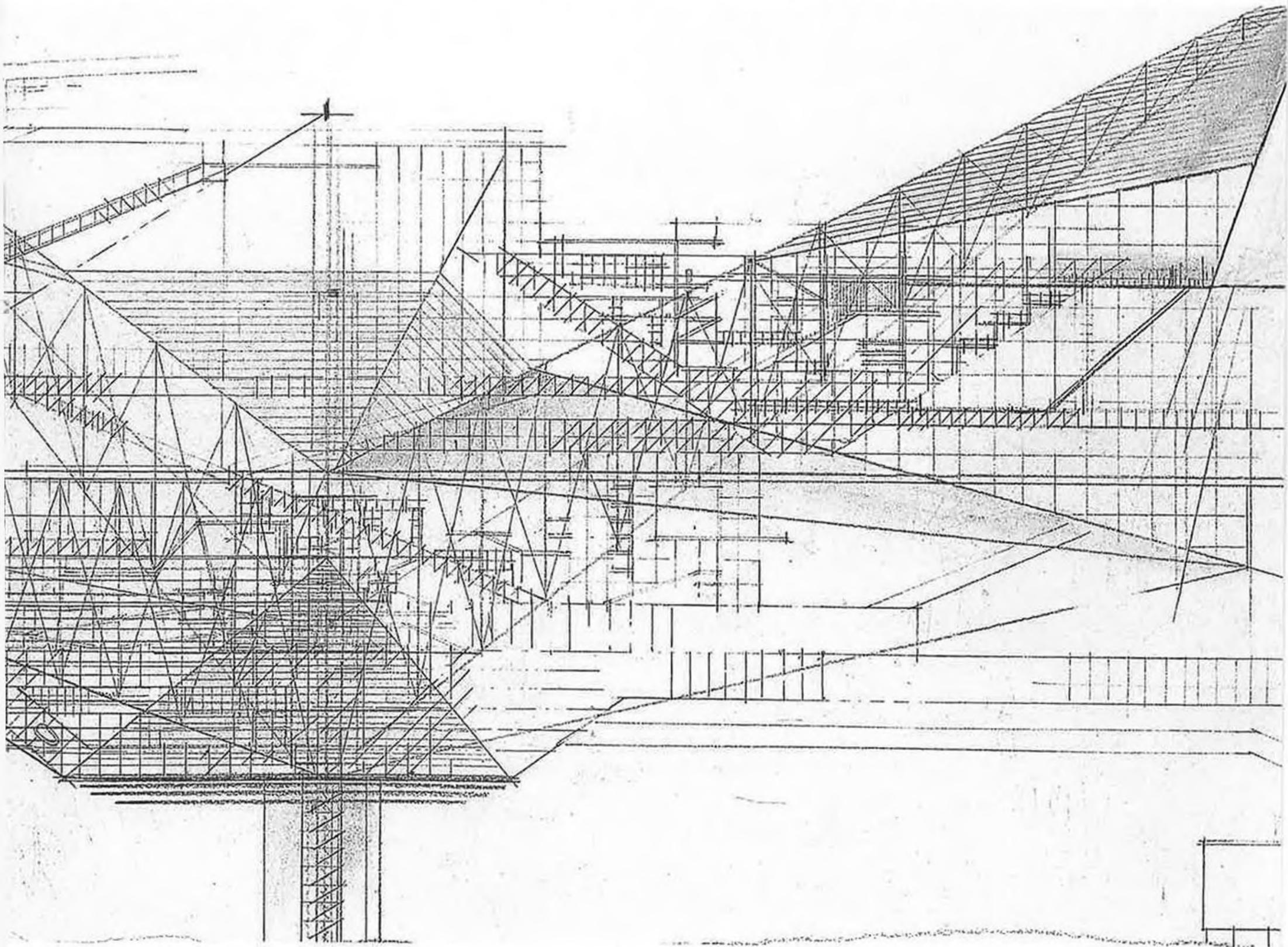


The Drawing Center's

DRAWING PAPERS ₃

Another City for Another Life: Constant's New Babylon

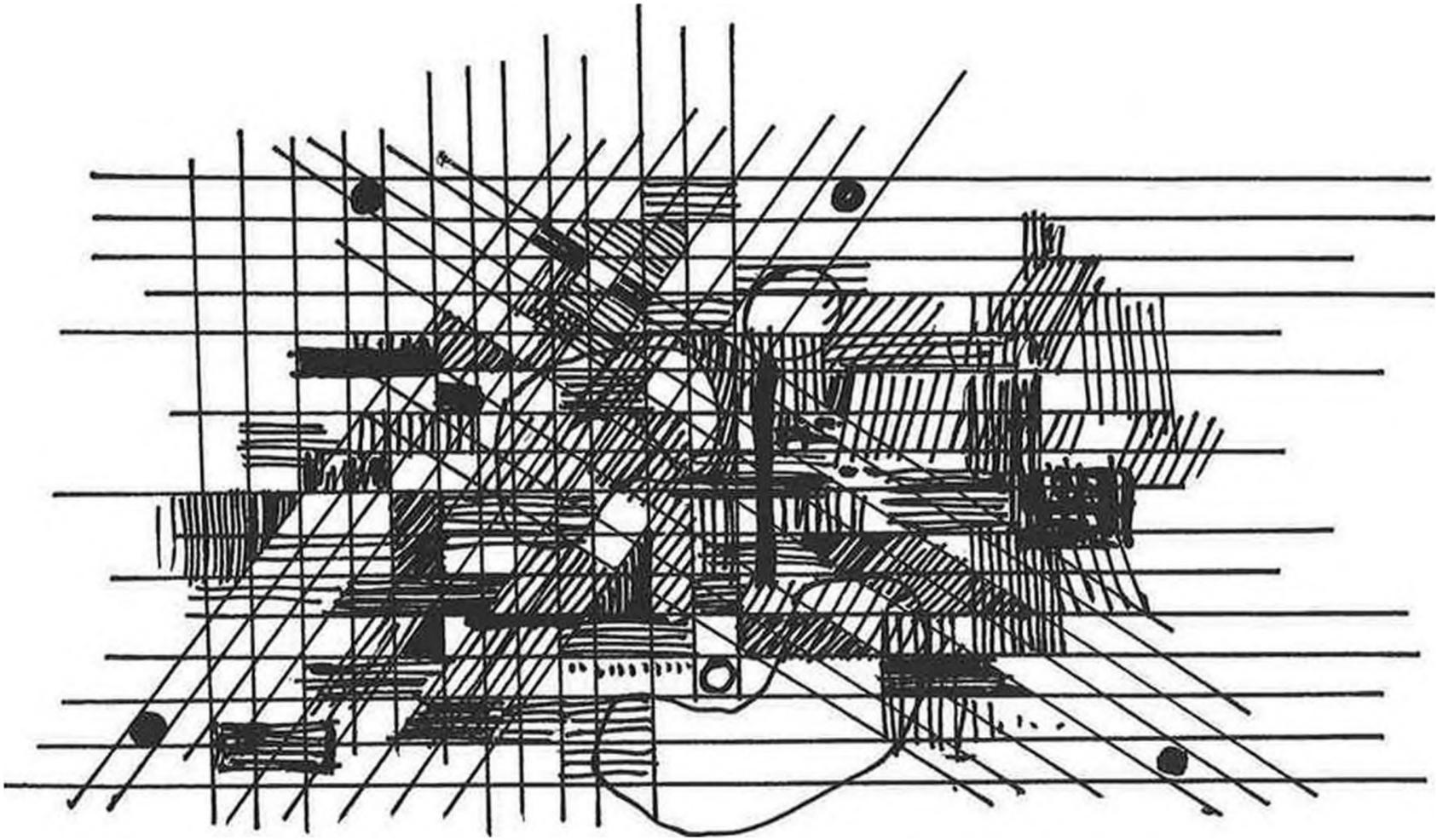


The Drawing Center
NOVEMBER 2-DECEMBER 30, 1999

Another City for Another Life: Constant's New Babylon

Curated by MARK WIGLEY

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Principle of a Covered City. Spatial "Plan." Ink on paper, 4 5/16 x 6 5/16 in. (11 x 16 cm). Published in *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3, December 1959. Collection of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague

An Homage to Constant

3

At the close of the century, and in anticipation of the city-wide celebration of "Utopia" in the year 2000 on the occasion of The New York Public Library's exhibition *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, The Drawing Center is honored to present *Another City for Another Life: Constant's New Babylon*. The exhibition and its related programs and publications feature the visionary architectural project New Babylon, developed between 1956 and 1974 by the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys, who was profoundly concerned with issues of "unitary urbanism" and the future role of art in an advanced technocratic society. For the first extensive presentation of Constant's project in the United States, this exhibition includes over seventy drawings produced during nearly two decades, as well as an architectural model and an audio-visual display of slide projections and video screenings. So as to provide a contextual framework, the exhibition also presents a selection of catalogues, invitations, correspondence, maps, posters, photographs, manifestos, albums, and other writings by Constant and his peers. This accompanying edition of the *Drawing Papers*, number 3 in the series, is comprised of two complementary sections: an insightful essay by the curator of the exhibition, Mark Wigley, and a selection of Constant's own writings, most of which appear in English for the first time. The final component of the project is the symposium *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from New Babylon to Beyond*, which will be documented in a book of the same title to be published in the spring of 2000. Representing the situationist context that New Babylon emerged out of and in turn influenced, both the symposium and its book will explore the dynamic intersection of drawing, utopianism, and activism in a multi-media era.

Although the exhibition and its connected publications trace a historical moment, Constant's work reveals a number of ideas that are surprisingly contemporary and raise urgent questions concerning the relationship between a fully automated environment and human creativity. Intended as a polemical provocation, New Babylon envisages, as Constant has stated, "the world-wide city of the future" for a society of total automation, in which the need to work is replaced with a nomadic life of creative play or a modern return to Eden. The *homo ludens* whom man will become once freed from labor, "will not have to make art, for he can be creative in the practice of his daily life." Deeply rooted in the tradition of the avant-garde, with its desire for the renewal of society, New Babylon

offers a challenging proposal, wherein a network of enormous multilevel interior spaces propagates so as to eventually cover the planet. These interconnected "sectors" float above the ground on tall columns, while vehicular traffic rushes underneath and air traffic lands on the roof. The inhabitants drift by foot through the huge labyrinthine interiors, perpetually reconstructing every aspect of the environment by changing the lighting and reconfiguring the mobile and temporary walls. For this *homo ludens*, social life becomes architectural play and the multi-interpretable architecture becomes a shimmering display of interacting desires—a collective form of creativity, as it were, displacing the traditional arts altogether. In 1959 Constant stated: "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."

Positioned at the threshold of the end of art and architecture, this great urbanism game-as-project had a major impact on the work of subsequent generations of artists, architects, and urbanists. Prefiguring much of the current debate about architecture in the supposedly placeless age of electronics, Constant seems to have conceived an urban model that literally envisaged the World Wide Web. The network of "sectors" in New Babylon can be seen as a physical translation of the Internet and the Web site, in which one configures his or her own space and can wander in an unobstructed way from site to site, without limits. In this respect, Constant's project represents a spatial visualization of a virtual world, where people can move, meet, and interact at anytime, anywhere. Developing this unlimited communication system, the work seems as radical as ever—an outstandingly visualized concept that dispenses with established ideas of everyday life, community, and domesticity, and challenges the very notion of architecture in the era of electronic space, where computers and telecommunications are taking us into the euphoria of the next millennium.

Perhaps one of the last revolutionary formulations in the twentieth century concerning the function of art in the construction of a new urban environment and social space that allowed for the emergence of *another* (wo)man, New Babylon imagined and interrogated the role of cultural production in a post-war society of consumption. The militant anti-art position, which fused with the imperative to dissolve the separation between art and life, gave rise in Constant's project and other situationist works to a new dialectics of the simultaneous negation and realization of art. Remarkably, in this process drawing sustained its position as a means of expression toward an aesthetics of action, while painting was relegated to oblivion, literally given up by Constant in 1953 because he was doubtful of its transforming potential. Graphics became the site of political intervention, not only to illuminate the architectonics and strategies of the bureaucratic consumer culture of late Western capitalism, but also to develop the architectonics of a utopian space of creativity in an increasingly computerized society. In fact, Constant considered New Babylon to be neither a determined urbanist plan, nor a utopian project, in the sense that its realization belonged to the real environmental possibilities for a social space, with an ever-changing shape intended "to avoid any restriction of the freedom of movement and any limitation with regard to the creation of mood and atmosphere."

What does New Babylon signify at this moment, when reality seems to indicate that the imagined *homo ludens*, being part of a non-working community, did not bring about a daily life of invention and action, but of leisure and consumption? What can the role of art be, if not the actual production of “consolation-objects” in a world constituted of continuous displacement and fluctuating notions of origin and context? Eventually, Constant foresaw the destructive part of his proposed environment, since the last scenes in his drawings lay bare a site of violence and terror. As liberating as the first demonstration of the new city may have seemed in opposition to functionalist architecture, as repressive the high-tech labyrinthine “construction of atmosphere” may have become in the end. In spite of this dramatic analysis, New Babylon remains an amazingly inventive project as a critical interrogation of the logic of the spectacle, and as an artistic suggestion of new forms of behavior, interaction, and politics. In the encounter of aesthetics and politics, Constant’s New Babylon figures as a model for the exploration of the current cultural landscape, where a decline in the capacity to imagine the world differently seems to be apparent.

At this point, first and foremost, I wish to acknowledge Constant, who agreed generously and enthusiastically to share with New York his provocative vision of a new city. The Drawing Center is especially honored that this long overdue celebration of New Babylon in the United States takes place within its galleries. Although Constant developed this architectural project through the deployment of an expansive range of media, aspects of drawing form its ever shifting foundation. Given The Drawing Center’s tradition of exhibitions of architectural drawings, it is appropriate that New Babylon—one of the most significant and influential visionary architectural projects of the twentieth century—will usher this institution into the future. This exhibition is based on *Constant’s New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire*, which was curated by Mark Wigley for the Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam. It has been a great pleasure to work with Mark on this project, and I wish to thank him for ably adapting its original form so as to focus on the role of drawing in Constant’s creative process. Mark has approached a complex body of material with the inquisitiveness and rigor that are characteristic of his innovative scholarship, and we are indebted to him for sharing his extensive knowledge of New Babylon with us.

Any international project demands the cooperation and support of a network of individuals and institutions, and this is particularly true in the case of this exhibition, which was initiated upon my arrival at The Drawing Center only six months ago. There are numerous people to thank for their quick understanding of this undertaking, and I am profoundly grateful for many generous and varied contributions to it. *Another City for Another Life: Constant’s New Babylon* would not have succeeded without the dedication and support of a handful of exemplary institutions in the Netherlands. In this respect my greatest thanks are extended to the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, and the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague. The Witte de With, under the guidance of its Director, Bartomeu Mari, allowed The Drawing Center to develop this exhibition based, in part, on its own excellent presentation of Constant’s project. The bulk of The Drawing Center’s exhibition comes from the fine holdings of the Haags Gemeentemuseum, which have been made available through the generosity of its Director, Dr. Hans Locher—a longtime champion of Constant and New Babylon—and its Chief Curator, Hans Janssen. The professionalism and generosity of the Witte de With and the

Haags Gemeentemuseum have been inspiring. I also wish to acknowledge Dr. G. Kotting, Director, and Marcia Zaaijer, of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague, who facilitated the loan of the majority of contextual materials. In addition the Center is greatly appreciative of the following museums for their loans to the exhibition: Museum Boijmans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, and its Director, Chris Dercon; the Centraal Museum, Utrecht; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the Museum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo. Loans have also been generously provided by private sources, and in this respect I wish to recognize Wil Heins, Herman A. Kater, Roberto Ohrt, and the Galerie van de Loo, Munich. For the audio-visual components of the exhibition I acknowledge VPRO-Television, the Filmmuseum, and Kunstkanaal, Amsterdam.

