequent, mass transport of large sections of the population across considerable distances would be an unnecessarily complicated and costly manner of gratifying the new demand for exploration, and in the second place, the orientation-based structures of the ‘home bases’ would lose their whole raison d’être once their inhabitants’ daily schedule was no longer dictated by the rhythm of work. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the division between rich industrialized countries and non-industrialized developing countries will last for ever. With the industrialization of the third world, the latter will lose its present status as a highly valued recreational area. Following these predictable consequences to their logical conclusion, we find a worldwide industrialization that is less and less dependent on human labor, so that all over the world a huge mass of energy is released which seeks to discharge itself in an exploration of the environment. Covering large distances, as in present-day tourism, will no longer be a solution. A new urban structure that facilitates exploration at every turn will be needed in place of the well-organized but now meaningless work environment. Space will have to be used more intensively than ever before and to be divided up in much more complex patterns. A stable street plan is incapable of satisfying these demands. The intensification of space can only be achieved by a constant modification of space, by making space dynamic. The factor that effects such constant change can be none other than the explorative activity of the populace.
Happening / oil on canvas / 140 x 130 cm
private collection

Labyrintische ruimte (Labyrinthine Space)
oil on canvas / 165 x 175 cm / collection De Nederlandsche Bank, Amsterdam
1. Zonnebaders (Sunbathers) / oil on canvas / 99 x 104 cm / collection Stadsgalerij Heerlen
2. Le massacre / lithograph / 55 x 77 cm
3. Le voyeur / charcoal and watercolor / 87 x 91 cm / private collection
4. La blouse hongroise (The Hungarian Blouse) / oil on canvas / 130 x 140 cm / collection Prof. J.B. Lucas, Voorburg
5. Le viol (The Violation) / oil on canvas / 70 x 90 cm / collection Prof. dr. C. Kelk, Amsterdam

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The Couple / oil on canvas / 70 x 90 cm / collection Wil Heins, Rotterdam
New Babylon – Ten Years On  
[Original in Dutch, 'New Babylon – na tien jaren,' presented as a lecture at the University of Technology, Delft, Faculty of Architecture, on 23 May 1980. Translated by Robyn de Jong-Dalziel]

In the autumn of 1974, the complete New Babylon project was exhibited in the Haags Gemeentemuseum in The Hague. This exhibition, arranged and annotated by the then curator Hans Locher, comprised the full complement of models, plans, drawings, photomontages, photographs, and slides, together with a number of paintings and extensive documentation. Of these, only the paintings were recent, for much earlier, in 1970, I had stopped work on New Babylon altogether in order to devote myself once more to painting. Now, ten years after this radical and much criticized decision, the time seems right to take another look at New Babylon against the backdrop of the current situation, and to compare this with the situation in the 1950s, when the project was begun.

New Babylon was dogged by criticism throughout its early history. My work on it led fairly rapidly to my break with the Situationist International which had been godfather to the first models. Although I held lectures and exhibitions in various European countries in an attempt to draw attention to New Babylon, I seldom encountered any genuine sympathy for the ideas underpinning this project and I was constantly having to defend myself against accusations of utopianism or technocracy, depending on whether the attack came from the right or the left.

My models appeared to sow confusion instead of fostering understanding for my efforts to visualize a world that was so fundamentally different from the world in which we live or the worlds we know from history. In the end I resorted once more to brush and paints as the most effective way of depicting the unknown.

For it was this aim I had in mind when I started on the first models and plans: to give visual shape to an idea by building a model, a model against which this idea could be continually tested and thus further elaborated.

The idea in question was ‘urbanisme unitaire,’ a difficult concept that had occasionally cropped up in publications by the Lettrist International and later in those of the Situationist International. In fact, my collaboration with the situationists began with a text entitled ‘La déclaration d’Amsterdam’ (The Amsterdam Declaration), largely written by me and co-signed by the initiator of the Situationist International, Guy Debord, which contained an attempt to define this concept.

Unitary urbanism was described in the Declaration as ‘the complex, ongoing activity which consciously recreates man’s environment according to the most advanced conceptions in every domain.’ In another point, unitary urbanism was referred to as ‘the fruit of an entirely new type of collective creativity.’ These two quotations from the declaration are general enough for a broad interpretation and can still be used in connection with New Babylon. Not so my third and final quotation: ‘La création d’ambiances favorables à ce développement est la tâche immédiate des créateurs d’aujourd’hui.’

Here the artist is charged with an immediate task, in other words, within the framework of the existing culture. We shall see in a moment how untenable this proposition proves to be. The subsequent emergence of the ‘happening,’ the ‘environment,’ and the ‘performance’ have led me to think differently.

I have left the last quotation in the original French because, like the three English words, it involves an element of jargon that requires further explanation, namely the word ‘ambiance.’ The first issue of the journal Internationale Situationiste, which appeared in June 1958, contained a number of definitions of typical situationist concepts. The first of these concerned the concept ‘situation construite’ and reads as follows: ‘Moment de la vie, concretise d’une ambiance unitaire et d’un jeu d’événements.’ The word ‘situationaliste,’ from which the movement derived its name, can be traced back to this statement, so that one is justified in concluding that the construction of ‘ambiances’ in connection with ‘événements’ (the French word for ‘happening’) formed the leitmotiv in the setting up of the Situationist International.

In the definition quoted – ‘ambiance unitaire’ – the term ‘ambiance’ (literally ‘surroundings’ or ‘atmosphere’) takes on the meaning of the totality of material conditions that are essential for the collective construction of a situation. The situation itself, however, is a mere ‘moment de la vie,’ in other words, short-lived and intended to be succeeded by new and different situations.

Unlike other situationists, I realized straight away that the theory of unitary urbanism was not primarily concerned with micro-structures or ‘ambiances.’ On the contrary, these depend largely on the macro-structure, and the elaboration of the extremely sketchy idea of unitary urbanism was therefore inextricably bound up with a critique of city planning. It is a well-known fact that ambience is strongly influenced by the urban environment. If, in addition to this, one proceeds from a conception in which life represents not continuity but a succession of moments, moments that are incessantly changing their nature and orientation, so that each successive moment disavows and erases its predecessor, if one proceeds from this dialectical view of life, one cannot continue to see the living environment as a settlement, a fixed abode.

No, the creation of micro-ambiences would require a completely new type of development, one in which movement, not settlement, would be the main issue. Taking this idea as my starting-point, I published two articles in Internationale Situationiste.

The first article, entitled ‘Une autre ville pour une autre vie’ (Another City for Another Life) and illustrated with a number of drawings, contained in fact a first rough description of New Babylon.

The second article was a description of the first model, then called Zone jaune (Yellow Zone), later Gele sector (Yellow Sector); in an editorial note at the end of the article, the name New Babylon appeared for the first time, cautiously introduced as ‘hypothèse particulière d’urbanisme unitaire’ (i.e. my personal opinion). The history of New Babylon had begun.

I quickly realized, however, that this beginning had made my break with the Situationist International inevitable.

Six months after the aforementioned publication, in December 1960, this break was announced in the journal with the sour remark that I had given priority to the structural problems of urbanism while the others wanted to stress the content, the play, the ‘free creation of everyday life.’
This so-called content, incidentally, was hardly ever mentioned again in the journal and eventually disappeared altogether.

This brief description of the birth of the project seemed to be necessary for a proper understanding of what followed. The late 1950s were a time of cultural decline and the exhaustion of bourgeois society. A revolution seemed imminent, was eagerly awaited. The infrastructure seemed to be on the point of collapse and it was thought that before long it would be possible to realize new forms of life. The Situationist International was regarded by some as the successor to Cobra: apart from myself, Asger Jorn also took part in situationist activities. An exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam was planned, consisting of a huge labyrinth, and accompanied by a happening, with the city providing the ideal backdrop for a 'ludic' event.

This event was canceled by the museum's director, Willem Sandberg, and subsequently replaced by a pointless parody, the so-called 'Dylaby'.

Spontaneous, direct action struck many people as more important than analytical study. Bakunin found a greater favor than Marx. This mentality continued until the mid-1960s and achieved its apotheosis, but also its end, in this same Amsterdam with the appearance of Provo, an anarchic movement that took delight in making the establishment look ridiculous and which attracted international attention.

In the meantime, and scarcely noticed at first, a development was taking place in society that was to give New Babylon an important boost: the second industrial revolution based on automation.

It was a long time before there was any serious debate about the consequences of what was then seen as no more than a possible eventuality and now as an economic necessity: the abolition of human productive work.

Within the framework of capitalist society, where the majority can only live by selling their labor, automation represents unemployment and alienation. So for a long time it was customary to play down automation and the theme of the abolition of work as futurist bunkum. Many discussions about New Babylon got bogged down in differences of opinion regarding the pros and cons of automation. The fact that the mere prospect of automation inevitably confronted us with the question of where human energy would be able to discharge itself if not in productive work, suddenly gave New Babylon enormous topicality. In the 1960s, New Babylon developed from hypothesis to conceptual model. The question that now presents itself is what purpose such a model might serve.

Since Norbert Wiener, the pioneer of automation, wrote his first study of its possible social consequences, whole libraries have been filled with works on the subject. The problem still seems to be the difficulty the human mind has in picturing the (as yet) non-existent, in freeing itself from the familiar pictures lodged in its consciousness. Visualizing the unseen is a typical task for the visual arts. The author who attempts to write about the automated society almost inevitably falls into the yawning gap between that society and the known, familiar society of working men and women, between the world of homo faber and the world of homo ludens.

Homo faber and homo ludens, for Johan Huizinga two aspects of one and the same person, are separated from one another by automation, or rather, the condition of homo faber simply disappears as a result of automation whereupon the term homo ludens loses its true, original meaning. One must indeed ask oneself whether the human energy released by automation will generate an activity that can be characterized by the term 'play,' or whether this term is not peculiar to the working society where it denotes an exceptional situation.

The first difficulty faced by futurologists is the lack of ready concepts for discussing a society that is so essentially different from all known societies. Even if one coins new concepts to set against the existing ones, even if one introduces the notion of the playful or creative society as opposed to the working society, or if one opposes utilitarian with the word 'ludic,' this still doesn't get one very far, for these new concepts are soon assimilated into everyday speech, but with a meaning that makes them comprehensible within the framework of the existing society. We all know examples of the phenomenon, from the creative police unit 'creapol' to the 'ludic shopping center.'

No sooner is a neologism coined than it is so manipulated and diluted as to become useless. Even the word 'revolution' has not escaped this fate, any more than the principle of production, relations of production, proletariat, surplus value, alienation— which are interpreted in so many different ways that confusion of concepts is the order of the day.

No, for thinking about a social structure that is so different from the existing one that it can safely be called its antithesis, words and terms are inadequate tools. Since what we are considering here is no abstraction but a material world, as in physics, it seems almost logical to resort to visual tools; in other words, a model.

The construction of this model should be based on the material conditions that can be inferred from automation and that are decisive for the material shape of the world: the functions of time and place. It is of course obvious that the way time is spent is related to work or the disappearance of work.

Workers are constrained to divide their time into periods of work, rest and recreation, to which one may add transport, in short, the well-known four functions of urban planning as formulated in the Athens Charter.

As any unemployed person can confirm, this division of time disappears when there is no work to be done. Any partygoer or holidaymaker can moreover tell you that in the absence of work, the rhythm of the clock, of day and night, is disrupted.

In a society without work, therefore, timekeeping will be seen in a very different light, also literally, and will be organized more in accordance with changing needs than a universal schedule: there will be no need to plan time collectively because there will be less need to coordinate the activities of different individuals. The intensity with which time is spent will take on a more continuous character. Something analogous can be said about place, the dwelling-place of each individual. Since the development of productive work, place has been largely dependent on the
production process: the worker not only has a fixed place of work but is also obliged to remain in the vicinity of the workplace outside working hours. This is how the first settlements arose and how, up to now, cities are planned. If this necessity were to lapse along with work itself, sedentary life would lose its raison d’être. Human behavior during work-free periods—holidays—provides sufficient proof of this. Without the restrictions imposed by work, moving around becomes more important than staying put: the dormitory town loses its function because residence can be temporary rather than permanent.

Taking these two basic facts as my starting-point, I proceeded to elaborate New Babylon in the 1960s.

Whereas initially the accent had been on the mobility of the micro-structure in the service of people with the freedom to spend and shape their lives as they wish, who interpret life as creation, as a work of art, the 1960s saw the design of a worldwide macro-structure capable of guaranteeing freedom of time and freedom of place: the continuity of a network rather than the quantity of individual settlements. The hypothesis of a unitary urbanism had made way for an urban plan.