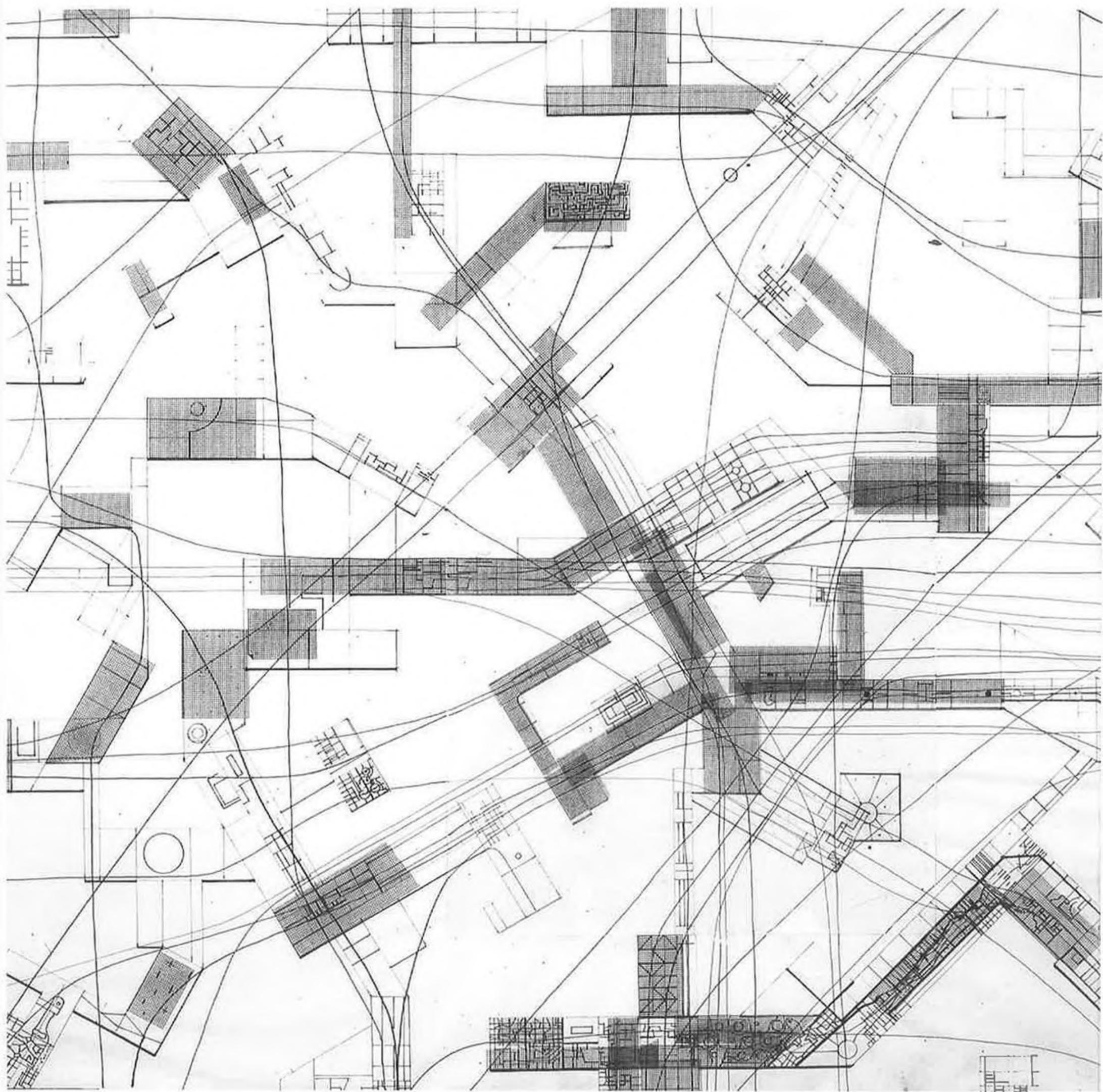
The accompanying symposium *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from New Babylon to Beyond* was developed through my conversations with Mark Wigley and Thomas McDonough. It has been a wonderful and challenging experience to shape this groundbreaking event with them, and to have them participate in it as both moderators and speakers. The book based on the event, to be edited by Mark Wigley and myself, will consist of the essays by the conference speakers considering the key role of architectural graphics in the situationist project and the key role of the situationist graphics in subsequent architectural projects. The focus on the status of drawing will be used to foster new interpretations of architecture and art in the post-war period. My profound appreciation and thanks are extended as well to the other participating scholars: Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Chair, Department of Art History, Barnard College/Columbia University; Rosalyn Deutsche, art historian and critic, Elizabeth Diller, artist, architect, and Associate Professor of Architecture, Princeton University; Martha Rosler, artist; Anthony Vidler, Chair, Department of Art History, University of California at Los Angeles; and Bernard Tschumi, architect and Dean, School of Architecture, Columbia University. It is very exciting that such accomplished figures will share their expertise with us. The symposium will start on a very high note with a conversation between Benjamin Buchloh and Constant, who, like New Babylon, is visiting New York for the very first time.

I have worked on this project with an incredibly dedicated and talented staff. It has, therefore, been a real pleasure to organize this exhibition with my assistant Katie Dyer; Ellen Haddigan, Assistant Director; Blair Winn, Development Coordinator; Anne Blair Wrinkle, Development and Public Relations Officer; Linda Matalon, Director of Operations; Marisa White, Gallery Assistant; Sheila Batiste, Director of the Schools Program; Greg Peterson, Operations Assistant; Allison Plastridge, Registrar and Curatorial Assistant; and, last but not least, with Elizabeth Finch, Curator, who with her usual dedication and sense for detail has contributed immensely to the realization of this undertaking. The Drawing Center's newest staff members, although not directly involved in this project, were one factor in its realization, and my thanks and warm welcome are offered to Victoria Noorthorn, Viewing Program and Exhibitions Coordinator, and Arturo Herrera, Viewing Program Curator. For the design of this publication and related materials for the exhibition I am indebted to the inspired work of Luc Derycke. In addition I wish to acknowledge the contributions of the freelance art-installer Bruce Dow and the exhibition designer Matthew Yokobosky. I extend my appreciation to Roland Groenenboom, the European coordinator of the exhibition, whose knowledge of New Babylon has been matched by his organizational and diplomatic skills.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the generous sponsorship of the Netherlands Architecture Fund, Rotterdam, and I wish to thank R.L. Brouwers, Director, and Pauline van Roosmalen for their unfailing belief in this project. I also acknowledge with gratitude the major financial support of the Mondriaan Foundation for the advancement of the visual arts, design, and museums, Amsterdam. At the Mondriaan Foundation, my thanks go to Melle Daamen, Director, and Yvonne Lüdert. The Drawing Center is as well indebted to the Consulate General of the Netherlands in New York, most especially Consul General Bob Hiensch; Frank Ligtoet, Counsellor for Cultural Affairs USA; and Robert Kloos, Director for Visual Arts, Department of Cultural Affairs. I also wish to express my appreciation of The Netherland-America Foundation under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Margriet of the Netherlands and the Honorable Pieter van Vollenhoven. Special thanks are offered to the Soho Grand Hotel.

Finally, I thank The Drawing Center's Board of Directors, and in particular its Co-chairman George Negroponte and its members Andrea Woodner and Werner Kramarsky, who were early supporters of this project. Their council on many matters pertaining to its development has been invaluable. For their words of support as we undertook the search for financial backing for the exhibition, I thank Georges Teyssot, Professor, Department of Architecture, Princeton University; Sylvia Lavin, Chair, Department of Architecture and Urban Design, University of California, Los Angeles; Clair Weisz, architect; and Diana Agrest, Principal, Agrest & Gandelsonas.

CATHERINE DE ZEGHER, *Director*



Groep sectoren (Group of Sectors), 1960
Collotype, with ink and collage, 22 7/16 x 26 3/4 in. (57 x 68 cm). Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Paper, Scissors, Blur

What is it to exhibit the drawings of Constant's New Babylon? What is it to isolate one medium from such a polemically multi-media project for a multi-media life? What is it to momentarily quarantine the drawings away from the countless models, lithographs, etchings, paintings, photographs, films, manifestos, books, and newsletters that Constant assembled between 1956 and 1974 to form New Babylon? And what is it to do so when this massive project precisely began by taking a certain calculated distance from drawing?

The Impossibility of Drawing

New Babylon first appeared as a set of large extremely well crafted architectural models. Each presented a different "sector" of the city of the future, a future in which automated machines hidden underground take care of all work and people spend their whole lives drifting through vast interior spaces suspended high in the air. The spaces are inter-linked in a labyrinthine network that spreads itself across the entire surface of the earth as one immense building. New Babylon is a seemingly infinite playground. Its occupants continually rearrange their sensory environment, redefining every micro-space within the sectors according to their latest desires. In a society of endless leisure, workers have become players and architecture is the only game in town, a game that knows few limits.

The project was part of a whole generation of radical proposals for the idealized city of the future and was at once celebrated and criticized as it became well known in the architectural community in the early 1960s. Constant had been collaborating with experimental architects ever since he rejected painting in favor of three-dimensional work in 1953, but he only committed himself to such an extremist image of the future city when he became a founding member of the Situationist International, the small collective that completely redefined the meaning of political activism from its formation in July of 1957 to its final dissolution in 1972. Constant played a central role in the group's early operations until his resignation in June of 1960. His attitude towards the politics of architecture coalesced with that of Guy Debord, the ringleader, and the models of New Babylon emerged as their definitive statement.'

The absence of drawing was seemingly part of the original statement. When the first of the models went on display, in a May 1959 exhibition of Constant's sculptures in the

Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, no drawings were exhibited.² When the project was first published, two months later in a situationist newsletter, only a photograph of the first model appeared.³ As it started to be featured in the group's documents as the exemplar of their operations, a few drawings did appear but only after model photographs. When Constant resigned, and the project moved into most of the major international architectural publications, drawing virtually disappeared, only to resurface in some late exhibition catalogues. Reversing the traditional life of an architectural project, the drawings of New Babylon consistently come after rather than before. More and more were done over the course of around fifteen years, yet they never seem to take the lead.

It is symptomatic that Constant didn't show any drawings in his many lectures about New Babylon—only photographs of the models. He had orchestrated hundreds of these images over the years, using different angles, lenses, film, photographers, lighting conditions, backgrounds, and combinations of models to produce the desired effect of kaleidoscopic transformation. The images created an almost psychedelic impression of endless change without ever specifying exact spaces. Many were displayed in the very first exhibitions alongside the corresponding models. As more and more drawings were included in exhibitions, starting with the first substantial number in Bochum in March of 1961, the photographs were still shown.⁴ In fact, there were always many more photographs than drawings. Furthermore, in the mid-sixties, Constant started to add a set of large photographic albums as an "Atlas" of colored images of the world of New Babylon.⁵ Some of the images were of drawings but they were very much in the minority. Drawings remained subordinate to the models, which in turn were subordinate to the photographs.

It would seem, then, that to exhibit the drawings by themselves is to exhibit a secondary medium. Or, more precisely, it is to exhibit a medium that constitutes a large part of the New Babylon project yet has been polemically and repeatedly positioned as secondary, a medium whose strategic effect depends on the appearance of being subordinate but might not be so submissive in the end.

Which images are we talking about anyway? What is a drawing exactly? According to the working definition of The Drawing Center, a drawing is any "unique work on paper." To exhibit the drawings of New Babylon is simply to exhibit over seventy or so sheets of paper. They range in size from around 3 x 4 cm to 200 x 300 cm and are covered with a variety of marks in pencil, charcoal, pastel, crayon, chalk, ink, felt-tip pen, oil, watercolor, fragments of tourist map, text, photographs, newspaper, and Zippertone. One could of course draw on anything, a building, a cave wall, a street, a beach, a body, a computer screen. Technically, paper is just the "support" of a drawing and the material added to it is the "medium." But paper is a special kind of support. It is a lightweight membrane whose own materiality (color, thickness, weight, texture, opacity) is usually ignored—even if it is critical to the person who drew on it.

The paper Constant used ranges from traditional art paper, to notebook sheets, tracing paper, xerox paper, collotype printing paper, and photographic paper. This is obvious on inspection, yet the conventional mode of viewing calls on us to neglect these differences. The standard museological labels that so fetishistically detail all the media in any drawing almost never specify the characteristics of the paper. Only when the paper is not white do the experts rush to tell us what color it is, and even then they do so in a way that preserves

the sense of an idealized white that has been supplemented with color.⁶ In publications, the differences between papers are usually effaced and the resulting white usually merges with that of the page. The paper is effectively bleached one more time. Only the marks themselves catch the eye.⁷ To exhibit so many drawings of New Babylon in a relatively confined space is to install a kind of wallpaper where the substance of the paper is meant to give way to the marks on it. No attempt is made to subvert the traditional logic of display in the exhibition as that logic had a key role in the project itself. As always, almost all the images will appear in close fitting wooden frames, or frames with standard white mattes, that conceal the edges of the sheets of paper to complete the effacement of the support. The white surface within the frame will yet again be experienced as a neutral ground that quietly awaited whatever marks were made on it before the marks were captured for posterity by a sheet of glass. The effect is that of simply lining the gallery with marks and labeling the material and date of each one. Arranged chronologically, they are like specimens in a scientific collection. Marks have been captured like exotic butterflies and put on display. Paper is sacrificed to this fetishistic effect. It disappears.

While the only material that can officially be used for drawing is a layer of compressed and dried woodpulp or fragmented linen, the desirable characteristic of that material is precisely that it can be overlooked. Paper is treated as if it is not really there, as if it occupies a liminal space between material and immaterial. This allows it to act as a bridge across the classical divide between material and idea. Drawings are seen as a unique form of access to the thoughts of the people that make them. Indeed, they are simply treated as thoughts. It is as if the materiality of the medium is transformed by the quasi-immateriality of the support rather than simply exposed by it. A certain way of looking at paper, or rather a certain blindness to it, allows physical marks to assume the status of immaterial ideas. To exhibit any group of drawings side by side is already to construct an idealized world of collective fantasy. To exhibit New Babylon is to at least double this effect. The images of one dream world are launched into another one. The project floats in front of the drifting visitor on the quasi-immateriality of a light white surface that itself floats on the quasi-immateriality of the white gallery walls. A new architecture is suspended in a designated liminal zone in which paper has magical powers.

Paper has long been a standard support of dreams. Architects, dreamers by definition, "commit their ideas to paper." Those who never realize their fantasies are even called "paper architects" — a term of either derision or praise. Constant was in every sense a paper architect. Yet drawing was highly problematic. On the one hand, its magic would seem to go to the heart of his project. In a world in which people continually realize all their desires by reconfiguring the space around themselves, everyone is an artist, an architect, living within their endlessly and collectively reworked designs. The freedom of drawing, the sense of a neutral surface that can accommodate any mark, would seem an ideal way of communicating the freedom of life in New Babylon. But precisely in representing that freedom, Constant would usurp it by imposing his singular artist's vision. The ever drifting desire he speaks of cannot, by definition, be represented. The technique of representation at once exemplifies and masks the very condition it tries to represent.

At the same time, the basis of the infinite creative freedom being visualized is actually automation. In fact, New Babylon is a vast machine, a mechanism that repeats itself endlessly, automatically, yet allows people to collectively realize their ever changing fantasies.

Again, this could easily be drawn using the architect's standard techniques. But the mechanism is not meant to be experienced as such, only the sensuous fantasies it makes possible. Even a mechanical or schematic technique of drawing would give it a sensuousness it is not meant to have. To represent the structure of New Babylon accurately would be to misrepresent New Babylon. The role of drawing is therefore torn between the undesirability of fully representing the collective automation of resources and the undesirability of fully representing collective self-expression. The tension is quite visible in Constant's drawings. Most are neither images of the mechanism nor images of the life going on within it. They operate in some indeterminate zone between where both the machine and the life become shadowy, as if inviting the viewer or the future inhabitant to complete the picture. Those that either render the physical structure clearly or give a particular impression of the internal life are rare and significant exceptions that have to be explored more carefully.

Relocating Architecture

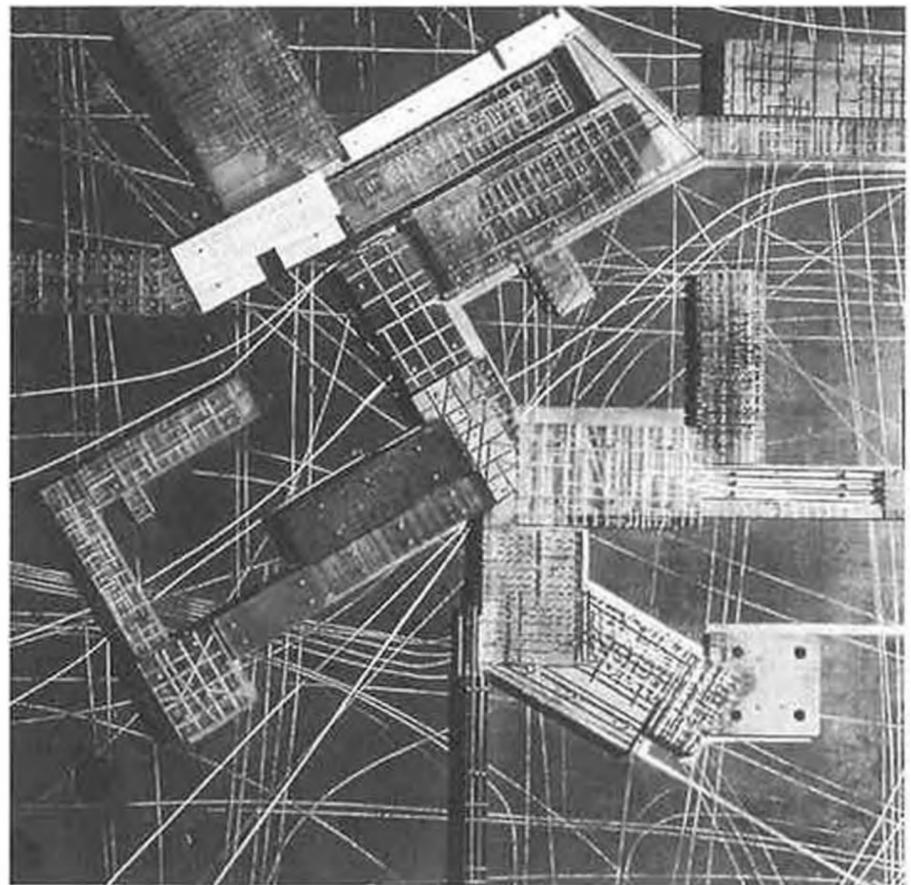
The core set of definitive models was constructed in 1958 and 1959.⁸ But it was not until they were completed at the end of 1959 that Constant produced any drawings. These few images were polemically architectural and simply recorded details already present in the models, literally transcribing three-dimensional information into two dimensions. Constant had become familiar with such techniques ever since he started interacting with architects in 1953. Yet the transformation of his sculptures into the forms of a future urbanism had only started in earnest after the painter Asger Jorn invited him to the provincial Italian town of Alba to participate in the First World Congress of Free Artists in September 1956. The meeting brought together the group founded in 1953 by Jorn and the painter Pinot Gallizio (the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus) with a delegate from the group of poets, writers, and filmmakers that had been founded by Guy Debord in Paris at more or less the same time (the Lettrist International). They discovered a mutual commitment to the radical politics of urbanism and Constant became a part of the subsequent discussions of how the two groups could unite to form the Situationist International. Constant's use of architectural drawing techniques is consistent with the new alliance's rejection of art as the individual expression of a unique kind of creative person in favor of the collective revolutionary restructuring of the everyday environment.