I shall assume that you are sufficiently well acquainted with this plan so that I need not describe it any further here, and move on to the real subject of this lecture: a critical consideration of New Babylon after a self-imposed absence of ten years, ten years in which much has changed in the world.

Let us begin with the latter. The 1960s were years of buoyant economic growth; the capitalist countries, relying on Keynesian economic theories, imagined that in state investment they had found the magic formula that would enable them to conquer Marx’s cyclical fluctuations.

The German minister of economic affairs, in a delirium of optimism, invented the word ‘Wirtschaftswunder.’ No mention was made of automation, then in full swing, and where its effects made themselves felt, people talked airily of creating ‘new job opportunities.’ The reality is that if automation is forced to implement automation because without it investments, profits and surplus value would dry up, it is at the same time threatened by automation.

After all, automation causes structural unemployment and so leads to a reduction in spending power, hence to so-called over-production. To counter this, new outlets—markets—have to be exploited and these exist only in non-industrialized countries which possess raw materials but lack the production facilities for processing them. Imperialism’s attempt to prevent or curb industrialization in the developing countries so as to keep them as market outlets for its own manufactures, dominates world politics. Organized and financed coups d’états, economic blockades and military interventions are among the arsenal of strategies deployed in this battle.

It is clear that automation results in a drastic change in the relations of production which in turn leads to changes to social structures. A revolutionary situation, in other words, which prompts speculative ideas about possible future forms of life and appropriate forms of living environment.

In a society where structural unemployment takes on such a permanent character that large sections of the workforce no longer participate in the production process at all, in what is for many to all intents and purposes a dead-end situation, it is no longer possible to think about urban planning from the utilitarian perspective of the Athens Charter with its four work-based functions.

Planners must, at least theoretically, start looking at alternative forms of urbanization. It seems remarkable that this is scarcely happening.

In the third part of his book *Histoire mondiale de l’architecture et de l’urbanisme modernes*, especially devoted to futuristic projects, Michel Ragon concludes that New Babylon presupposes socialization, the common ownership of land and the means of production. Personally, I find this eminently logical in an urban vision which abandons the concept of ‘settlement’ and instead emphasizes mobility, the freedom of time and of place.

After all, automation provides every reason for this. If one wants a built environment that optimizes individual mobility, one is forced to abandon the notion of the ‘city’ as a concentration of individual structures, which brings one almost automatically to the concept of a continuous structure. If such a structure were to spread out over a very large area, changing geographical conditions alone would ensure that, although perhaps initially of a linear nature, it would inevitably start to take on the shape of a more or less irregular network. Land subdivision, I need hardly point out, makes such a development impossible. Even large-scale expropriation procedures would be of little use. Furthermore, a network structure implies leaving the holes in the net undeveloped if one is taking account of agrarian and scenic needs and not end up with complete chaos.

It is difficult to see how such a form of urbanization can be reconciled with landownership, quite apart from the fact that landownership is going to become increasingly difficult to justify in an over-populated world.

From the outset, therefore, the New Babylon project has been based on collective ownership of land. This has meant abandoning short-term feasibility and making the plan conditional on a revolutionary change in society.

As far as the means of production are concerned, things are even clearer: the New Babylon project is based on the hypothesis of a society without human productive work, a society in which the production apparatus is optimally automated. Without this condition there would be no need to take account of activities and lifestyles arising from the energy released by such a society and every notion of New Babylon would thereby be at an end.

Well then, how could such far-reaching automation be achieved without social ownership of the means of production? How could even a production apparatus owned by only a few continue to exist alongside propertyless masses who are no longer needed for production? How could the production in that case be marketed if it can no longer be paid for with labor? And how could the needs of the non-working masses be satisfied without spending power? In short, what would be the sense of production in such a context?

Capitalism is being destroyed by its own growth. It tries to prolong its existence by declaring part of the world a trading outlet and excluding industrialization. But it is already clear that this part is steadily shrinking.

Taking advantage of competition among the economic superpowers, more and more so-called developing countries are managing to embark on the path of industrialization. It may take some time to reach a situation of acute disparity between an increasingly productive automated apparatus on the one hand and an ever-shrinking market on the other. In such a revolutionary situation, the only conceivable so-
lution is socialization, although this will not of course come about of its own accord but via a lengthy period of conflict, even armed conflict.

The only alternative imaginable is all-out war, resulting in the destruction of large areas of our planet.

The pessimists among you must not, however, forget that even a war of destruction will mean the end of capitalism, and will at best merely postpone history.

Those who think that nuclear destruction is inevitable and have already accepted this future scenario, will not be able to muster much interest in New Babylon and will regard it as an unattainable Utopia.

But what is a Utopia? A Utopia is a picture of society that ignores material conditions, an idealization of reality.

Utopia is a world without aggression, without suffering, without change, without creativity, without play, without freedom.

Automation is a material condition and achievable. New Babylon, which is based on this fact, is therefore also theoretically achievable.

The material preconditions for New Babylon exist, even if they cannot be adequately developed because they are irreconcilable with the pre-existing economic mechanism. One can state that since the collapse of this economy — revolution — is the precondition for the emergence of a world similar to New Babylon, New Babylon is still a distant prospect, and may be preceded by a period of large-scale destruction.

But this still does not make New Babylon utopian and it certainly makes sense for us to start looking now for an alternative to this somber vision of the future. The 1970s have been dominated by an economic recession partly caused by automation and consequently intractable. The growing presence of excess human energy has started to make itself felt. Unexpected and unpredictable modes of behavior continually disrupt the established social pattern. Mostly they are tinged with aggression; fantasy is rare. Is the catchcry 'L'imagination au pouvoir' (power to the imagination) which survived the May 1968 events in Paris, an empty slogan?

Is the idea underlying the hypothesis of 'freedom of time' a utopian idea? If Marx, with his remark that creativity in the masses has always been suppressed, was mistaken; if Lautréamont, with his yearning for a poetry made by all rather than one, was cherishing a fantasy; if the situationists, with their original program of invention and construction of 'comportements,' 'ambiances,' and 'situations,' were merely formulating illusions, now is the moment when this should become apparent.

And if we are forced to conclude that not much remains of even the primitive and naive beginning of ludic behavior as it appeared during the Provo period and during the Paris May days, we should be looking to find out why this is so.

We could begin for instance with the debasement of the concept 'ludic.' This word, which crept in almost unnoticed, first in French, in situationist publications, and which is now familiar internationally, was originally used to denote alternative behavior, as opposed to 'utilitarian' or useful behavior, to denote life as 'creation' (another debased concept) as opposed to life as duty.

In its original meaning, the word 'ludic' was always used in a social context, in other words, not for the behavior of a particular individual (there would be nothing new about this), but for the interaction within larger groups of individuals.

The word was therefore always used in connection with the concept of 'collective creativity' which refers to a cultural form that stands in contrast to individual creativity, which is a rare commodity in the working society. 'Collective creativity' is thus a hypothetical concept that is closely connected with the idea of a non-working or 'ludic' society.

It goes without saying that a culture produced by collective activity is on a higher level than a culture made by only a few and which the majority of people experience as mere spectacle or do not notice at all.

The idea of such a collective creativity has been latent in all schools and groups of modern art, sometimes explicit, seldom clearly defined. One finds this idea among both surrealists and constructivists, and it has left a deep impression on the Cobra movement. The situationists were the first to realize that it is incompatible with individual art forms and that collective creativity would not produce art works as such but something of an entirely new and unfamiliar nature for which the term unitary urbanism was invented.

As I said at the start, it now strikes me as incongruous to expect today's artists to become creatively involved in the development of behavioral patterns that can only be developed by a collective and even then in an entirely different kind of society.

What was then still acceptable as a theoretical proposal, has in practice turned out to be doomed to failure. The 'happening' inevitably turned into a 'performance,' into a spectacle produced by the individual and consumed by others, no different than in a theater.

The experiments with various modes of behavior have led to nothing but individual creations, comparable to traditional art forms and only distinguished from these by the use of technical resources.

But this is about more than a failure, a shot in the dark. Unitary urbanism is a revolutionary idea because it is conditional upon a social transformation. The abandonment of this precondition has led to counter-revolutionary activity, a manipulation and falsification of this idea.

Indeed: the American performances and environments are to situationist 'comportements' and 'ambiances' as Teilhard de Chardin is to Darwin. The best method a social organization possesses for ridding itself of ideas that threaten it is assimilation of those ideas, albeit in a modified form and stripped of their true substance.

The enormous publicity enjoyed by the so-called 'new art forms' emanating from America, and the massive financing of this propaganda could perhaps be seen in this light.

And the falsification of the ideas goes hand in hand with the degradation of the terms used to formulate these ideas. But the material conditions for ludic actions have also deteriorated. The centers of the big cities are cleared by land speculation: the population is forced to move to widely dispersed dormitory towns, dependent on car, television and supermarket, robbed of direct and spontaneous contacts, the standard of living declines, the struggle for existence comes to the fore once more, in short, the atmosphere and the setting for collective ludic behavior disappear.

An irrational aggression naturally takes their place as an outlet for unused energies. It is to be expected that this trend will continue, that the positions will harden and the power struggle become more grim.

New Babylon seems a very long way off, especially now that...
there is a growing need for a different kind of living environment. Twenty years ago, discussions about New Babylon focused on the question of whether automation would indeed be achieved, and if so, whether this would lead to emancipation from work and to the wholesale release of energy that might for instance be converted into creativity. Now these are no longer questions; enormous energy is being withdrawn from the labor process and it finds no other outlet than in aggression prompted by dissatisfaction. This situation can only become increasingly explosive. The relevance of the New Babylon project seems to have disappeared or to have been postponed to some shadowy future. The prospect of social revolution is obscured by the fear of a nuclear war; we are living under the stress of nuclear blackmail. Under these circumstances, the idea of 'collective creativity,' which informed the building of the New Babylon model, has faded into the background and it does not look as if this will change for the time being.

The model itself, when not seen from the perspective of an idea, strikes many people as a collection of aesthetic or even technical objects, devoid of intelligible content. People look at it the way they look at African sculptures; without understanding anything of the magical significance, but nonetheless fascinated by the form which starts to lead a life of its own. This is all the stronger in this case because the New Babylon material was conceived more as illustration than as a basis for construction. Rather than stipulating building forms, as other speculative plans do, it suggests possibilities: 'This is how it might look.'

The network is amorphous, the sectors are all differently constructed, now as a suspended structure, there self-supporting or simply supported on pilotis. The aim was to create a maximum of variety precisely so that people would not get the mistaken impression that it was being offered as a technical solution. The inner work of the sectors, the micro-structure, was deliberately left open, or schematically indicated here and there, so as to emphasize that these are changeable decors whose function cannot be fixed in advance.

Descriptions of the project always made it perfectly clear that New Babylon was to be made by the New Babylonians themselves, that it is impossible and pointless to design a city for the future because we have no say in that future. What we can do is to predict or strive for changes in the way people live together, to take these into account when considering possible alternative urban forms.

We build now for the present way of life, so we build wretchedly for a wretched life. For those who believe or think that another kind of society is possible, that, to paraphrase Freud's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, we must not interpret the world but change it, speculative representation is every bit as important as critical analysis.

The rigid dividing line that Engels drew between Utopia and science impoverished thinking about the future. If we recognize that the way the world looks is the product of coincidences but of human activity, which is in turn determined by social processes, Utopia in the true sense of the word ceases to exist, for nothing is a priori unreal unless, like eternal life, it contravenes the laws of science.

New Babylon is based on facts that do not contravene the laws of science: automation of production, disappearance of human production work, free disposal of the major part of a lifetime for virtually everyone, activation of that time by inventive behavior, the creation of life. These facts prompt several conclusions: freedom of movement, no need of a fixed abode, a built environment with variable functions, movable construction of the micro-structure.

Up to this point, it is possible to form a fairly clear idea of an as yet uninhabited world. It is more difficult to populate this world with people who live so very differently from ourselves: we can neither dictate nor design their playful or inventive behavior in advance. We can only invoke our fantasy and switch from science to art. It was this insight that prompted me to stop work on the models and to attempt in paintings and drawings, however approximately, to create some New Babylonian life.

This was as far as I could go. The project exists. It is safely stored away in a museum, waiting for more favorable times when it will once again arouse interest among future urban designers.

Everything I had to say about it has been said and written down. I am certainly not the first artist in history to get involved in the design of buildings or urban development schemes. But I do not believe that any of my predecessors distanced themselves so far from the existing reality. Yet the same can be said of the paintings and sculptures of this century. Artistic activity attests to a universal lack of faith in the continued existence of this culture; it is observed to be largely destructive, according to the situationist formulation, 'décomposition des arts.'