The first drawings of the project were published in December 1959 in Constant's essay "Une autre ville pour une autre vie" (Another City for Another Life) for the third issue of the collective's magazine, *Internationale Situationniste*.⁹ Two small ink sketches register the basic concept that was already in place in the models and appear alongside a photo of the first model to be completed. A plan shows a series of overlapping grids that define an amorphous space for play while a section shows how that space is freed from the constraints of the ground by a few huge columns. The plan is a key drawing (p. 2). Of all the images produced of New Babylon over the years, it is the one that definitively captures the basic concept of the whole project. Yet it is not a schematic sketch of a concept to be realized in other images or models. It simply transcribes the organizational principle of the completed models.

This process of mechanical transcription was taken further as the *Oriënt sector* and *Gele sector* (Yellow Sector) models were measured and drawn up as large architectural plans showing the position of every element. The drawing of the *Gele sector* was published in

June 1960 in one of Constant's contributions to the fourth issue of *Internationale Situationniste*.¹⁰ All the sensuousness of the model, and of the spaces it is supposed to define, is abstracted away by carefully ruled thin black lines on a white background. An aesthetic of precision and calibration of effect is aligned with a narrative by Constant about the different spaces in the sector, each of which is labeled in the drawing with a capital letter. It is a quasi-scientific display. Each space is systematically accorded a specific function, which means in New Babylon a specific form of play. Any sense of randomness in the plans is removed. Even confusion, as in the labyrinthine spaces, is codified as designed confusion. The effect of the early drawings is one of control. They are controlled images of an uncontrolled space. They represent the space for play but are not themselves playful.

In fact, the real function of the drawings was not to foreground play but to give the stunning models the status of architecture rather than sculpture. The only drawing not explicitly tied to the precise details of an already constructed model is *New Babylon Nord*, a large plan that shows a sprawling labyrinthine network of sectors covering a huge colored landscape—labeled and scaled like a tourist map of an already existing city. This, the only one of the early set of drawings that would be exhibited and republished several times in catalogues, must have been made in the early months of 1960 and was the first appearance of the name “New Babylon.” It was only at the very end of 1959 that Guy Debord had proposed it as the appropriate name for the overall project, and it was still not used in January of 1960 when the first exhibition of the core set of models was held in a small gallery in Essen.¹¹ Some ink drawings of possible variations of the sectors went on display but no map.¹² The map was produced afterwards in response to Debord's endless questions about whether the project could be thought of as a city in the traditional sense or not. Constant wanted to demonstrate that a networked city was possible, a city without a center. Yet even this overall image of a network of sectors had been modeled before it was drawn. It develops the *Groep sectoren* (Group of Sectors) model, the last of the core models to be completed.



Groep sectoren (Group of Sectors), 1959
Metal (iron, copper), ink on Plexiglas, and oil
on wood, 1 3/4 x 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in. (4.5 x
100 x 100 cm) Gemeentemuseum, The Hague
(photo: Bram Wisman)

When Constant resigned from the Situationist International shortly afterwards, he returned to the model to redraw it with a more precise architectural technique. The model was accurately transcribed into a plan and the resulting small drawing was extended to produce a larger drawing, also entitled *Groep sectoren*, that showed the organizational system spreading itself in all directions (p. 8). The original plan of the model can still be seen in the center of the final drawing. A piece of translucent yellow paper has been superimposed on it to show the model's position. The drawing thereby locates the model in a wider field but, more importantly, it locates the model in the field of architectural culture. Or, rather, it locates the project somewhere between art and architecture, since the conventions of architectural plans have themselves been rendered artistically. Constant's plans have the look of architectural drawings yet in the end disturb mainstream architectural culture. Having taken his distance from the art world, he takes his distance from architecture, turning architectural techniques against architecture by exaggerating their typical characteristics.

Unlike traditional architectural practice, there are never any working drawings for the project itself, no preliminary drawings for the models, no sketches, no rough plans. Drawing is not a transitional stage in the production process. Nor does it simply come at the very end. There are no final renderings of a completed scheme, no presentation drawings. The role of drawing is enigmatic. It was only after Constant resigned from the Situationist International that he started to draw spaces that had not already been modeled. At first, the new series of drawings explored the spaces that had been generated, but then new kinds of space were generated within the drawings, and the drawing techniques themselves started to multiply. Traditional ink and pencil sketches gave way to detailed sections, reworked maps, collages, reworked photographs, and mixed media assemblages. Since the basic principle of New Babylon was constant change, any one representation of it, or any one medium of representation, was clearly suspect. Increasingly large detailed models were still built until 1969 but Constant devoted more and more time to drawing. He even put together an exhibition and catalogue of a set of freehand drawings of the project in a Rotterdam gallery in 1963.¹³ The images became increasingly playful. Measured plans on blank sheets were challenged by increasingly wild lines, calculation became decomposition, ink lines became collaged fragments. By the time Constant started drawing with scissors, drawing had assumed a very different role and character—a shift that has to be read in terms of the central role played by drawing in Constant's earlier work.

The Rule of the Child

Born in 1920, Constant Nicuwenhuys was trained as a painter at the Beaux Arts Academy in Amsterdam with the usual emphasis on drawing as the basis of the fine arts. Indeed, he first became well known as a member of a group of painters whose work foregrounded drawing. In July of 1948 he founded the Dutch Experimental Group with five other young artists and four months later they linked up with the painter Asger Jorn's circle in Copenhagen and the writer Christian Dotremont's circle in Brussels to form "Cobra." The new alliance, named after the first letters of their three respective cities, used childhood play and creativity as the model for political revolution. Their work was meant to revive the unconscious creative instincts present in everyone but relentlessly suppressed by the official image of creativity, the art world. In Cobra's view, artists have always collaborated with the dominant mechanisms of social control, even when disguised

as avant-garde rebels against those very mechanisms. The seemingly radical work promoted in Paris actually maintains the artist's traditional role of cultural anesthesiologist. It either suppresses the unconscious or over intellectualizes it. The abstract work of the De Stijl circle was an easy target. Its calibrated geometry exemplified high art's congenital detachment from the revolutionary anarchic forces of raw instinct. Mondrian's highly controlled compositions were singled out and accused of propping up the prevailing social order by concealing the uncontrolled world of the psyche. The surrealists, on the other hand, were condemned for over theorizing the unconscious world they had exposed and thereby deactivating its political force. Desires should simply be allowed to come to the surface as desire. The only labor of the artist is to resist the temptation to transform what is already bubbling up to the surface into something beautiful, ugly, symbolic, or conceptual. Raw material must be left raw.

Cobra work aspired to the status of street graffiti—crude screams for social and psychological liberation. The group produced rough drawings, and paintings with the effect of rough drawings. If classical training, like that which most of them had received, codifies how early uncontrolled sketches are to be steadily brought under control until finally tamed by the painting itself, Cobra produced images with all the elemental qualities and forms usually credited to first, fast, or childish drawings. No straight lines or classical proportions. Everything shaky or blurry. No finish. No composition. No evidence of construction. No systematic layering, subtle gradations, refinement, or frame. Crude figures formed with flashes of ink and paint burst into view from anywhere like strange agitated animals from children's stories.

Cobra, the group's magazine, published children's drawings alongside their work. To break the repressive hold of the law, they emulated the graphic tactics of those who have yet to succumb to the law. No liberation without learning from the child: "The child knows of no law other than its spontaneous sensation of life and feels no need to express anything else," says Constant in his "Manifesto" for the Dutch Experimental Group, published in the first issue of its magazine *Reflex* in 1948.¹⁴ The child's free engagement with the world exemplifies all of Cobra's favorite words: "vital," "blunt," "direct," "immediate," "energetic," "spontaneous," and "experimental." What appears as uncontrolled frivolous play—whether in the child, the unconscious, the primitive, the insane, or the "untrained"—becomes the foundation of the most serious transformation of society. Marx's narrative is retold in terms of a relentlessly anti-aesthetic play. Artistic irresponsibility assumes moral proportions. Cobra tries to untrain itself, to decompose painting, to literally undo the discipline of art in the search for a wild form of graffiti. As Constant's manifesto puts it:

The chalkings on pavements and walls clearly show that human beings were born to manifest themselves; now the struggle is in full swing against the power that would force them into the straightjacket of clerk or commoner and deprive them of this first vital need. A painting is not a composition of colors and line but an animal, a night, a scream, a human being, or all of these things together.¹⁵

Untamed drawing exhibits an extraordinary force with which cultural norms can be demolished. It's not that such art could contribute to revolution or even play a major role. It is the very basis of any revolution. Indeed, Constant insisted that revolution itself is a work of art. But the force of the untamed hand will inevitably be resisted by those who attempt to transform each creative opening into a reproducible style. In "Cultuur en Contra-Cultuur," a text for the second issue of *Reflex*, Constant portrays the history of

art as a dialectical and unending struggle between “demolition” and “formalism.”¹⁶ Creative art is a form of demolition that can never become complacent and celebrate its attacks on the status quo because it will inevitably be transformed into a comfortable formalism that restores much of what has been damaged. Radical artists must continually challenge themselves. Their work is first and foremost a form of experimentation rather than a form of aesthetic practice. Children’s drawings are again the model. The text concludes by arguing that the recent exhibition of “Art and the Child” at the Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam “has once again shown what enormous creative forces slumber in man’s nature.”¹⁷ When the Cobra artists put on their most famous and controversial exhibition in the same museum in November 1949, they placed some drawings and poetry by five year olds alongside their own work in the special issue of *Cobra* that they produced as a catalogue. The accompanying essay by Constant, entitled “C’est notre désir qui fait la révolution” (Our Own Desires Build the Revolution), repeated the call for a radical and restless experimentation in the name of raw desire. Freeing the hand in drawing is once again, albeit tacitly, associated with freeing the people.

Drawing unleashes desire which unleashes a classless society. Yet precisely because it is a question of desire, the character of both the drawing and the future society remain unknown. The only way to demolish the current social order is simply to embrace the unknown: “*It is impossible to know a desire other than by satisfying it, and the satisfaction of our basic desire is revolution.*”¹⁸ Spontaneity is the key. This is not the pseudo-spontaneity of abstract artists, which is dismissed as that of “a spoiled child who doesn’t know what he wants; who wants to be free, but cannot do without his parent’s protection.”¹⁹ Cobra seeks the radical experimentalism of the unprotected, unsupervised, unconscious child as represented in the tenth and final issue of *Cobra* by a photograph of a solitary child drawing a meandering line in chalk on the street.²⁰ This is not an image of an innocent graffiti artist. On the contrary, it is an image of a revolutionary. Starting with the seventh issue, even the group’s name was drawn on the title pages and in advertisements for the magazine as if it were some found graffiti scratched into a stone surface.²¹ And of course they graffitied their own writings, furniture, apartments, and the houses of friends or collectors with childish figures and scrawls. Yet while all their work took on the character of this kind of drawing, it is symptomatic that Cobra rarely addressed drawing as such. It is as if the very category of “drawing” was understood to be an abstract category fundamentally tied to the conceptual and political order they wanted to overthrow. Drawing, in its crudest material form, would not be “drawing” but a direct political act.

With the breakup of Cobra at the end of 1951, most of its thirty-three or so collaborators continued to produce work inspired by children’s scribbling and graffiti but the traces of drawing disappeared from Constant’s work. His paintings started to become more abstract, with the characteristic shapes of his Cobra work being progressively simplified into clearly defined planes of monolithic color. Shaky lines become steady. Blurs become sharp divisions. Evocative and mystical titles become prosaic labels documenting the basic formal qualities of each work. This steady abstraction culminates in 1953 with a series of paintings symptomatically entitled “compositions” (“in black and white,” “with orange,” “with squares,” “with blue lines,” “with green shape,” and so on). Constant had seemingly come full circle from his merciless attack on the cult of composition and his descrip-

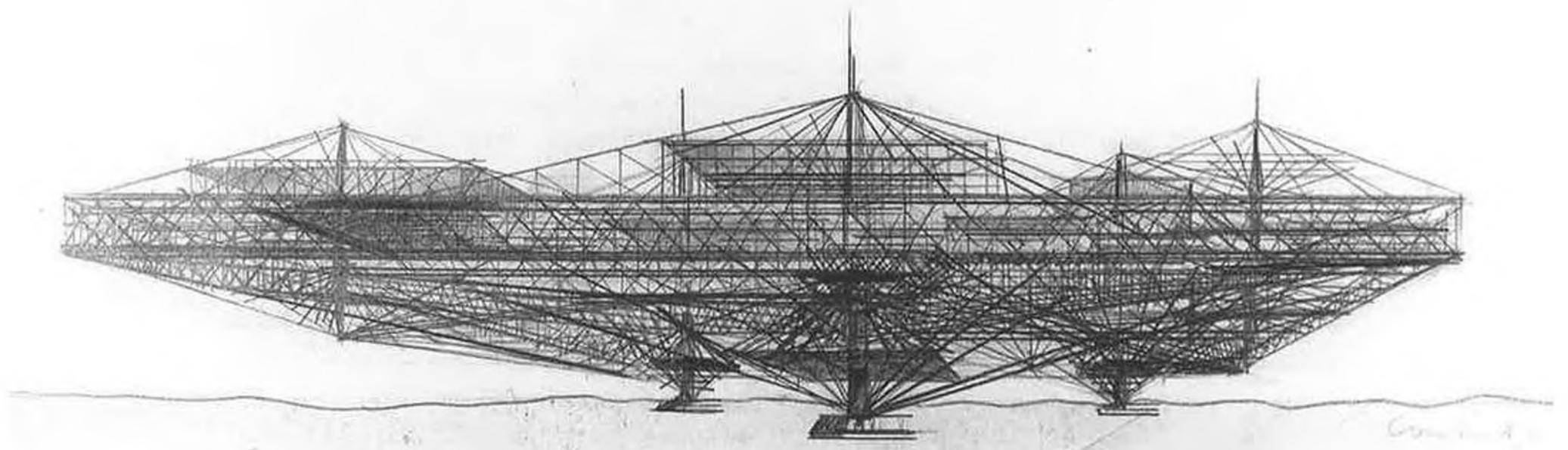
tion of Cobra as a kind of graffiti on abstract work like Mondrian's.²² But he had not reversed or abandoned his political position. On the contrary, he immediately renounced painting altogether as a suspect accessory of the dominant social order which could never contribute to revolutionary change.

Composition avec 158 petits carreaux (Composition with 158 Small Tiles) a 1953 painting with a pattern of small light squares laid out as an incomplete grid on a dark square background, turned out to be the pivotal work. In *Composite met blauwe en witte blokjes* (Composition with Blue and White Blocks) of the same year, the squares became wooden cubes rising up from a wooden platform. Constant's work had turned three-dimensional. For a while, it hovered somewhere between painting and sculpture, like three-dimensional painting, before becoming fully sculptural in the sense of being completely detached from any reference to a flat ground surface awaiting inscription. Over the next three years, Constant would build many elaborate constructivist inspired sculptures in Plexiglas, metal, wire, and wood. No drawings were ever produced for these works. Only a 1958 sheet of three tiny sketches of an already completed *Nébulae mécanique* (a spiralling metal form with Plexiglas discs suspended in wire spokes) remain from the period.²³ The forms were directly shaped in space. And there were still no drawings when these "constructions" evolved into "maquettes" of New Babylon—a city of the future in which childlike play would be the organizing principle and the basis of social liberation. Play was the whole point of New Babylon but not its mode of production. The anarchic creativity worshipped by Cobra was to be carried out by the inhabitant of New Babylon rather than the artist who first envisioned that endless city. The models are complex and multi-layered but in no way imprecise, random, rough, spontaneous, jagged, or incomplete. They are extremely sophisticated architectural statements which definitively establish many of the formal relationships that would be repeatedly rediscovered in the subsequent forty years of experimental design. Indeed, the experience of architects when seeing these models today is typically one of shock, then confused admiration.