This can be explained as proceeding from a profound uneasiness with society. Never before have criticism of and opposition to social reality been so symptomatic of art. It is understandable that many artists should have started musing about the possibility of a different culture, one that does not rest on the achievements of one or two individuals, but on the collectivity. Without these musings, the New Babylon project would never have come into existence.

For over half a century now, the world has been haunted by the spirit of dada. Seen from this perspective, New Babylon might perhaps be called a response to anti-art.
238 Presentations

solo  group  catalog  lecture  review  essay  interview  TV/film/radio

1952
21 November - 5 January Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Voor een spatiaal colorisme
   Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum
   three handprinted plates, edition of 50. texts: Constant and A. van Eyck

1955
14.07 participation in a forum organized by Liga Nieuw Beelden. Participants: J. Bakema, Constant, W. Crouwel,
   A. van Eyck, A. Komter, G. Rietveld
   Constant, 'Van samenwerking tot absolute eenheid van de plastische kunsten,'
   Forum, vol. 10, no. 6 (July-August), p. 207

1956
06.09 lecture 'Demain la poesie logera la vie' at the Primo congresso mondiale degli artisti liberi, organized by A. Jorn and
   P. Gallizio, held from 2-9 September, Alba, Italy
   Constant, 'De eerste tekenen,' Liga Bulletin (June), n.p.

1957
04.03 lecture 'Het doel en streven van de naoorlogse avant-gardistische groeperingen van "experimenten" tot "situatio-
   nisten",' at the Academie voor Bouwkunst, Amsterdam

1958
04.03 introductory speech at the third Situationists conference, held from 17-20 April in Munich

1959
04.03 lecture 'Het doel en streven van de naoorlogse avant-gardistische groeperingen van "experimenten" tot "situatio-
   nisten",' at the Academie voor Bouwkunst, Amsterdam

17.04 introductory speech at the third Situationists conference, held from 17-20 April in Munich

4 May-8 June Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Constructies en maquettes
   exhibition catalog: Constant. Paris: Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie
   texts: Constant, Biography
   'Constant — of: Urbanisme in de kunst,' Het Vrije Volk, 22 May
   H.R., 'De architectonische dromen van Constant. Eerste eigen expositie in Stedelijk Museum,'
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   Constant, 'Rapport inaugural de la conférence de Munich,' Internationale Situationniste,
   no. 3 (December), pp. 25-27
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09.01 lecture at the opening of the exhibition  
H. de H., ‘Wechselspiel der Generationen,’ Die Welt, 23 January  
A.S.V., Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 15 February  
Constant, ‘Description de la zone jaune,’ Internationale Situationniste, no. 4 (June), pp. 23-26  
18.07 lecture ‘Was ist Städtebau?’ at the Institut für Städtebau und Landesplanung of the Rheinische-Westfälische Technische Hochschule, Aachen  
20.12 lecture ‘Unitair Urbanisme’ and presentation in sound and image of New Babylon at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, organized by Liga Nieuw Beelden  
‘Constant ontwerpt een droomstad: Nieuw Babylon,’ Het Vrije Volk, 21 December |
| 1961          | 4 March-9 April Städtische Kunstgalerie, Bochum | Constant Amsterdam exhibition catalog: Constant Amsterdam. Bochum: Städtische Kunstgalerie | texts: Constant, Biography  
04.03 lecture at the opening of the exhibition  
‘Elan zum Experiment und Risiko. Jetzt drei Ausstellungen in der Kunstgalerie – Constants Blick auf “New Babylon”,’ Westdeutsche Allgemeine, 4 March  
‘Imaginaire stad met totaal ander leven,’ Parool, 30 March |
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<td>02.04 ‘Met Simon Vinkenoog naar het New Babylon van Constant,’ broadcast on Dutch vpro television in the series ‘Atelierbezoek’</td>
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<td>07.11 lecture ‘New Babylon – An illustrated talk by Constant’ at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London</td>
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j.h.p., 'Visioner om et abstrakt Babylon. Hollandesk universal-kunstner viser sine fremtidsvisioner på en smuk, men ganske ufor stäelig udstilling på kunstakademiet,' Politiker, 13 March

Constant, 'New-Babylon,' Signum. Tidsskrift for moderne kunst, no. 4, pp. 23-30

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Constant, 'New Babylon: An Urbanism of the Future,' Architectural Design, vol. 34, no. 6 (June), pp. 304-305

Constant, 'Ny Babylon,' Arkitekten, vol. 66, no. 13 (June), pp. 280-284

'Utopie einer neuen Welt. In städtischem Kunstbesitz: Bilder des Holländers Constant,' Ruhr Nachrichten, 4 July

Constant, 'Opkomst cn ondergang van de avant-garde,' Randstad, no. 8, Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, pp. 6-35

Constant and N. Tummers 'Constant. Nieuw Babylon over 's-Gravenhage,' Dagblad Cobouw, 25 September

25 September-3 January Haags Gemeente Museum, The Hague, Den Haag '45 '85
text: Constant

September/November Galerie Moderne / Galerie for ny kunst, Silkeborg

1-16 October, Galerie Diogenes, Berlin, New Babylon-Architekturen [organized at the occasion of the Berliner Bauwochen]

publication of the lectures given during the Berliner Bauwochen by: Constant, N. Tummers, H.J. Schneider and C. Caspari. Berlin: Galerie Diogenes

02.10 lecture in the Galerie Diogenes, Berlin at the occasion of the Berliner Bauwochen

'Nomaden Heute. Utopische Bauten in der "Galerie Diogenes"', Der Abend, 2 October

H. Ohff, 'Begegnung mit Constant. Utopisches in der Galerie "Diogenes",' Der Tagesspiegel, 3 October

'Pläne für New-Babylon,' Spandauer Volksblatt, 9 October

'Bauten für eine neue Kultur,' Der Kurier, 12 October

H. van Haaren, 'New Babylon, stad voor de homo ludens,' Reflector van het hedendaags wereldgebeuren, vol. 6, no. 3 (October), pp. 26-27

31 October-6 December Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, New Babylon. Imaginäre Stadtlandschaften

text: Constant, Bibliography

31.10 lecture 'Die Stadt des freien kreativen Menschen' at the opening of the exhibition

'Ausstellung voll Aktualität. Holländer Constant zu Gast in Haus Lange,' Neue Rhein Zeitung, 31 October