Considered as a whole, the drawings that followed the models are likewise a mechanism of disciplinary displacement or confusion. They steadily lure architects from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Despite the promiscuity of drawing techniques typically used in architecture, those that seem to most properly belong to the architectural world (detailed plans, sections, and elevations) steadily give way in the project to those that are foreign in both their technique and their almost complete blurring, distortion, or erasure of the architectural forms. For the art world, the effect is the reverse. Unfamiliar subjects and techniques give way to the familiar. New Babylon is a calculated assault on disciplinary limits, and drawing is a key part of the arsenal.

The Reproduction of Originality

This systematic confusion of art and architecture exploits the enigmas at the heart of the basic definition of drawing. A drawing is not just a work on paper. It is a "unique" work. In the traditional cult of drawing, only originals can authenticate the bond between material marks and immaterial ideas. The mere fact of reproduction takes the image away from the artist's hand. To appreciate a drawing is to sense the physical presence of the artist's body, understood as the tangible presence of his or her unique mind. This presence is supposedly lost in the act of reproduction. The traces of a machine replace those of the



Schets voor zelfdragende sectorconstructie (Sketch for Self-supporting Sectorconstruction), 1964
Pencil on paper, 17 3/4 x 24 5/8 in. (45 x 62.5 cm). Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

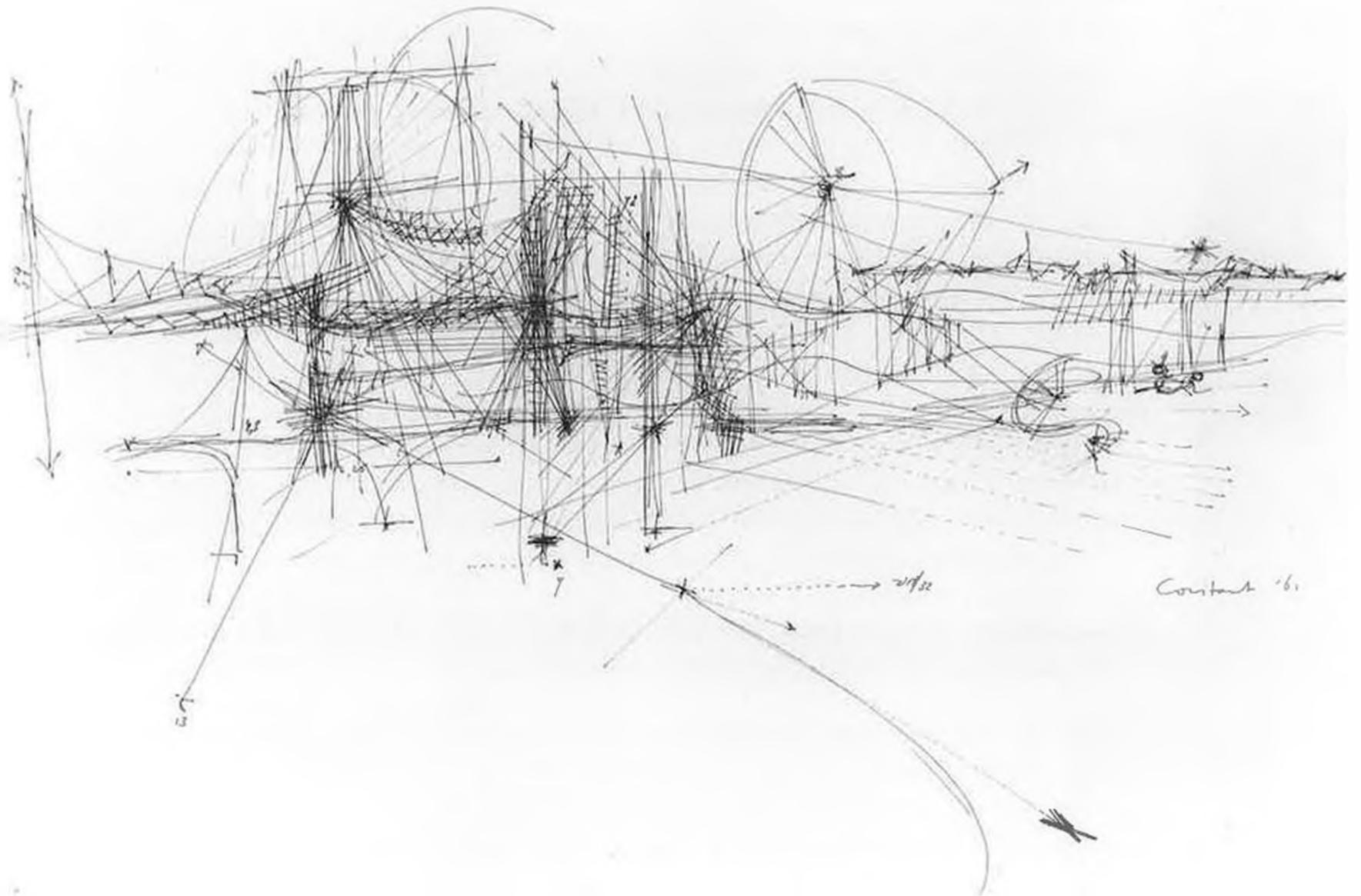
hand. Paper is supposed to be the actual site of the artist's labor. Indeed, the artist doesn't just work on the paper but across it. The drawing is a kind of journey rather than a singular imprint onto the whole surface, as in an etching or lithograph. The mystique of drawing is not just that the paper has been marked by a certain person in a certain moment but that it was marked in a particular sequence, even if that sequence is no longer evident.

All of Constant's reproductions on paper—the lithographs, etchings, unmodified photographic prints, publications, newsletters, and posters of *New Babylon*—have to be put to one side. To limit drawing in this way is of course to remain within a clearly defined tradition. The Drawing Center inherited the expression “unique work on paper” from The Museum of Modern Art in New York, which had formulated it in the mid-forties to establish criteria for exhibiting the drawings in its collection.⁴ In coming up with the definition, MoMA continued over five hundred years of institutional history. In fact, the history of the dominant institutions of the art world parallels, and depends upon, the history of paper. It is not that drawings must be unique in the same way that any other artwork was traditionally meant to be unique. The very concept of art as the unique expression of an individual artist is tied to paper.

Drawing only started to become the privileged site for the production of a unique original that could be valued in its own right in the fifteenth century. Countless figures were involved in this lengthy shift and it was not definitively formalized until 1550 when Giorgio Vasari's *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects) insisted that *disegno*—at once the drawing and the idea—was the basis of all the arts and analyzed a succession of artists from that point of view.⁴⁵ The shift that Vasari at once monitored and accelerated didn't simply occur in the Renaissance. It was the Renaissance. Vasari was the one who coined the label and he played a major role in establishing the new cult of artistic genius whereby artists no longer simply imitate the beauty of the cosmos but express their individual creative insights in doing so. He identified this unique mode of expression with new techniques of drawing like the “rough sketch” and established an entire infrastructure of artistic training, collection, and scholarship. It is no coincidence that the person who founded the first academy of art (the 1563 Florentine Accademia del Disegno for painters, sculptors, and architects that Vasari organized around drawing) was also the one who assembled the first systematic collection of drawings valued as highly as final works and used that collection to launch art history as such. The drawings, kept in five large albums as his *Libro de Disegni*, are referred to throughout his book and are seen to give a unique insight into the creativity of each artist.⁴⁶ By the century's end, it had become impossible to think of art outside of the production of unique drawings.

Paper was the key. The arrival of this new conception of art coincides with the arrival of paper. Paper manufacture was only introduced in Italy in the fifteenth century. Before that, it was imported and extremely expensive and only used by artists for the final *modello*, the contract drawing on the basis of which a commissioned work would be completed. Preparatory drawings were done on wooden and wax tablets that would then be erased so another drawing could be done. They had no independent value and were not preserved. The only permanent drawings were those done on the durable parchment surfaces of the “model book,” collections of standard drawings by the master to be copied by members of his workshop.⁴⁷ While short-lived preparatory drawings were done to adjust generic designs to specific situations, it is the model book that exemplified the overall attitude towards art. Drawing was primarily a mechanism of copying, a technique for moving a design from one place to another, a channel by which the beauty of the natural order could be systematically transferred to that of an artwork in a series of stages and likewise transferred from one artwork to another. Vasari's celebration of a more active role for drawing coincides with a huge increase in the availability of paper. Paper had become progressively cheaper and was increasingly used for exploratory drawings devoted to the evolution of new ideas rather than the transfer of established ones. A tradition of the “sketch book” emerged in parallel with the “model book.”⁴⁸ By the end of the century, paper production had reached such a level that artists had developed whole new techniques of experimentation with it. The new support had fostered an entirely different attitude towards art. Paper was established as the unique site for confirming mastery.

It was this transformation of the status of drawing that made it possible to elevate architecture from the status of a guild practice to that of a liberal art, an art liberated from the constraints of the material world. Inasmuch as architects make drawings, their work could be considered theoretical rather than practical. Architecture's status as a discipline



Schets voor een constructie (Sketch for a Construction), 1961. Ink on paper, 17 3/4 x 25 5/8 in. (45.1 x 65.1 cm)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

turns on its connection to paper. It was able to be included in any system that privileged *disegno*. In fact, in Vasari's view, it belonged at the top of the system. Architectural drawing was the standard example of how a drawing could be indistinguishable from an idea. Nothing could establish the magic of drawing more than the transformation of the most immobile materiality, huge assemblages of stone, into the most delicate mobile form. It was not by producing solid objects with certain aesthetic qualities that architecture attained the higher status of an artistic discipline. It was by producing work on paper. Paper became the real building site.

As the culture of expressive drawing flourished in the other arts, architects developed a full range of artistic techniques, from preliminary experimental sketches to final renderings, alongside techniques of projection whose role is supposedly only that of mechanical transfer. The techniques that established the architect as an artist evolved in parallel to those that aspired to minimize originality and safely transfer the sketched idea through to the final building. Yet architecture was rarely considered at the peak of the arts in the subsequent centuries. It never fully escaped its association with the practicality of building, the burden of function, and so on. All the teaching and drawings whose function was to transform the physical world kept architecture at the threshold of the academy, just

inside the door, as it would keep architecture just inside the door of the university since the mid-nineteenth century. Drawing elevated architecture, but only so far.

It must be remembered that drawing itself was treated as a “support medium,” part of a chain of production, for a long time. Paper was thereby the support of a medium that is itself just a support. Drawing had become the foundation of all the arts but was subordinate to the art forms that it made possible. It is not until the mid-eighteenth century that drawings are put in frames, covered with glass, and hung in collections as original works. Only then can it be said that drawing stands on its own as a full discipline in its own right. Unique marks on paper had finally been relieved of the burden of modifying the material world. The materiality of the marks themselves had become the sole object of labor. Only then could architectural drawings, even those completely embedded in the chain of representations leading towards a realized building, start to be revalued, but it is a revaluation that was never fully accomplished.

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Architectural drawings (plans, elevations, and three-dimensional drawings of buildings) had been included in collections ever since Vasari's foundational albums, and of course they were often done by the same people that were producing paintings and sculptures. Yet they were not treated the same as other drawings. Vasari, for example, drew a frame around each of his drawings, a frame that signified their elevation to the status of unique works of art by masking the edges of the sheet of paper and thereby liberating the image from the material world. The frames were three-dimensional architectural forms drawn in perspective and individually designed for each image. When many small drawings by the same artist were placed on one album page, a single architectural facade was drawn to accommodate all of them. The sense of discrete pieces of paper pasted into an album gave way to that of a seamless architectural space. The effect of the frame is to dematerialize the paper. Paper is not simply located in three-dimensional space. On the contrary, it is taken out of that space. The frame acts as a window through which the image is seen. Paper becomes like glass, a special kind of glass because it is seen through yet only the marks on it are visible. The mechanism takes away a section of the world and replaces it with a now idealized image. Vasari's insertion of such three-dimensional structures (even if only represented as such in two dimensions) is consistent with the basic function of frames but also with his claim that architecture is that which gives birth to the other arts by making a space for them. Unique architectural drawings by Vasari (himself both a painter and an architect) made it possible to elevate the status of drawing in the other arts. Yet the architectural drawings in the collection are not framed (with the one exception of a design by Palladio that receives the lightest frame possible). While this is understandable in terms of the potential confusion of the architecture of the frame with the architecture that it frames, the result is that the edges of the paper supporting architectural drawings are exposed. The drawings were never fully liberated from the material world. This remained the case in the subsequent centuries. To say the least, architectural drawings have an ambivalent status.

The standard labels for drawings are again revealing. The fetishistic attention paid to the materiality of the marks made on the paper is actually a symptom of drawing having finally been detached from a direct connection to the rest of the physical world. When architectural drawings are presented in the context of the art world, the sign that they are being appreciated as independent artworks in their own right is that the material condi-

tion of the image is documented. Yet when the same drawings are presented in the architectural context, even in the most scholarly exhibitions and publications, attention is rarely paid to the materiality of the medium used. Close attention is usually reserved for the materiality of the building that the drawing represents. As a discipline, architecture never quite lets go of that role, even when celebrating paper architecture. It would seem that drawings are only understood to be "architectural" inasmuch as they imply a transformation of the physical world beyond them.

This long history is brought back to the surface whenever a contemporary artist simulates being an architect. Constant restages an old disciplinary struggle in which the stakes are very high. At first, he cautiously tests a mechanical architectural technique, one of transfer and reproduction rather than original experimentation. But soon he is embellishing that technique, blurring the sense of transfer with freehand forms and eccentric coloration. The techniques soon start to multiply, and he follows a relentless trajectory through the full range of drawing. Over the course of fifteen years, images that mechanically document the structure give way to a wide array of expressionistic drawings that finally give way to painting. Ruled lines give way to eccentric twists of the hand exhibited in galleries.

Constant literally exploits paper, taking advantage of the extraordinarily influential but fragile distinctions that for centuries have been at once applied to it and based upon it. It is important to note that through the long course of the elevation of drawing, the new sense of drawing as the production of an original idea never simply took over from the sense of drawing as a form of reproduction. Indeed, it was always argued that the ability to produce originals depends on cultivating the art of copying. Vasari, for example, insisted that creative expression emerged from imitating good artists and he did so in his own works.²⁹ The cult of originality is completely embedded in a logic of reproduction and a series of training techniques that were developed to regulate the connection between them. Originality is only ever allowed to emerge in the context of institutionalized control. In this way, the very freedom of drawing, the lack of resistance posed by the paper, is repositioned as the evidence or product of the greatest control. The spontaneous line on paper becomes the property of the disciplinary system, the set of enforced repetitions that it appears to break free of.

After all, the historical context of the emerging cult of the original is actually the emerging culture of reproduction, a culture that was propelled by paper precisely. The new age launched by the invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century was also the age of the mass production of paper. Each of the thirty parchment copies of Gutenberg's 1452 bible used the skin of around three hundred sheep so he made the remaining one hundred and eighty copies in paper. It was the industrialization of the paper industry to meet the demands of the new forms of reproduction that provided the paper with which artistic originality would be established in experimental drawings. Paper is the site of both originality and reproduction. This is no coincidence. It is precisely because it had become the means of reproduction that paper could act as the optimum site to register originality. Originality appears as such where it is most vulnerable. Consequently, paper must be surrounded by multiple institutional practices to identify and protect originality: discourses of authentication, signatures, ownership records, framing practices, conservation techniques, mono-

graphs, journals, museum departments and study centers, museums dedicated to drawing, commercial galleries devoted to drawing, and so on. Paper doesn't just sit at the divide between originality and reproduction, it has been turned into the very mechanism for regulating that division.

This is why paper could assume a central role in New Babylon. The project turns on the fragility of the line between originality and reproduction, unique unpredictable events and mechanization, spontaneous play and automated machinery. In the very techniques of drawing, Constant encounters the logic of the project that he is trying to represent. As the drawings of New Babylon slide from "mechanical" to "expressive," the relentless smoothness of the slide, the extremely minor variations from drawing to drawing, and the repetition of the same images in different media, effectively undermines the standard oppositions. A sense of reproduction is embedded in a string of originals and thereby conveys the organizing principle of the project. The effect of a hundred unique works on paper is that vast mechanical structures assume an atmospheric immateriality and expressive flashes assume a structural physical presence. The collapse of mechanization and spontaneous originality that is meant to be enacted by New Babylon is first enacted on paper.

Having stubbornly resisted drawing at the beginning, there seems to be no turning back once Constant touches even the most mechanical techniques. Total abstinence gives way to a flood of images. It is as if drawing reclaims a project that it had secretly been structuring all along. This only serves to make the original hesitation seem all the more dramatic, and unexplained.

After Control

At first it would seem that the hesitation is simply a sign of just how emphatically Constant disassociated himself from Cobra. After all, the group's way of mercilessly attacking the institutions of the art world was to exploit the foundational practice of that world, drawing. They removed the disciplinary infrastructure that regulates drawing in order to take the experimentalism of the spontaneous line away from the artist and credit it to the child in everyone. Discipline gave way to everyday desire. The uncontrolled drawing was detached from the culture of control. It became the privileged agent of political destabilization.