'New-Babylon – die Zukunft Stadt. Eröffnung einer seltsamen Ausstellung im Museum Haus Lange,' Westdeutsche Zeitung, 2 November

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M. Pirich, 'Wie lebt der Mensch im arbeitsfreien Zeitalter? Haus Lange zeigt "New Babylon," die imaginären Stadtlandschaften von Constant,' Rheinischen Post / Krefelder Stadtpost, 3 November

07.11 lecture for the Gesellschaft für Städtebau, in Schloss Mainau, Konstanz
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<td>S. Luycken, ‘Die Architektur des homo ludens. In Krefeld sind erstmals Constants Architektonische Utopien zu sehen,’ <em>Mannheimer Morgen</em>, 10 November</td>
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<td>20.11 lecture ‘Imaginäre Stadtlandschaften’ and C. Caspari ‘Das Labyr in New Babylon’ in Haus Lange, Krefeld</td>
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<td>Ausstellung brachte Wirbel. Grosses Interesse für den Holländer Constant, ‘<em>Neue Rhein Zeitung</em>, 20 November</td>
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<td>‘Ein Denk- und Spielmodell. Der Niederländer Constant über sein New Babylon in Haus Lange,’ <em>Westdeutsche Zeitung</em>, 24 November</td>
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<td>W. de Bruijn, ‘New Babylon, stad voor de spelende mens,’ <em>Dagblad voor Noord-Limburg</em>, 26 November</td>
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<td>Der <em>New-Babylon Zeichnungen 1961/62</em> texts: C. Caspari, Constant</td>
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<td>B. Kroon, ‘Constant: geen nuttigheid, maar kunst. De wereldstad van onbeperkte vrije tijd,’ <em>DeTijd</em>, 24 December</td>
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<td>1965</td>
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<td>2 January-2 February Galerie Krikhaar, Amsterdam, Constant 1945-1965</td>
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<td>A. Bosman, ‘De kunst is dood, maar creatieve mens ontwaakt,’ <em>Algemeen Dagblad</em>, 13 January</td>
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<td>23.01 lecture at the Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunst, The Hague</td>
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<td>E. Wingen, ‘Dit wordt het jaar van Constant: de rustige hemelbestormer. Nieuw-Babylon: vrije consumptie voor iedereen,’ <em>De Telegraaf</em>, 30 January</td>
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<td>2 February-7 March Rotterdamsche Kunstkring/Galerie Delta, Rotterdam, Constant 1945-1965</td>
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<td>exhibition catalog: <em>Constant 1945-1965</em>. Rotterdam: Rotterdamsche Kunstkring/Galerie Delta</td>
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<td>26.02 lecture as guest teacher ‘New Babylon’ at the Academie van Bouwkunst</td>
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<td>06.03 lecture at the Jan van Eyck academie, Maastricht</td>
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<td>H.M. Giesen, ‘Constant en zijn non-stop-happening,’ <em>De Gelderlander Pers</em>, 27 March</td>
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<td>31.03 lecture ‘New Babylon’ at the Academie voor Bouwkunde, Delft</td>
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<td>01.04 lecture ‘New Babylon’ at the Sociale Academie, Amsterdam</td>
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<td>02.04 lecture ‘De toekomst van de stad’ for the Haagse Kunstkring and Bond voor Nederlandse Architecten, The Hague</td>
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<td>H. van Haaren, ‘Signalement van Constant,’ <em>Museumjournaal</em>, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 115-117</td>
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<td>H. van Haaren, ‘Constant. Schilderijen, constructies, New Babylon,’ <em>Openbaar Kunstbezit</em>, vol. 3, no. 6 (June), pp. 12a-12g</td>
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<td>28.06 television broadcast on Constant’s work, produced by Openbaar Kunstbezit</td>
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3 July-5 September Kunsthalle, Bern, *Neue Tendenzen der Architektur*

exhibition catalog: *Neue Tendenzen der Architektur*. Bern: Kunsthalle Bern
texts: L. Burckhardt, Constant, et al.

'Speelstad Nieuw-Babylon visie van een kunstenaar. Constant Nieuwenhuys exposeert in Maastricht,' 
*Dagblad voor Noord-Limburg*, 8 July

15 July-15 August Voormalige Dominicaner Kerk, Maastricht, *New Babylon* [with Graatsma and Slothouber]

*New Babylon Informatief*, no. 1 (July)
text: N. Tummers

15.07 lecture in the Dominicaner Kerk, Maastricht
W.K. Coumans, 'New Babylon en Vier Kanten,' *Nieuws van de Staatsmijnen*, 30 July

'interview met Constant Nieuwenhuys,' *Bouwkundig Weekblad*, 27 August

1 October-21 November Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, *Constant*

exhibition catalog: *Constant*. The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum
texts: Constant, J. de Gruyter, H. van Haaren, L.J.F. Wijsenbeek, Biography, Bibliography

*New Babylon Informatief*, no. 2 (October)
text: N. Tummers

'Constant als schilder, beeldhouwer en utopist. Uitgebreid overzicht in Gemeentemuseum,' *Haagse Courant*, 2 October

'Constant en de homo ludens. Overzichtstentoonstelling in het Haags Gemeentemuseum,' *Het Binnenhof*, 9 October

P. Hellman, 'Constant. Guerilla-strijd tegen de bestaande orde,' *Het Vrije Volk*, 9 October

G. Kording, 'Constant: visionair ruimtevormer,' *De Rotterdamer / Nieuwe Haagse Courant*, 9 October

F. de Haas, 'Constant in Gemeentemuseum, Boeiend constructeur maar geen visionair,' *Het Vrije Volk*, 9 October

L. Roest, 'Constant. Profetisch kunstenaar,' *Het Vaderland*, 12 October

G.C. Vieten, 'Plastik “Neu-Babylons” im Haager Gemeentemuseum,' *DieWeltkunst*, 15 October

A. Bosman, 'Constant. Van experimenteel tot stedebouwer van de toekomst,' *Algemeen Dagblad*, 16 October

W.D. Kuik, 'Constant, de profeet. New-Babylon in Den Haag,' *Het Parool*, 16 October

'Constant. Luchtkastelen om de aarde te herwinnen,' *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 16 October