Cobra was of course inspired by a wealth of similar explorations going back to the turn of the century. Jean Dubuffet was particularly admired by the group for rejecting the distinction between beauty and ugliness. His very first exhibition in Paris in 1944 had been of images that looked as if drawn by a child and in 1945 he started collecting graffiti and drawings by the insane, prisoners, clairvoyants, and provincials. His major inspiration was the psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn's 1922 study of the art of the insane, one of the cult books of the surrealists.³⁰ Captivated by the images in Prinzhorn's book, he went on a tour of asylums in 1945 but was only interested in those drawings that were not being used as part of a therapy. Spontaneous images produced for no particular reason were seen to access a whole other dimension of creativity that culture, even, if not especially, in the form of therapy, does its best to censor. Undisciplined drawings by anyone designated as "other" became magical tokens. Just a few months before the founding of Cobra, Dubuffet launched his *Compagne de l'Art Brut* to cultivate this obsession. Unsurprisingly, its founding members included André Breton, whose surrealist circles had long before endorsed Joan Miró's "anti-paintings," which reproduced the effect of children's drawings

and graffiti, and André Masson's "automatic drawings," which in turn were inspired by Paul Klee's childlike drawings. Surrealism's foundation in automatic writing, which, as Breton put it in 1924, tries to "blacken some paper with a fine disregard for, literally, what might happen," was aligned with the uninhibited expressions of children.¹¹ The point is to "liberate instinctive impulses, to break down the barrier that civilized man faces, a barrier that primitive people and children do not experience."¹² *La Révolution Surréaliste*, *Minotaure*, and *Documents* are filled with drawings by children, "primitives," graffiti, and contemporary artists.

The linking of these types of drawing as a way to displace high art had already been clearly formulated in expressionist circles by 1912 and was reinforced by G.H. Luquet's classic study *Les Dessins d'un enfant; étude psychologique* of 1913 and eventually his follow-up study *L'Art primitif* of 1930, which compared children's drawings to those of non-Western or prehistoric cultures.¹³ The development of each person is seen to replicate the overall development of the species. It is important to note that this argument is an extremely old one. In discussing the origin of drawing, Vasari rehearses the standard accounts then points to the spontaneous drawings of untrained children in "primitive" surroundings as evidence that the earliest cultures would have likewise instinctively started the art of drawing off on a good footing that was gradually developed through time until its triumphant perfection in the Renaissance.¹⁴ What the surrealist's wanted to do, of course, was to go back to these same pre-adult, pre-Western, pre-high culture scenes to recover the subversive qualities that were suppressed rather than developed. Children's drawings are seen to subvert the very culture they supposedly initiate. The unregulated acts of the child can therefore be turned against all high cultural institutions. The enemy, and this would later turn out to be particularly the case in Constant's work, was not the surviving nineteenth-century academic tradition of art as such but the Renaissance discourse that had established the basis for that tradition in a particular concept of the regulated creativity of the cultivated artist. It is not by chance that medieval graffiti by children became a standard fetish. Georges Bataille, for whom prehistoric drawing demonstrated art's origin in precisely the kind of radical confusion of work and play that would later obsess Cobra, analyzed Luquet's 1930 book with appreciative skepticism in *Documents*—illustrating his article with drawings by Masson's nine year old daughter and children's graffiti from the doors of churches.¹⁵ Bataille insists that the child distorts rather than composes form. Graffiti proceeds through a series of vandalistic "alterations," "destructions," and "deformations." The article was symptomatically followed by a selection of Miró's self-professed attempts to "assassinate painting" through what Bataille describes as such a radical "decomposition" of the art form that only a few stains are left behind as "the traces of who knows what disaster."¹⁶ The suppressed world of the past, the child, and the other is reactivated by artwork that brutally assaults its own discipline.

Cobra was clearly influenced by this mentality. It was not by chance that Jorn and Constant first meet at a Miró exhibition in Paris in 1946.¹⁷ Almost all of the group was experimenting with different forms of automatic drawing before the alliance was formed. Yet the group established itself by taking a strong stand against the surrealists, accusing them of transforming the unconscious into an overly elaborate theoretical object detached from politics. The revolutionary force of desire was seen to be dissipated by highly controlled formulations. Breton's rejection of the Communist party in July of 1947 was the

last straw. Dotremont reacted by immediately establishing Le Bureau International du Surréalisme Révolutionnaire and invited Jorn to give a paper at the founding conference at the end of October in the room of a Brussels café. Jorn spoke about his automatic drawings and identified himself as the representative of a non-existent Danish Experimental Group.³⁸ Constant, Corneille, and Appel, who had attended the conference, got together in July of 1948 in Constant's apartment and emulated Jorn by founding the Dutch Experimental Group. At an international conference of dissident surrealists in Paris in November, all three groups became dissatisfied by what was going on and formed Cobra the day after. The group was unambiguously the rebellious child of surrealism. To make this clear, the first issue of *Cobra* begins with "Discours aux pingouins" (Discourse to the Penguins), Jorn's attack on Breton's analysis of automatic drawing.³⁹ Orthodox surrealism is accused of effacing the physicality of the automatic act in favor of the mental state it supposedly represents. Cobra celebrated the physical act of constructing the image, insisting that desire only ever expresses itself in bodily acts. It is itself physical.

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Cobra work wallows in its own physical presence. A kind of pressure is everywhere evident. Movements are jerky. The point of the paintbrush has been squashed into the surface. Lines leak. Colors clash. The work is much cruder than its surrealist precedents. Even the wild "blind" expressionist drawings of the first decades of the century that were the precedents of the surrealist experiments seem tame in comparison. The key difference in approach is that the surrealists made a clear distinction between the unconscious discovery of an image and the subsequent process of refining that image.⁴⁰ For Cobra, this refinement immediately restored all the disciplinary apparatus of the art world that had rightly been abandoned and, in so doing, completely neutralized the resulting image politically. The artworks reestablish control over desire rather than submit to it. They demonstrate all the traditional mastery of the drawn image. Cobra, on the other hand, wanted to be childish rather than childlike, producing actual graffiti rather than an artistic rendering of it.⁴¹

With the breakup of Cobra, Jorn remained committed to the destabilizing force of children's drawings and graffiti. He fostered a cult of "bad painting" and "modifications of painting"—graffiti on art itself as distinct from graffiti as art—something the Cobra group had tried collectively in 1947 when five of them (including Constant) over painted someone else's painting. In 1955, Jorn commissioned children to draw the designs for ceramics he was producing and included them in his book *Pour la forme*, published in 1958 by the situationist press.⁴² This was a continuation of his pre-Cobra explorations. In 1937, he had enlarged two children's drawings into wall-sized murals for Le Corbusier's *Pavillon de temps nouveau* in Paris and his circle in Copenhagen had published children's drawings in their magazine *Helhesten* in 1944.⁴³ When he resigned from the Situationist International shortly after Constant, he immediately founded the Scandinavian Institute for Comparative Vandalism, and its first publication was a book of photos about medieval graffiti on Norwegian churches.⁴⁴ Cobra was merely an episode in his extended exploration of the spontaneity of such drawings.

Constant, on the other hand, had effectively rejected this kind of drawing in rejecting painting. Within the Situationist International (another rebellious child of surrealism), he militantly opposed Jorn's "Bad Painting" and Pinot Gallizio's "Industrial Painting" for propping up the traditional figure of the artist—imitating revolutionary forces rather than mobilizing them.⁴⁵ But he did not abandon the idea of child creativity. On the contrary,

the architects he worked with, notably Aldo van Eyck, and those whose projects most influenced him, notably Alison and Peter Smithson, used the child as their role model. Van Eyck had been an unofficial member of Cobra ever since Jorn and Constant visited him in 1946 to see his Miró paintings, and he would design their most important exhibitions.⁴⁶ Between 1947 and 1955, he produced around sixty playgrounds in Amsterdam that would have a great impact on Constant, who designed play furniture for several of them after Cobra disbanded. When presenting the playgrounds at a conference in 1956, van Eyck insisted that the child had to be both cared for and learned from:

The city without the child's particular motion is a malignant paradox. The child discovers its identity against all odds, damaged and damaging in perpetual danger and incidental sunshine. Edged towards the periphery of attention, the child survives, an emotional and unproductive quantum. When snow falls on cities, the child, taking over for a while, is all at once Lord of the city. Now if the child, thus assisted, rediscovers the city, the city may still rediscover its children.⁴⁷

Alison and Peter Smithson, van Eyck's colleagues in the infamous Team 10 group that was formed in 1953, had collaborated with the photographer Nigel Henderson to photograph and analyze the pattern of movements of children playing in the street. This study was used as the basis of establishing a "freer sort of organization" in the city in a series of projects that were very influential on the form of Constant's project. The study was presented in 1953 as a horizontal chart in which images of children playing gradually give way to urbanistic proposals and culminate in the Golden Lane Housing project of 1952, the networked layout of which was a major inspiration for the overall pattern of New Babylon. Symptomatically, Henderson had begun by photographing "children's pavement play graphics" and similar graffiti on the hoardings of building sites.⁴⁸ Yet the form of the networked city that radically subverts the traditional hierarchies of urban organization, and places everything in a continuous restless mobility, does not replicate the creative play on which it is based and tries to foster.

To abandon spontaneous drawing is not to abandon the child. Children's creativity remained Constant's model but its products were no longer to be simply imitated. As with the playgrounds, it was a matter of making spaces for play rather than reproducing its patterns. Like van Eyck, Constant used a highly controlled abstract geometry to facilitate an uncontrolled play. The geometry Cobra had rejected in the name of play becomes the very possibility of that play, a reversal that had already been tested in van Eyck's innovative installation for the famous Cobra exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in 1949. Wild work was seen to flourish in a non-wild space. New Babylon is no more than a playground for adults who no longer have to suppress the child's desire to play. Two-dimensional drawing has given way to the three-dimensional exploration of the child. The chalk scribble in the street has been replaced by the running, jumping, spinning, and climbing that leaves no fixed trace.

Constant never rejected the Cobra goal of anarchistic creativity. He only rejected the particular means with which the group had tried to realize it. While he, Jorn, and Debord all distanced themselves from Cobra when they founded the Situationist International, much of the Cobra mentality remained. All that had radically changed, for Constant anyway, was the role of the artist, a shift that opened up an entirely different aesthetic strategy for achieving the same basic ends. A mechanism that allows other people to realize their spontaneous creative acts would not have the same form as those acts. And yet it would be

inseparable from the acts. Much of Cobra's discourse was modified in order to maintain exactly the same basic objective.¹⁹ Jorn's 1947 speech at Dotremont's conference in Brussels, for example, had galvanized the group for the first time by rejecting both the "surrealist" and the "abstract" in favor of the "experimental" and this soon became Cobra's mantra. But in New Babylon, the surreal and the abstract could no longer be separated.²⁰ What had become experimental were the very forms that Cobra had abandoned.

Constant could use an unplayful kind of drawing to foster play. Architectural drawings, which are all about the display of control, are precisely the opposite of what attracted Cobra to children's drawings. With New Babylon, the fetish of creative play returns as the basic principle of a new kind of urbanism but not the kind of drawing that once exemplified that play. Measured lines are now seen to facilitate behaviors that subvert all measurements and expectations. Such drawing effaces its artistic dimension to become a technical instrument for making creative actions, which is to say political actions, possible for other people. As such, it reinforced the situationists' rejection of the culture of the original artist. In fact, Debord encouraged the first such drawings. When they appeared in the third issue of *Internationale Situationniste*, they were preceded by an unsigned article by Debord that used photographs of a New Babylon model to exemplify the necessary absence of art in revolutionary politics.²¹ Techniques specific to architecture were mobilized against art. The practices that keep architecture subordinate in the art world were used to displace that world. Building became a form of demolition.

27

Working Drawings for a Mirage

The situationists were fond of plans. Aerial views and plans of cities, subway systems, neighborhoods, buildings, and even furniture layouts feature prominently in their publications. Each is treated as a kind of military document detailing a "theater of operations," a terrain marked for exploration in which a new understanding of urbanism could be activated. As the urbanist's basic tool of design and analysis, the plan has to be appropriated and twisted to other ends. To twist the plan is to twist the very concept of planning.

The most obvious example of this twisting was when Debord and Jorn collaborated to make a set of city maps between 1957 and 1959. Standard tourist maps of Paris were cut up with scissors. All that is kept are the sites of highest "psychogeographic" intensity that were discovered during *dérives*, the group's late night drunken drifts through the city on the basis of instinct alone.²² Curving red arrows between these favored sites mark the trajectories along which people drift from intensity to intensity, oblivious of the uncharged parts of the city that have now been discarded. The remaining fragments of the city have themselves drifted into new positions. They float in an empty space of desire. New Babylon transposes this reworked old city into a new type of city. Its overall form, as established in some of the first models and then drawn up in the early plans, is precisely that of Debord and Jorn's maps. The project is simply the attempt to produce a new kind of drawing, a three-dimensional map for a drifting life in which desire is the driving force.

The infamous *dérive* is itself already a kind of drawing. The drifter, responding to the resonances between the hidden forces of the unconscious and the hidden forces in the city, draws a meandering line through the city. The drift is an automatic drawing that subverts the official city plan by exploiting unmapped sensual and subliminal qualities. Constant

constructs a new kind of city out of those suppressed qualities by building his three-dimensional map. When heading down his relentless trajectory from detailed measured drawings to atmospheric blurs, he keeps coming back to the form of the original two-dimensional psychogeographic maps and redraws them with his scissors. The string of resulting maps that punctuate the project at regular intervals is completely different from all the other drawings. It is as if these collages form the central core of the project while the other drawings are just explorations of the consequences.

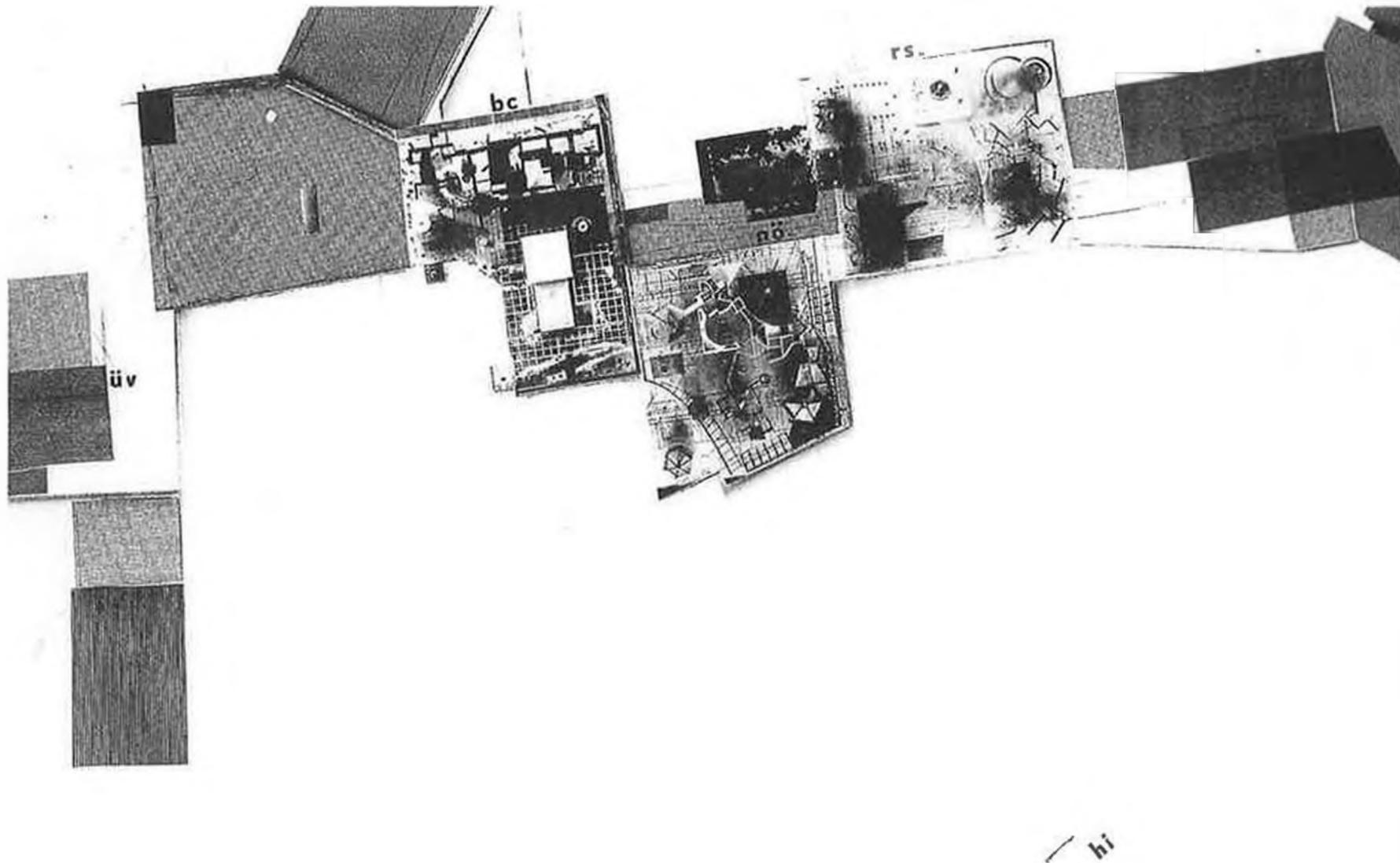
It is not until 1969 that Constant comes up with the definitive map. In *Symbolische voorstelling van New Babylon* (Symbolic Representation of New Babylon), Debord and Jorn's fragmentation of a single city has finally been displaced by a remarkable drawing in which a single city is now made up of intersecting fragments of tourist maps from different cities all over the world. The map itself has become three-dimensional. The collaged fragments cast their own shadow on the white paper and the paper itself has been smudged with pencil to insist on its materiality. The white surface is no longer a neutral ground for a drawing. It is the drawn ground itself. The red arrows of the original psychogeographic maps now race across this paper ground as precisely drafted thin red lines that mark the high speed transportation system that allows people to move from any point in the global labyrinth to any other. The tip of the automated factories beneath the ground, that make the whole freedom of the system possible, can be seen coming up through the white surface at a few of the intersections of the high speed lines. To look at the drawing is, in both an obvious and a deeper sense, like looking at a model.