'Preatvaeria,' *Elsevier*, 16 October

20.10 lecture at the occasion of the exhibition at the Haags Gemeentemuseum


D. Welling, 'Plannen voor ons speelse leven in komende zee van vrije tijd,' *Rotterdams Nieuwsblad*, 23 October

P. Berger, 'De nieuwe Babylonische spraakverwarring,' *Het Vaderland*, 27 October

R. van Duyn, 'New Babylon. Gesprek met Constant,' *Provo*, no 4, 28 October

L. Tegenbosch, 'Constant vecht tegen windmolens,' *de Volkskrant*, 29 October
244 Presentations

G. Lampe, 'De geniale utopieën van Constant. Cobra en Nieuw Babylon,' *Vrij Nederland*, 30 October

P.W.J. Steinz, 'Groeten uit New Babylon Constant,' *Hervormd Nederland*, 30 October

E. Wingen, 'Nieuw-Babylon,' *De Telegraaf*, 4 November

E. Wingen, 'Constant en Bouthoorn, twee kunstenaars twee werelden,' *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant*, 6 November

E. Wingen, 'New Babylon — eine Utopie. Ein Vortrag des Städteplaners Constant in Köln,' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 January

H. van Haaren, 'Constant: de schepper van New Babylon,' *Sleutel*, vol. 4, no. 1 (November), pp. 12-13

09.11 lecture 'Die Stadt als Dekor für Kreation und Rekreation' at the Volkshochschule, Cologne

H. van Haaren, 'Constant: de schepper van New Babylon,' *Sleutel*, vol. 4, no. 1 (November), pp. 12-13

1966

14 January-11 February Volkshochschule, Cologne, *Constant. New Babylon*

untitled brochure

texts: Constant, E.T. Mochler, Biography

14.01 lecture 'New Babylon — Stadt des homo ludens' at the opening of the exhibition

H. Baumans, 'Constants schöne ganz neue Welt. Städte und Bilder in der Volkshochschule und bei

'Constant bastelt Neu-Babylon,' *Rundschau am Sonntag*, 16 January

H. S. Zwirner,' Neue Rheinzeitung', 18 January

V. Sturm, 'New Babylon — eine Utopie. Ein Vortrag des Städteplaners Constant in Köln,' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 January

G. Jappe, 'Der Gründer Neu-Babylons. Constant in der Volkshochschule und bei Zwirner,' *Kölner Stadtanzeige*, 21 January

14 January-11 February Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne, *Bilder, Gouaches und Plastiken von Constant Nieuwenhuys*

*New Babylon Informatief*, no. 3 (January)

text: C. Caspari

J.A. Twaites, 'Die Stadt von morgen ist zum Spielen da. Neu-Babylon; Die Utopie des Holländer

Constant — zu zwei Ausstellungen in Köln,' *Saarbrücker Zeitung*, 24 February

H. Schreiber, 'Neu-Babylon. Ein Architekt träumt in die Zukunft — Gerüstkonstruktion für ganze

Siedlungsgebiete,' *Rheinischer Merkur*, no. 9 (25 February), p. 17

26 February-24 March Provinciaal Museum, Den Bosch, *Constant. Van Cobra tot New Babylon*


texts: Constant, H. van Haaren, Biography

J.M., 'Constant: Van Cobra tot New Babylon,' *De Stem*, 5 March

D. Welling, 'Nieuw Babylon? Wat zit er voor ons in? Full-time Provo Constant wekt op tot creatieve

ontvredenheid,' *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 5 March

T. Frenken, 'Van Cobra naar New Babylon,' *Lindhovens Dagblad*, 12 March

T. Frenken, "Collectieve creativiteit" van de "neo homo ludens"; *Brabants Dagblad*, 12 March

'Van Cobra tot Nieuw Babylon. Constant's ontwerpen voor een stad,' *Den Demschaarsche Courant*, 28 March

2 April-8 May Kunsthalle, Bern, *New Babylon [with Jean Gorin and Jean Dewasne]*


texts: Constant, H. Szeemann, Biography, Bibliography
18 June-16 October 33e Esperezione Biennale Internazionale d’Arte, Padiglione Olandese, Venice

New Babylon Informatief, no. 4 (June)
texts: Constant, V.E. Nieuwenhuys, S. Vinkenoog, N. Tummers

‘Nueva Babilonia,’ Arquitectura México, vol. 28, no. 93, pp. 25-26
W. Christlieb, ‘Olympiade der Künste,’ Abendzeitung, 18-19 June
E. Wingen, ‘Op de Biënnale,’ Telegraaf, 21 June

T. Neelissen, ‘Constant: “Werken in New Babylon is zoiets als tanden poetsen of nagels schoonmaken”. Toekomstproject van Nederlander in Venetië bekroond,’ Haarlems Dagblad, 16 July
E. Wingen, ‘Constant’s droom is in Venetië realiteit. Zijn Nieuw Babylon originele bijdrage op de Biennale,’ Telegraaf, 21 July

T. Nelissen, ‘Constant over “New Babylon”: “Noem het een aards paradijs”. “Dat de mens nuttig moet zijn is een fictie”. Man die zei: “Kunst is dood” wint prijs voor Nederland op Biënnale Venetië,’ Haagse Courant, 30 July
G. Celant, ‘xxxiii Biennale Internazionale d’Art; padiglioni stranieri.’ Casabella continuita, no. 308 (August), p. 64
T. Neelissen, ‘Constant: New Babylon is géén utopie. Ik geloof in een hogere bestemming van de mens... op aarde,’ Rotterdams Nieuwsblad, 20 August

P.W.J. Steinz, ‘Spelen — hoe dan ook — een der hoofd tendensen der Biënnale in Venetië,’ Hervormd Nederland, 3 September

Ignis Promethei, vol. 22, no. 6 theme issue on New Babylon
N. Tummers, ‘Experiment en respons,’ Bouw, vol. 21, no. 4 (29 October), pp. 1732-1735

Wie werden wir morgen wohnen? Schwebende Stadt New Babylon,' *Schöner Wohnen*, no.10 (October), p. 134

27 October-27 November Galerie Krikhaar, Amsterdam

F. Kelk, ‘Zwart-wit bij Constant,’ *Het Parool*, 8 November
J. Bolten, ‘Constant tekent gastvrij labyrint,’ *Het Parool*, 12 November
C. Blok, ‘Tekening van Constant,’ *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 12 November

12.11 lecture ‘Over het reizen’ for the Bond voor Nederlandse Architecten at Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam

E. Wingen, ‘Het meesterschap van Corneille en Constant. In Stedelijk en bij Krikhaar,’ *De Telegraaf*, 15 November

27.11 television broadcast on Dutch NTS entitled ‘Monitor’