Clearly, the models of New Babylon do not simply represent the rejection of drawing after all. They are actually conceived of as a kind of drawing. It is not just that Constant directly experiments with forms in three-dimensional space, just as an artist might experiment on paper. The logic of drawing organizes the very structure of the forms. In Debord and Jorn's maps, the first move was to remove most of the city and leave the remaining fragments floating on a white background without a frame. The map had thereby been turned into a drawing and was literally assembled as a unique work on paper. This gesture is repeated, then radicalized, in Constant's models. In the first of the core models (Orange Sector and Yellow Sector), the ground plane below the suspended sector has been colored white. Like the white paper of the psychogeographic maps, it is marked with lines of movement. The transparency of the Plexiglas planes suspended above this surface on open wire frames means that the complete effect of the maps is produced when the model is seen from above. The three-dimensional zones of psychic intensity collapse onto the white surface. From above, the model has become a drawing, a two-dimensional image that magically becomes three-dimensional when the viewpoint drops.

This effect was maintained in each successive model and was encouraged when some of them were routinely hung vertically on walls. Constant actively blurs the distinction between model and drawing. This blurring was most emphatically established in *Groep sectoren*, the last of the core models to be completed and the one that formed the basis of the first drawn plan of New Babylon (p. 13). The visual effect of looking down on the model was duplicated in the matching drawing and this duplication would launch the endless chain of images that followed.⁵³ Constant would take the effect to the next level in 1969. He cut up aerial photographs of all the early models and placed them in a chain linked to fragments of Zippertone, pencil lines, and pencil shadings on a large white

paper ground to form yet another compelling map, *Reeks sectoren* (Series of Sectors). This relentless blurring of model and drawing echoes the original concept of the *modello*. Before drawing received its special promotion as *disegno* and was celebrated as the basis of the arts, the word *modello* applied to either a drawing or a maquette.⁴ Constant didn't simply pass from models to drawings then work his way through all other available media. The models are a kind of drawing, presented to us as if we are potential inhabitants of their spaces, and the subsequent works on paper are actually ways of inhabiting the models and exploring their limits. Work on paper was treated as a form of inhabitation rather than a form of design.

In fact, the logic of drawing was multiplied within each model. The role of the white ground that acts like the paper supporting a drawn image is also played by the layers of Plexiglas that are suspended above it—the new ground planes on which the inhabitants of New Babylon will live. The single ground is displaced by several grounds, each of which also acts like a sheet of paper marked by intersecting lines of movement. The transparent and translucent surfaces are either etched with such lines or awaiting them. The traditional structure of drawing that Constant seemed at first to have radically abandoned is actually the very structure of the new world he proposes and the life-style it will make possible.



Reeks sectoren (Series of Sectors), 1969. Photocollage, with Zippertone and pencil
47 1/7 x 52 in. (120 x 132 cm). The Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

The whole project can be understood in these terms. What is portrayed by all the various media deployed by Constant is itself a form of media whose closest affinity is with drawing. New Babylon is nothing but a new means of expression. Constant designs a colossal new medium, or, to be more precise, he designs a support on which the inhabitant's play will be the medium. After all, as he keeps telling us, each occupant of New Babylon will be an artist. Crowds of these passionate artists will collectively mark the support with ever changing materials: light, color, texture, temperature, sound, ventilation, humidity, and so on. The inhabitants draw, as it were, in three dimensions. The drawings will continually change. They will never be fixed like a traditional artwork. The experimental play that so inspired Cobra, the spontaneous physical act driven by unregulated desire, is accommodated rather than frozen. The structure Constant designs is just a support for the materiality of sensuous events. And as with drawing, the support must be as immaterial as possible. Hence the open metal frames and transparent or translucent surfaces. Like paper, the vast structure must ultimately be effaced in the name of the inscriptions upon it.

In fact, the structure of New Babylon, like that of paper, is not meant to be experienced as such. Constant only represents it with some realism in one exceptional view from the outside, *Gezicht op New Babylonische sectoren* (View of New Babylon) of 1971. A black-and-white photograph of the last model has been seamlessly photo-montaged into a photograph of a real landscape, greatly enlarged and recolored by hand. For the first time, the structure appears to have already been built. Yet the coloring is streaky and the many new details that have been drawn onto the blowup (modifying the sector and adding a whole new landscape of sectors in the background) are very hazy. There is a sense of realism yet no clear image is offered in the end. Subsequent views of the outside, like all the earlier ones, keep the whole structure extremely delicate or blurry, especially those that include the amorphous outlines of future inhabitants. Inside, things are always blurry. Almost all the drawings exhibit a translucence of structure echoing that in the models. Constant continually blurs both the play of desire, which cannot be specified without blocking it, and the support of that play, which cannot be represented without it being mistaken for frozen play. New Babylon is given the quasi-immateriality of paper. If Cobra mistakenly confused the paper hung in a gallery or a publication with the surfaces of the city, and thereby credits its childlike drawings with revolutionary force, New Babylon makes a new city, a new politics, out of the logic of paper itself.

This was already clear in the very first drawing (p. 2). The simple image is a drawing of drawing itself. A ruler has been used to represent the basic structural framework of New Babylon and then freehand hatching has been used to mark ambiguous zones of play within that framework. The structure has been minimally represented as a support waiting for play to be registered upon it. The overlap of mechanical and freehand drawing establishes the basic principle of the project and also the basic relationship between the models and the drawings. The network of ruled lines reproduces exactly the effect of the lines etched into the overlapping layers of Plexiglas in the *Oriënt sector* model. What the drawing does to the model is just add the vague outlines of possible zones of play. The free play of the artist's hand stands for future play rather than depicts it.

This subtle code is used in most of the drawings. Blobby or blurry figures and lines of movement keep appearing as freehand marks against a gridded framework that has been set up with a ruler to represent the basic structure of the architecture. It is as if play

begins where the straight line ends. Once established in the early drawings, the ruled structure recedes into the background. It literally forms the background layer against which eccentric figures and indications of movement emerge. Eventually, just three or four intersecting straight lines can represent the huge megastructure. It's not that the world of play comes into focus when the infrastructure accommodating it recedes. Even the most detailed drawings do not represent the sensuous qualities the infrastructure is meant to make possible. All we are allowed to see is that we are not seeing very much. It is precisely the lack of a complete or even partial image that empowers the inhabitants. In the end, all the drawings are like the very first one. They present the basic principle of the project rather than how it would look. Neither the support nor the play is really shown. Again and again, a lightly ruled immaterial support is marked by the vague freehand outlines of possible future material play. Constant simply designs the three-dimensional paper on which people will draw their lives.

Despite devoting himself to a single project for an unprecedented amount of time and exposing it with an unprecedented number of diverse techniques of representation, the point was to never reveal what New Babylon looks like yet provoke desire for it.¹⁵ The astonishing multiplicity of images and types of image was meant to dispel any one impression. The key effect was the flicker between images. Sheer weight of material actually lightened the project. A heavy multi-media barrage produced the magical effect of a little paper.

What Debord called the "rather pleasing vagueness" of the term "psychogeography" in 1955 is echoed in the images of New Babylon.¹⁶ Which is not to say that the project is imprecise, incomplete, or inadequate. On the contrary, it is a carefully constructed openness, the openness of a sheet of paper awaiting marks, the openness of a liminal support—neither fully material nor fully immaterial. New Babylon takes advantage of enigmas at the heart of the cult of drawing. The project is not a particular design, a singular conceptual organization in the sense of *disegno*. It is more a disturbance of design itself, a demolition of the powerful hierarchy between thought and action, a disruptive opening to the physicality of desire. But desire, by definition, cannot be seen as such. It is precisely what is missing, what is yearned for, what will come. It is the city of the future.

There are almost a hundred drawings of New Babylon. Yet they try not to show us New Babylon. For over fifteen years, Constant dedicated himself to drawing a mirage. Things momentarily come into focus only to shimmer away. The biggest building ever conceived keeps disappearing into a haze. To exhibit these drawings is to exhibit a highly charged but elusive blur.

MARK WIGLEY

NOTES

1. For the detailed relationships between Constant and the architectural community on the one hand, and the situationists on the other, see Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998). The present text is intended as a supplement to the monograph, focusing on the question of drawing.
2. *Constructies en maquettes*, May 4-June 8, 1959, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
3. Constant, "Le grand jeu à venir," *Potlatch. Informations intérieures de l'Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 [new series] (July 15, 1959), 11p.
4. *Constant Amsterdam*, March 4-April 9, 1961, Städtische Kunstgalerie, Bochum.
5. In 1967, for example, the exhibition in Oslo featured 13 drawings, 23 photographs, and the Atlas. *Constant. New Babylon*, November 18-December 10, 1967, Kunstnerens Hus, Oslo.
6. Typical forms like "pen and brown ink on brown-washed paper," for example, preserve the sense of a neutral paper which has been creatively marked. The color of the paper, even if obtained in that form, is presented as an action of the artist, an extension of the media added to the paper rather than a material condition of the support as such.

7. Ironically, it is precisely in specialized exhibitions or publications of drawings alone, where one might expect a more nuanced reference to the qualities of each paper, that the very presence of paper at all is never referred to. In exhibitions or publications featuring different art forms, at least the fact that the drawings are on paper is pointed out.
8. These include the five key sector models (Orange, Yellow, Red, Orient, and Group) and around nine others, including characteristic landscapes (*Ambiance de départ* and *Industrieel Landschap*), a three-dimensional labyrinth (*Klein Lahr*), and spherical buildings (*Spatiovore*).
9. Constant, "Une autre ville pour une autre vie," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (December 1959), pp. 29-31.
10. Constant, "Description de la zone jaune," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4 (June 1960), pp. 23-26.
11. Constant. *Konstruktion und Modelle*, January 9-February 9, Galerie van de Loo, Essen. The catalogue text by Debord doesn't refer to "New Babylon" as it was an edited version of a text originally written, but not used, for the May 1959 exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum.
12. These drawings were never published. They were kept by Otto van der Loo, the gallerist of the first exhibition, and were only put back on display for the first time since then in the 1998 exhibition of New Babylon at the Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam. They do not appear in the accompanying monograph as they were not relocated until it had already been prepared.
13. *New Babylon. Tekeningen 1961-1962*, June 6-September 20, 1963, Galerie Delta, 1963. The catalogue is: *Tekeningen New Babylon* (Rotterdam: Galerie Delta, 1963), with texts by Constant and C. Caspari.
14. Constant, "Manifest van de experimentele groep," *Reflex: Orgaan van de experimentele groep in Holland*, no. 1, 1948, pp. 2-11. Translated by Leonard Bright as "Manifesto (1948)" in Willemijn Stokavis, *Cobra* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), pp. 29-31.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
16. "This urge for direct expression, for a way out for pent up vitality, regarded by the art historian as the stimulus for the development of culture, is thus in reality its demolition. It is the source of all revolutionary activity and attacks ever further the fundamentals of culture, not resting until the cause of the lack of fulfillment is removed. ... We see this development as the result of two opposed forces, *revolution* and *formalism*, of which one continuously wins over the other, but only temporarily, for the other re-establishes its position quickly, only to receive another blow. Thus, strictly speaking, one cannot speak of development, in European culture, but rather of *demolition*." Constant, "Cultuur en contra-cultuur," *Reflex*, no. 2, pp. 6-7. Translated by Alexandra Broches in *Artist's Proofs*, vol. 6, no. 9-10, 1967, p. 79.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Constant, "C'est notre desir qui fait la revolution," *Cobra: Organe du front international des artistes experimentaux d'avant-garde*, no. 4, pp. 3-4. Translated by Lucy Lippard as "Our Own Desires Build the Revolution," H.B. Chipp ed., *Theories of Modern Art. A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1968), pp. 601-602.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 602.
20. The image was one of the illustrations in the article by Pierre Alechinsky entitled "Abstraction Faite," *Cobra* 10 (Autumn 1951), pp. 4-8. The final illustration is of children's graffiti from a medieval church.
21. The image comes from the word "Cobra" scratched in slate in a work by Raul Ubac used on the cover of *Cobra* 7 and then the title page of this and subsequent issues.
22. "Let us fill up Mondrian's virgin canvas even if only with our own miseries." Constant, "Our Own Desires Build the Revolution," p. 602.
23. The page of three sketches was first published in H. van Haaren, *Constant* (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhof, 1967), ill. 14a.
24. "Of all our modern arts, drawing is most resistant to definition. The Museum of Modern Art simply calls every unique work on paper a drawing... Now, certainly, a drawing is widely considered to be almost anything that is on paper—and many things that are not. Works on paper-based supports (like cardboard) and on new paper-substitute supports (like plastic sheet) are collected by the Museum as drawings (and so are works on paper laid down on other supports)." John Elderfield, *Modern Drawing. 100 Works on Paper* (New York: MoMA, 1983), p. 9. The expression "unique work on paper" was introduced in 1944 for the Museum's first exhibition of drawings: Monroe Wheeler, ed., *Modern Drawings* (New York: MoMA, 1944). It was then adopted for the Museum's first exhibition of its own drawings in 1947. The definition was restricted to works in black and white until 1964, when pastels and water-colors were included. Only with the formation of an independent department of drawings in 1971 was it expanded to include *papier collés* and other forms. For the history of the department, see John Elderfield, "Drawings" in *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1983), pp. 261-264.
25. "Seeing too that from this understanding there arises a certain conception and judgement which forms in the mind that which, when expressed with the hands, is called *disegno*, we may conclude that *disegno* is not other than a visible expression and declaration of our inner conception and of that which others have imagined and given form to in their idea... What *disegno* needs, when it has derived from the judgement the mental image of anything, is that the hand, through the study and practice of many years, may be free and apt to draw and to express correctly, with the pen, the stylus, the charcoal, the chalk, or other instrument, whatever nature has created. For when the intellect puts forth refined and judicious conceptions, the hand which has practiced *disegno* for many years, exhibits the perfection and excellence of the arts as well as the knowledge of the artist." Giorgio Vasari, Technical Introduction to *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (2nd edition of 1568). Translated by Louisa S. Maclellan as *Vasari on Technique* (New York: Dover, 1960), p. 205. While the argument that *disegno* is the origin and theoretical basis of sculpture and painting had gained momentum through several theorists in the fifteenth-century, Vasari was responsible for establishing an entire discourse around this point. See, Francis Ames Lewis, *Drawing in Early Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University, 1983).
26. For a reconstruction of the long dispersed collection, which Vasari started to assemble in 1529, see L. Collobi Raghianti, *Il Libro de' Disegni del Vasari*, 2 vols (Florence: Vallecchi, 1974).
27. Robert W. Scheller, *Exemplum: Model-Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (ca 900 - ca. 1470)*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995).
28. Contemporary scholarship identifies Antonio Pisanello's experimental drawings as "the roots of an entirely new tradition.

- Spontaneous, exploratory and inventive" that coexists with standard model books produced by the same artist. Francis Ames-Lewis and Joanne Wright, *Drawing in the Italian Renaissance Workshop* (London: Victoria and Albert Press, 1983), p. 98. For these two sides of Pisanello's practice, see Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Preparatory Drawings for Frescoes in the Early Quattrocento: The Practice of Pisanello," in Walter Strauss and Tracie Felker, *Drawings Defined* (New York: Abaris Books, 1987), pp. 49-62. Woods-Marsden counters Ernst Gombrich's influential assertion that the use of drawing for creative exploration did not begin until Leonardo da Vinci.
29. "Disegno cannot have a good beginning if it does not come from continual practice in copying natural objects, and from the study of pictures by excellent masters and of ancient statues in relief, as has been said many times." Vasari, Technical Introduction to *Lives of the Artists*, p. 210. "I know that our art consists first and foremost in the imitation of nature but then, since it cannot reach such heights unaided, in the imitation of the most accomplished artists." Vasari, Preface to *Lives of the Artists*, translated by George Bull (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 31. For Vasari, the very basis of originality is the copy. He describes how the genius of Michelangelo (who represents "perfection in disegno" and is therefore the climax of the *Lives*) was first recognized in his childhood ability to forge the drawings of masters so well (including the use of smoke to give the appearance of age) that "he could exchange his copies for the originals." The sign of genius is not simply the production of unique marks but "originality and skill in imitation." Ibid., p. 329. On Vasari's own imitations, see Sharon Gregory, "Vasari, Prints and Tradition," in Stuart Currie ed., *Drawing 1400-1600: Invention and Innovation* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1998), pp. 132-143.
30. Hans Prinzhorn, *Bilderei der Geisteskranken: ein Beitrag zur Psychologie und Psychopathologie der Gestaltung* (Berlin: Springer, 1923). Translated by Eric van Brockdorff as *Artistry of the Mentally Ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration* (New York: Springer Verlag, 1972).
31. "The mind which plunges into Surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best parts of its childhood...From childhood memories, and from a few others, there emanates a sentiment of being unintegrated, and then of *having gone astray*, which I hold to be the most fertile that exists. It is perhaps childhood that comes closest to ones 'real life'; childhood beyond which man has at his disposal, aside from his *laissez-passer*, only a few complimentary tickets; childhood where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about the effective risk-free possession of oneself. Thanks to Surrealism, it seems that opportunity knocks a second time." André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924). Translated by Richard Seaver and Helen I. Lane in André Breton, *Manifestos of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1972), pp. 1-48, 39.
32. André Breton, "Surrealist Situation of the Object (1935)," in *Manifestos of Surrealism*, pp. 255-278, 273.
33. Georges Luquet, *Les dessins d'un enfant; étude psychologique* (Paris: E. Alcan, 1913). Georges Luquet, *L'Art primitif* (Paris: G. Doin & cie, 1930). The combination of drawings by children, the primitive, and the insane had first appeared in a Dada anti-art exhibition in Cologne in 1919, but the idea that they were "parallel phenomena" to be used as the model for displacing high art traditions had already been formulated by Klee in 1912: "For these are primitive beginnings in art, such as one usually finds in ethnographic collections or at home in one's nursery. Do not laugh, reader! Children also have artistic ability, and there is wisdom in their having it! The more helpless they are, the more instructive are the examples they furnish us; and they must be preserved free of corruption from an early age. Parallel phenomena are provided by the works of the mentally diseased: neither childish behavior nor madness are insulting words here, as they commonly are. All this is to be taken very seriously, more seriously than all the public galleries when it comes to reforming today's art." Paul Klee, ed., *The Diaries of Paul Klee*, entry 905 for 1912. Cited in John M. MacGregor, *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 231.
34. "Now in our own time (as I hope to show a little farther on by a number of examples), simple children, brought up roughly in primitive surroundings, have started to draw instinctively, using as their only model the trees around them, the lovely paintings and sculptures of nature, and guided only by their own lively intelligence. But the first men were more perfect and endowed with more intelligence, seeing that they had nature for their guide, the purest intellects for their teachers, and the world as their model. So is there not every reason for believing that they originated these noble arts and that from modest beginnings, improving them little by little, they finally perfected them." Vasari, Preface to the *Lives of the Artists*, p. 31.
35. Georges Bataille "L'Art Primitif," *Documents*, no. 7 (1930), pp. 389-397.
36. Georges Bataille, "Joan Miró: Peintures récentes," *Documents*, no. 7 (1930), pp. 399-404.
37. For Constant's recollection of the meeting, see Jean Clarence Lambert, *Cobra* (New York: Abbeville, 1988), p. 74.
38. An extract of Jorn's speech was published in *Le Surréalisme Révolutionnaire*, no. 1, January 1948, p. 9.
39. Asger Jorn, "Discours aux pingouins," *Cobra* 1 (1948), p. 8.
40. "Forms take reality for me as I work. In other words, rather than setting out to paint something, I begin painting and as I paint the picture begins to assert itself under my brush...The second stage, however, is carefully calculated. The first stage is free, unconscious, but after that the picture is controlled throughout, in keeping with that desire for disciplined work I have felt from the beginning." James Johnson Sweeney, "Joan Miró: Comment and Interview," *Partisan Review*, XV, no. 2 (February 1948), pp. 208-212.
41. Cobra's celebration of the unfettered actions of desire and rejection of both the surrealists' over-refinement of the results of automatic drawing techniques and over-theorization of those results should not be confused with an anti-theoretical posture. On the contrary, Jorn and Constant were always presenting comprehensive theoretical analyses that rationalized their actions. In fact, the roughness of Cobra work is inseparable from the smoothness and detail of their theoretical statements.
42. Asger Jorn, *Pour la forme: Ébauche d'une méthodologie des arts* (Paris: Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie, 1958).
43. *Helhesten*, no. 5-6 (1944).
44. *Signes gravés sur les églises de l'Ève et du Calvados* (Copenhagen: Editions Borgen, 1964). Jorn writes the introduction and a contribution on "Sauvagerie, Barbarie, et Civilisation."
45. Constant kept challenging Debord's support of Jorn and Pinot-Gallizio's work, as exemplified by Debord's catalogue essay for an exhibition of Jorn's work and Michele Bernstein's essay on an exhibition by Pinot-Gallizio. What tends to be ignored is the fact that Constant was the most militantly anti-art member of the collective. He angrily opposed the exhibition of situationist work in galleries and even the

holding of situationist meetings in gallery spaces (as happened at the Munich congress). It was Debord who persuaded him that this was an acceptable risk and encouraged him to exhibit New Babylon for the first time in a gallery in Essen that had just been opened by the same gallerist who hosted the Munich congress. It is important to note that even after the "artists" (Constant, Jorn, and Pinot-Gallizio) left the Situationist International, the collective did not simply abandon the space of art. For his part, after resigning from the collective, Constant would hold an increasing number of solo exhibitions of the project up until 1966 (one in 1961, one in 1962, two in 1963, four in 1964, four in 1965, six in 1966). After that, they became less and less frequent before a final display of almost all the works in 1974, the year that the project ended. Having been launched as a form of resistance to the traditional space of art, much of the project was eventually tailored to that space. As a result, the dilemma posed by exhibiting the project (and thereby absorbing its anti-art potential) is not straightforward. Constant had actually prepared it for that space (along with the spaces of publications, lectures, schools, radio, and television) in exactly the same way he had prepared it for the city itself.

46. In some issues of Cobra, it is actually van Eyck's address that is given as the contact point for the Dutch members.

47. "The Child and the City—Problem of Lost Identity." Presentation at the tenth CIAM conference in 1956. Van Eyck eventually made over seven hundred playgrounds up until 1978. The projects had first been published in Aldo van Eyck, "Kind en stad," *Goed Wonen*, October 1950, no. 10, pp. 152-153.

48. "In architecture the 'as found' aesthetic was something we thought we named in the early 1950s when we first knew Nigel Henderson and saw in his photographs a perceptive recognition of the actuality around his house in Bethnal Green: children's pavement play-graphics; repetition of 'kind' in doors used as site hoardings; the items in the detritus on bombed sites, such as the old boot, heaps of nails, fragments of sack or mesh and so on." Alison and Peter Smithson, "The 'As Found' and the 'Found'," in David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 201-202.

49. The opening of Constant's 1964 lecture in Copenhagen refers to the shift of perspective: "Ladies and Gentleman. Sixteen years ago I came to Copenhagen for the first time, in a situation quite different from the present one. I came here to show my paintings and to find friends whose ideas and whose works were closely related to mine. I came with the enthusiastic spirit of collaboration and with the optimistic attitude that dominated in the years of reconstruction after the second world war. We are facing a world now that has much changed since then, and that is still changing rapidly, and if I have to explain how it happens that I am coming here this time to present ideas that in many respects may appear opposite to the ideas of COBRA, we will have to consider the circumstances we are actually living in now, and especially the perspectives that are offered by these circumstances. Then we will see that new social conditions are more and more leading to the necessity for the artist to change his social attitude, and even his cultural practice." Constant, unpublished manuscript for a lecture at the students association at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen, December 12, 1964. Archives of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague.

50. When criticizing Jorn's opposition to mechanization, Constant insists that "I have as little taste for individualist primitivism in painting as for so-called cold abstraction and architecture, even though one likes to stress an antagonism between these two tendencies which is both false and artificial....Ten years separate us from Cobra and the subsequent history of so-called experimental art shows us its errors." Constant, "Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 2 (December 1959), pp. 23-26. Translated by Paul Hammond in Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa, eds, *Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings on the City* (Barcelona: MACBA and ACTAR, 1996), pp. 62-65.

51. Unsigned, "Le sens du dépérissement de l'art," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 (December 1959), pp. 3-8.

52. For Debord, maps were a crucial part of the drift. Standard maps indicated possible paths to be taken, disturbed maps opened up unexpected paths, and new maps could be made on the basis of what was discovered during the drift. "Among various more difficult means of intervention, a renovated cartography seems appropriate for immediate utilization. The production of psychogeographic maps, or even the introduction of alterations such as more or less arbitrarily transposing maps of two different regions, can contribute to clarifying certain wanderings that express not subordination to randomness but complete insubordination to habitual influences..." Guy Debord, "Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine," *Les Lèvres Nues*, no. 6 (September, 1955). Translated by Paul Hammond as "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," in Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa, eds, *Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings on the City* (Barcelona: MACBA and ACTAR, 1996), pp. 18-21.

53. Installation photographs of the 1961 exhibition in Bochum show the *Groep sectoren* model hanging vertically on the wall alongside the *Groep sectoren* drawing. The model and the drawing based on it were first published side by side when an edited version of Constant's July 1963 lecture at the ICA was published as Constant, "New Babylon: an Urbanism of the Future," *Architectural Design*, June 1964, pp. 304-305.

54. Hannelore Glasser, *Artist's Contracts of the Early Renaissance* (Garland: New York, 1977), pp. 115-119.

55. Of his technicolor slide shows, for example, Constant would always insist "With these slides I only want to give you a suggestion, like the painter and the poet used to suggest a world superior to the world they had to live in. I certainly don't want to predict how the world of the future will look like, for that would be impossible. I want to challenge the imagination of those who will have to prepare the construction of the future world, when labor will be abolished." Constant, unpublished manuscript of lecture to the Students Association at the Royal Academy of Copenhagen, February 12, 1964. Archives of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague.

56. Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," p. 18.

Works In the Exhibition

Works are listed chronologically and then alphabetically by title within a given year. Dimensions are in inches, followed by centimeters; height precedes width precedes depth.

The audio-visual components are treated separately, in the final section of this list. Not listed is a display of contextual materials by Constant and his peers such as catalogues, manifestos, letters, maps, albums, posters, invitations, brochures, magazines, photographs, and newspapers. This section also includes a few original works, among which is the collage *La vie continue d'être libre et facile* (Life Continues to Be Free and Easy) by Guy Debord. The majority of contextual materials have been provided by the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague. Additional loans have come from the collections of the Witte de With and N.A.I., both in Rotterdam, as well as Roberto Ohrt and other private sources. The contextual display is supplemented by a selection of excerpted contemporaneous texts chosen by Mark Wigley and Thomas McDonough.

[1959]

Groep sectoren (Group of Sectors)

Metal (iron, copper), ink on Plexiglas, and oil on wood
1 3/4 x 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 (4.5 x 100 x 100)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Plattegrond van de oriënt sector

(Map of the Orient Sector)

Pencil and ink on paper
15 3/4 x 20 1/8 (40 x 51)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Principle of a covered city. Spatial "Plan"

Ink on paper
4 5/16 x 6 5/16 (11 x 16)
Published in *Internationale Situationiste*, no. 3, December 1959
Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague

Transverse section of the covered city

Ink on paper
2 9/16 x 9 7/8 (6 x 25)
Published in *Internationale Situationiste*, no. 3, December 1959
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

[1960]

Gezicht op een sector (View of a Sector)

Washed ink on paper
12 5/8 x 18 (32 x 45.8)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Groep sectoren (Group of Sectors)

Collotype, with ink and collage
22 7/16 x 26 3/4 (57 x 68)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Labyrint met trappen (Labyrinth with Stairs)

Ink on paper
18 1/8 x 12 5/8 (46 x 32)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Labyrintisch interieur (Labyrinthine Interior)

Ink on paper
16 9/16 x 20 1/16 (42 x 51)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Mobiele wanden (Mobile Walls)

Ink on paper
12 5/8 x 18 1/8 (32 x 45.8)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon

Ink on paper
11 13/16 x 9 1/16 (30 x 23)
Galerie van de Loo, Munich

New Babylon

Ink on paper
11 13/16 x 9 1/16 (30 x 23)
Galerie van de Loo, Munich

New Babylon

Ink on paper
11 13/16 x 9 1/16 (30 x 23)
Galerie van de Loo, Munich

New Babylon

Ink on paper
12 5/8 x 18 1/8 (32 x 46)
Galerie van de Loo, Munich

New Babylon

Ink on paper
12 5/8 x 18 1/8 (32 x 46)
Galerie van de Loo, Munich

New Babylon Nord (New Babylon North)

Collage, with ink and watercolor on paper
39 3/8 x 39 3/8 (100 x 100)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Ondersteuning van een sector (Support of a Sector)

Ink on paper
12 5/8 x 18 1/8 (32 x 46)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Plattegrond van de gele sector

(Map of the Yellow Sector)

Pencil and ink on paper
15 3/4 x 20 1/8 (40 x 51)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Trappen en ladders (Steps and Ladders)

Ink on paper
12 5/8 x 18 1/8 (32 x 46)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Twee sectoren (Two Sectors)

Ink on paper
12 5/8 x 18 (32 x 45.8)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

[1961]

New Babylon

Ink on paper

16 15/16 x 24 13/16 (43 x 63)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Schets voor een constructie

(Sketch for a Construction)

Ink on paper

17 3/4 x 25 5/8 (45.1 x 65.1)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Sectoren New Babylon (New Babylon Sectors)

Ink on paper

17 3/4 x 25 5/8 (45.1 x 65.1)

Private collection

Torens (Towers)

Ink on paper

17 3/4 x 25 5/8 (45.1 x 65.1)

Private collection

[1962]

Constructie (Construction)

Ink and pencil on paper

15 9/16 x 25 3/16 (39.5 x 64)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Constuctie (Construction)

Ink on paper

10 3/4 x 18 (27.3 x 45.8)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Figuren in een labyrint (Figures in a Labyrinth)

Ink on paper

12 1/4 x 17 3/4 (31 x 45)

Private collection

Interieur met trappen en deuren

(Interior with Steps and Doors)

Ink on paper

10 13/16 x 17 15/16 (27.4 x 45.6)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Labyr (Labyrinth)

Ink on paper

11 3/4 x 16 1/2 (29.8 x 42)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Labyratoire (Labyratorium)

Ink on paper

18 15/16 x 27 3/16 (48 x 69)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon

Ink drawing included in a set of 10 lithographs

(Luxury edition, nr. VII), 6 1/8 x 7 15/16 (15.5 x 20.2)

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

Rood vlak (Red Plane)

Color etching, aquatint

4 1/16 x 5 1/4 (10.3 x 13.4)

Edition of 20

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Schematische voorstelling van een sector

(Diagram of a Sector)

Ink on paper

12 9/16 x 18 1/8 (32 x 46)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Twee vormen (Two Forms)

Ink on paper

12 9/16 x 18 1/8 (32 x 46)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Untitled

Ink on paper

11 3/4 x 16 9/16 (29.8 x 42)

Private collection

Vergelijkende plattegrond New

Babylon/Amsterdam Ookmeer

(Comparative Map New Babylon/Amsterdam Ookmeer)

Collotype, with pencil, chalk, and ink

39 x 41 15/16 (99 x 106.5)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

[1963]

New Babylon/Amsterdam

Ink on map

20 7/8 x 24 7/16 (53 x 62)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon/Antwerpen

Ink on map

20 1/2 x 25 3/16 (52 x 64)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon/Barcelona

Ink on map

18 1/2 x 24 13/16 (47 x 63)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon/Holland

Ink on map

19 11/16 x 23 1/4 (50 x 59)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon/Köln

Ink on map

19 11/16 x 24 (50 x 60.9)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon/München

Ink on map

18 7/8 x 22 7/8 (48 x 58)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon/Paris

Ink on map

18 1/2 x 24 (47 x 61)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon/Rotterdam

Ink on map

18 7/8 x 24 (48 x 61)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon/Ruhrgebiet (Ruhr Region)

Ink on map

20 11/16 x 25 (52.5 x 63.5)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon/Zuid-Nederland (South of Holland)

Ink on map

19 5/16 x 24 13/16 (49 x 63)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Schets voor een plattegrond (Sketch for a Map)

Pencil and ink on paper

34 11/16 x 52 (88 x 132)

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

[1964]

Landschap met Spatiovore
(Landscape with Spatiovore)

Pencil on paper
35 1/16 x 55 1/18 (89 x 140)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Schets voor een sector (Sketch for a Sector)

Pencil on paper
17 3/4 x 25 3/16 (45 x 64)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Schets voor een sector met een tentdak
(Sketch for a Sector with Pavilion Roof)