1967


J. Koopmans, ‘Constant Nieuwenhuys: De mens is tot voetganger gedegradeerd,’ *Het Vrije Volk*, 7 January

H. van der Meer, ‘Het toneel van Amsterdam,’ *de Volkskrant*, 11 February

15.02 lecture ‘Over normen in de cultuur’ in De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam

E. Wingen, ‘Constant in 12 maanden,’ *De Telegraaf*, 18 February

Constant, ‘New Urbanism,’ *Delta*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 54-61

text: Constant

J. Claus, ‘Constant, Von Cobra bis New Babylon,’ *Die Zeit*, 9 June

‘Constants framtidssamfund i Kunstnernes hus. “Nye Babylon” fullgod erstatning for Rauschenberg utstillingen,’ *Dagbladet*, 11 October

‘Kunstnernes Hus får god erstatning for Rauschenberg. Constant Nieuwenhijs skal komme isteden,’ *Morgenbladet*, 11 October

Constant til Oslo i dag. For å montere utstillingen “New Babylon” fullgod erstatning for Rauschenberg utstillingen,’ *Dagbladet*, 11 October

12.10 lecture ‘New Babylon’ at the Studium Generale of the Technische Hogeschool, Delft

‘Rart i vente,’ *Morgenposten*, 10 November

‘Framtidsbyen “New Babylon” vel framme. Stablet i kjelleren i Kunstnernes Hus Constant-utstillingen åpner om én uke,’ *Dagbladet*, 10 November

G. G., ‘Livet en happening for New Babylon’s nomade,’ *Aftenposten*, 15 November

‘Politikere er naive – og tenker ikke framover,’ *Dagbladet*, 16 November

‘Fantastisk nederlandsk fremtidsprosjekt utstilles i Kunstnernes Hus,’ *Morgenposten*, 17 November

‘Hus for mennesker på konstant flyttefot,’ *Aftenposten*, 18 November

G. Stromholm, ‘Nye Babylon i Kunstnernes Hus,’ *Arbeiderbladet*, 18 November
18 November-10 December Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo, Constant. New Babylon

exhibition catalog: Constant. New Babylon. Oslo: Kunstnernes Hus

texts: Constant, M. Krohg, S. Vinkenoog, Biography, Bibliography

J. Fr. Michelet, ‘Utopisk byprosjekt i Kunstnernes Hus,’ Verdens Gang, 23 November
‘New Babylon… den arkitektoniske revolusjon som skaper et helt nytt samfunn. Hvor Homo Ludens er på reise beständig verken fra eller til,’ Porggenus Dagblad, 25 November
G. D. Horne, ‘Babbel i Babylon,’ Morgenbladet, 27 November
E. H. Johnsrud, ‘New Babylon, byen somhenger i luften,’ Astenposten, 30 November
S. Kyllingstad, ‘Constants åpenbarring. Eller New Babylon i Kunstnernes Hus,’ Nationen, 30 November
M. Krohg, ‘Babbel om Babylon,’ Morgenbladet, 4 December
T. Moe, ‘Det nye Babylon,’ Dagbladet, 6 December
S. Kyllingstad, ‘Utopi og protestantisme,’ Sarpen, 12 December
A. Raanen, ‘New Babylon,’ Fremiden, 20 December
Letterkundig inter-universitair tijdschrift, vol. 6, no. 21/22, pp. 75-88

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2 February-25 February Galerie-τ, Haarlem, Constant. Van Cobra tot New Babylon


texts: H. van Haaren, Constant

H. Steenhouver, ‘Constant in Galerie-τ. Van Cobra tot New Babylon,’ Haarlems Dagblad, 6 February
C. Blok, ‘Constant,’ De Groene Amsterdammer, 17 February
16.02 lecture for College of Art and Design in the City Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham
L. Duckworth, ‘Constant world of Homo Ludens,’ The Birmingham Post, 27 February
28.02 lecture and seminar at the Department of Architecture and Civic Planning, Nottingham University

Labyrismen

series of 11 lithos by Constant
text: C. Caspari

30 March-21 April Lunds Konsthall, Lund, Nya Babylon

exhibition catalog: Nya Babylon. Lund: Lunds Konsthall

texts: F. Edwards, Constant

F. Edwards, ‘Nya Babylon ett paradis för de arbetslösa. Frans tidens människa en lekande nomad,’ Sydsvenska Dagbladet. 30 March
12.10 broadcast on German NDR ‘Constant oder der Weg nach New Babylon’ by C. Caspari
Radio broadcast on Dutch VPRO radio
‘Ruimtelijke ordening of ruimtelijke chaos’

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<td>04.03</td>
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<td>‘EW-gesprek met Constant Nieuwenhuys en Sean Wellesley-Miller over Nieuw-Babylon,’ Elsevier (5 April), pp. 112-114</td>
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<td>T. Uittenbogaard, ‘Constant brengt nieuw boek de opstand van homo ludens. “Je kunt toch niet zoals de bbk met je mond vol tanden staan”’, De Nieuwe Linie, 1 November, p. 3</td>
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<td>04.11</td>
<td>Lecture ‘Planologie of revolutie?’ at the Studium Generale Planologie of the Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden</td>
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<td>K. Vollemans, ‘New Babylon,’ De Nieuwe Linie, 15 November</td>
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#### 20 November-18 February Amsterdams Historisch Museum, Amsterdam, Wegwezen. Recreatie vroeger, nu en straks

Exhibition catalog: Wegwezen. Recreatie vroeger, nu en straks. Amsterdam: Amsterdams Historisch Museum

Texts: Constant, H.M. Jolles, S.H. Levie

Constant, Opstand van de Homo Ludens. Een bundel voordrachten en artikelen. Bussum: Paul Brand

Constant, ‘Ny urbanisme,’ Arkitekt og billedkunst, n.d., pp. 70-71

Constant, ‘Ruimtelijke ordening en ruimtelijke chaos,’ Ruimte voor de mens, no. 1

Amersfoort: Werkgroep 2000, pp. 4-6

Constant, ‘Ny Babylon,’ Architekten, n.d., pp. 280-284

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<td>04.11</td>
<td>Lecture ‘Planologie of revolutie?’ at the Studium Generale Planologie of the Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden</td>
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<td>K. Vollemans, ‘New Babylon,’ De Nieuwe Linie, 15 November</td>
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texts: Constant, G. Debord, Mark Wigley
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Mark Wigley, October 1998
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