Pencil on paper
18 15/16 x 22 5/8 (48 x 65)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Schets voor zelfdragende sectorconstructie
(Sketch for Self-supporting Sector Construction)

Pencil on paper
17 3/4 x 24 5/8 (45 x 62.5)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Vogelvlucht groep sectoren I
(Birdseye View of Group of Sectors I)

Ink, pencil, and pen on paper
15 1/2 x 20 15/16 (39.4 x 53.2)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Vogelvlucht groep sectoren II
(Birdseye View of Group of Sectors II)

Ink and pencil on paper
15 1/16 x 22 3/16 (38.2 x 56.3)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Vogelvlucht groep sectoren III
(Birdseye View of Group of Sectors III)

Ink and pencil on paper
19 11/16 x 25 5/8 (50 x 65)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

[1965]

Figuren in ruimte (reisschets)
[Figures in Space (Travel Sketch)]

Ink on paper
11 13/16 x 16 1/2 (30 x 42)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

[1966]

Homo Ludens

Pencil on paper
52 3/8 x 52 3/8 (133 x 133)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Mobiel Labyrinth E.S.R. New Babylon
(Mobile Labyrinth E.S.R. New Babylon)

Pencil on paper
50 x 55 1/8 (127 x 140)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

New Babylon

Pencil on paper
40 3/16 x 57 7/8 (102 x 147)
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

New Babylon

Pencil and crayon
55 1/2 x 50 13/16 (141 x 129)
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

Sectoren rondom een bos (Sectors Around a Forest)

Watercolor and collage on photograph
39 x 31 1/2 (99 x 80)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

[1967]

Doorsnede voor grote gele sector
(Section for Large Yellow Sector)

Ink and pencil on tracing paper
24 7/16 x 57 1/8 (62 x 145)
Private collection

Mobiel Ladderlabyrinth (Mobile Ladder Labyrinth)

Pencil and watercolor on paper
39 x 43 5/16 (99 x 110)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

New Babylon op historische kaart van Middlesex
(New Babylon on the Historical Map of Middlesex)

Watercolor on photograph
31 15/16 x 39 (81 x 99)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Souvenir de Norvège (Souvenir of Norway)

Pencil, crayon, pastel, and watercolor on paper
52 3/8 x 59 1/4 (133 x 150.5)
Centraal Museum, Utrecht

[1968]

Schets voor een mobiel labyrinth
(Sketch for a Mobile Labyrinth)

Pencil, watercolor, and crayon on paper
39 3/8 x 49 1/4 (100 x 125)
Centraal Museum, Utrecht (on loan from Province Utrecht)

[1969]

Landschap (Landscape)

Crayon, ink, and aluminum paint on paper
47 1/4 x 51 5/8 (120 x 131)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Reeks sectoren (Series of Sectors)

Photo collage
47 1/4 x 52 (120 x 132)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Symbolische voorstelling van New Babylon
(Symbolic Representation of New Babylon)

Collage, with pencil and ink
48 1/16 x 52 3/8 (122 x 133)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

[1970]

Mekong River

Watercolor, spray paint, pencil, and collage on paper
46 1/2 x 52 (118 x 132)
Private collection

[1971]

Demonstratie (Demonstration)

Ink on paper
46 7/8 x 51 5/8 (119 x 131)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Gezicht op New Babylonische sectoren
(View of New Babylonian Sectors)
Watercolor and pencil on photomontage
53 3/16 x 87 13/16 (135 x 223)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Technologisch landschap
(Technological Landscape)
Pencil and aluminum paint on paper
47 5/8 x 52 3/8 (121 x 133)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

[1972]

Spiegelzaal (Hall of Mirrors)
Pencil and watercolor on paper
48 1/16 x 52 3/8 (122 x 133)
Private collection

[1974]

Theory Collages for Hans Locher (#2)
Collage, with ink and watercolor, mounted on a
metal sheet with a layer of paperboard
19 1/2 x 23 7/16 (49.5 x 59.5)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Theory Collages for Hans Locher (#8)
Collage, with ink and watercolor, mounted on a
metal sheet with a layer of paperboard
19 1/2 x 23 7/16 (49.5 x 59.5)
Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Audio-Visual Components

Lecture slides with audio accompaniment
1959-69
Courtesy of the artist and Witte de With, Rotterdam

Gyromorphosis
1958, 16 mm film by Ily Hirsh (7')
Filmmuseum, Overveen

Kijk op Kunst (A Look at Art)
Broadcast on May 18, 1961 (3')
KRO Television

Atelierbezoek: Simon Vinkenoog bezoekt Constant
(Studio Visit: Simon Vinkenoog Visits Constant)
Broadcast on February 4, 1962 (16')
VPRO-Television

Monitor
Broadcast on November 27, 1966 (6'), NPS Television

Constant oder den weg nach New Babylon
(Constant or the Way to New Babylon)
By C. Caspari, broadcast on October 12, 1968 (71')
NDR Television

Openbaar Kunstbezit: Kijken, denken, doen II
(Public Ownership of Art: Looking, Thinking,
Doing II) Broadcast November 28, 1971 (14'), NOS Television

Biography of the Artist

Constant Nieuwenhuys was born in 1920 in Amsterdam where he studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts. In 1948 he founded the Dutch Experimental Group with Karel Appel and Corneille and later in the same year the Cobra group, with Asger Jorn, Christian Dotremont, and others. With the breakup of Cobra in 1951, he spent a lot of time in Paris and then London, where an increasing interest in architecture and urban space between 1952 and 1953 led to his rejection of painting in preference to three-dimensional forms. From 1953 to 1956 he worked on an extended series of experimental sculptures and actively collaborated with architects. He designed a number of realistic projects for monuments, furniture, and play equipment—several of which were built. In 1957 he became a founding member of the Situationist International and immediately developed some of his earlier experiments into the New Babylon project as a demonstration of the group's radical attitude to the politics of space. Constant kept working on the project after his resignation from the group in mid-1960 and did not stop until 1974. He continued his collaboration with architects during these years, designing towers, parks, experimental labyrinths, fountains, and large monumental sculptures. The first sign that the New Babylon project was coming to an end was his return to painting in 1969. A series of large canvases that explored the darker side of life in New Babylon brought the long investigation to a close. The painter who had turned into an architect for almost twenty years turned back into a painter. Since 1974, Constant has continued to live and paint in Amsterdam.

The Drawing Center is the only not-for-profit institution in the country to focus solely on the exhibition of drawings, both contemporary and historic. It was established in 1976 to provide opportunities for emerging and under-recognized artists; to demonstrate the significance and diversity of drawings throughout history; and to stimulate public dialogue on issues of art and culture.

This is number 3 of the *Drawing Papers*, a series of publications documenting The Drawing Center's exhibitions and public programs and providing a forum for the study of drawing.

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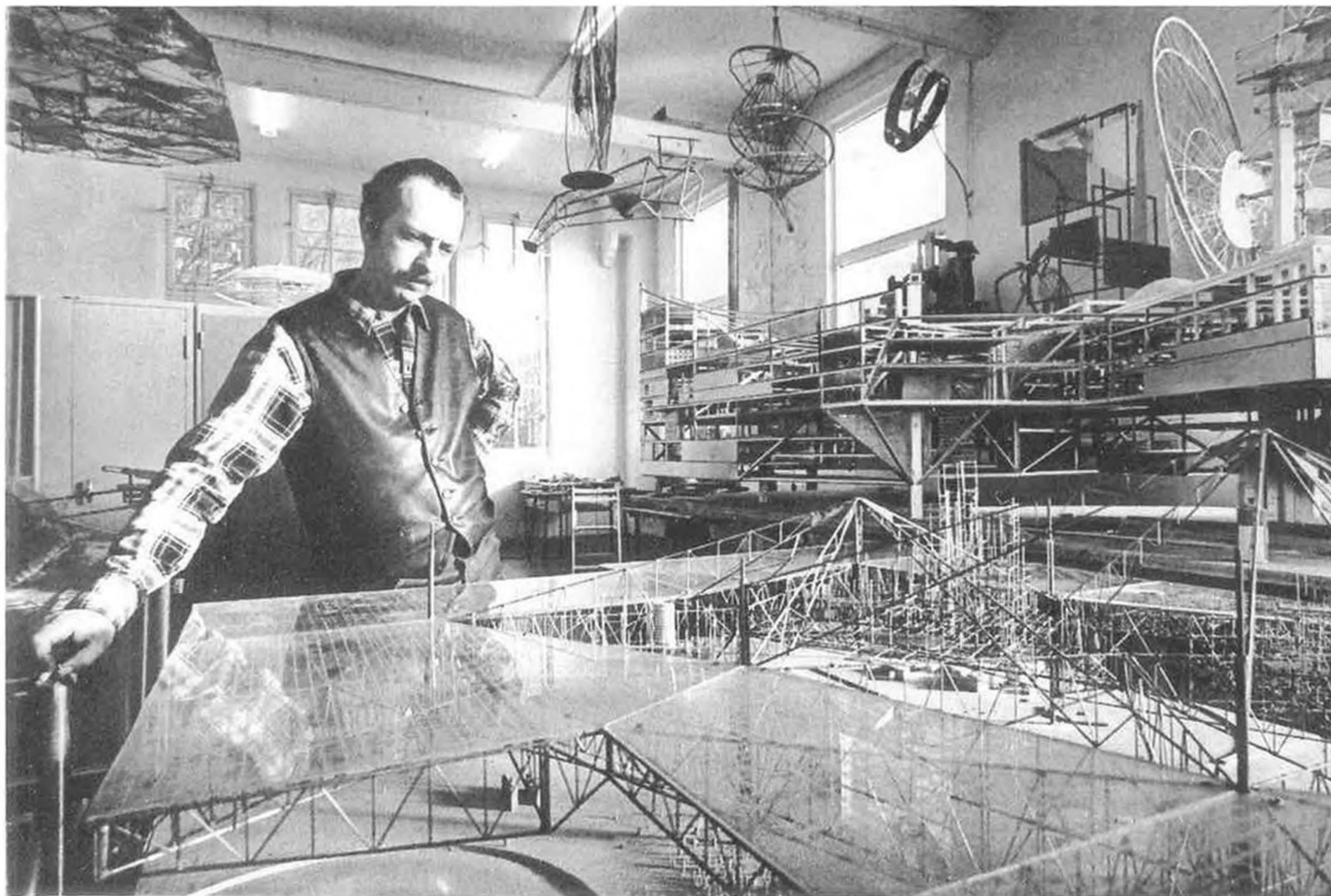
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Cover: *Doorsnede voor grote sector* (Large Yellow Sector), 1967
Ink and pencil on tracing paper, 47 1/4 x 52 (120 x 132). Private collection

The Drawing Center

3
Attachment

The Decomposition of the Artist: Five Texts by Constant



The following five texts by Constant have been selected to show the evolution of his thinking about the politics of art from the late forties through to the late sixties. They cover his early years with the Cobra group, his membership in the Situationist International, and the period after his break from the situationists. The texts (most of which have not appeared in English before) focus on Constant's militant attitude towards the role of the artist in society. They reveal a surprising continuity in the political position he adopted during several decades of continuous experimentation. They also demonstrate the extent to which the radical groups that valued the anarchism of pre-theoretical, pre-cultural, pre-conscious creativity more than anything else, nevertheless elaborated highly self-conscious theoretical defenses of that creativity. Their experiments were carefully positioned within both a millennial narrative about the history of culture and a detailed narrative about each of the twentieth-century avant-gardes. If uncultivated art, art that did not want to be art, was thrown into high culture like a bomb, it was a carefully guided bomb. The attempt to get outside, underneath, before, or beyond dominant cultural patterns had its own precise and highly cultivated discourse. The sophistication of this discourse, even in its seemingly sloganistic moments, is inseparable from the crudity that it promoted.

M.W.

This text was first published in 1948 as "Manifest van de experimentale groep" in the first issue of *Reflex*, the magazine of the Dutch Experimental Group, a collective of artists that had been founded in Constant's apartment in Amsterdam in July of that year. The collective, which included the painters Karl Appel and Corneille, became part of the international group Cobra from its foundation in November of the same year until its dissolution in 1951.

MANIFESTO

The dissolution of Western Classical culture is a phenomenon that can be understood only against the background of a social evolution which can end only in the total collapse of a principle of society thousands of years old and its replacement by a system whose laws are based on the immediate demands of human vitality. The influence the ruling classes have wielded over the creative consciousness in history has reduced art to an increasingly dependent position, until finally the real psychic function of that art was attainable only for a few spirits of genius who in their frustration and after a long struggle were able to break out of the conventions of form and rediscover the basic principles of all creative activity.

Together with the class society from which it emerged, this culture of the individual is faced by destruction too, as the former's institutions, kept alive artificially, offer no further opportunities for the creative imagination and only impede the free expression of human vitality. All the isms so typical of the last fifty years of art history represent so many attempts to bring new life to this culture and to adapt its aesthetic to the barren ground of its social environment. Modern art, suffering from a permanent tendency to the constructive, an obsession with objectivity (brought on by the disease that has destroyed our speculative-idealizing culture), stands isolated and powerless in a society which seems bent on its own destruction. As the extension of a style created for a social elite, with the disappearance of that elite modern art has lost its social justification and is confronted

only by the criticism formulated by a clique of connoisseurs and amateurs.

Western art, once the celebrator of emperors and popes, turned to serve the newly powerful bourgeoisie, becoming an instrument of the glorification of bourgeois ideals. Now that these ideals have become a fiction with the disappearance of their economic base, a new era is upon us, in which the whole matrix of cultural conventions loses its significance and a new freedom can be won from the most primary source of life. But, just as with a social revolution, this spiritual revolution cannot be enacted without conflict. Stubbornly the bourgeois mind clutches on to its aesthetic ideal and in a last desperate effort employs all its wiles to convert the indifferent masses to the same belief. Taking advantage of the general lack of interest, suggestions are made of a special social need for what is referred to as "an ideal of beauty," all designed to prevent the flowering of a new, conflicting sense of beauty which emerges from the vital emotions.

As early as the end of the World War I the DADA movement tried by violent means to break away from the old ideal of beauty. Although this movement concentrated increasingly on the political arena, as the artists involved perceived that their struggle for freedom brought them into conflict with the laws that formed the very foundations of society, the vital power released by this confrontation also stimulated the birth of a new artistic vision.

In 1924 the Surrealist Manifesto appeared, revealing a hitherto hidden cre-

ative impulse—it seemed that a new source of inspiration had been discovered. But BRETON'S movement suffocated in its own intellectualism, without ever converting its basic principle into a tangible value. For Surrealism was an art of ideas and as such also infected by the disease of past class culture, while the movement failed to destroy the values this culture proclaimed in its own justification.

It is precisely this act of destruction that forms the key to the liberation of the human spirit from passivity. It is the basic pre-condition for the flowering of a people's art that encompasses everyone. The general social impotence, the passivity of the masses, are an indication of the brakes that cultural norms apply to the natural expression of the forces of life. For the satisfaction of this primitive need for vital expression is the driving force of life, the cure for every form of vital weakness. It transforms art into a power for spiritual health. As such it is the property of all and for this reason every limitation that reduces art to the preserve of a small group of specialists, connoisseurs, and virtuosi must be removed.

But this people's art is not an art that necessarily conforms to the norms set by the people, for they expect what they were brought up with, unless they have had the opportunity to experience something different. In other words, unless the people themselves are actively involved in the making of art. A people's art is a form of expression nourished only by a natural and therefore general urge to expression. Instead of solving problems posed by some preconceived aesthetic ideal, this art recognizes only the norms of expressivity, spontaneously directed by its own intuition. The great value of a people's art is that, precisely because it is the form of expression of the untrained, the greatest possible latitude is given the unconscious, thereby opening up ever wider perspectives for the compre-

hension of the secret of life. In the art of genius, too, Western Classical culture has recognized the value of the unconscious, for it was the unconscious which made possible a partial liberation from the conventions which bound art. But this could be achieved only after a long, personal process of development, and was always seen as revolutionary. The cycle of revolutionary deeds which we call the evolution of art has now entered its last phase: the loosening of stylistic conventions. Already weakened by Impressionism, laid bare by Cubism (and later by Constructivism and Neo-Plasticism), it signifies the end of art as a force of aesthetic idealism on a higher plane than life. What we call "genius" is nothing else but the power of the individual to free himself from the ruling aesthetic and place himself above it. As this aesthetic loses its stranglehold, and with the disappearance of the exceptional personal performance, "genius" will become public property and the word "art" will acquire a completely new meaning. That is not to say that the expression of all people will take on a similar, generalized value, but that everyone will be able to express himself because the genius of the people, a fountain in which everyone can bathe, replaces the individual performance.

In this period of change, the role of the creative artist can only be that of the revolutionary: it is his duty to destroy the last remnants of an empty, irksome aesthetic, arousing the creative instincts still slumbering unconscious in the human mind. The masses, brought up with aesthetic conventions imposed from without, are as yet unaware of their creative potential. This will be stimulated by an art which does not define but suggests, by the arousal of associations and the speculations which come forth from them, creating a new and fantastic way of seeing. The onlooker's creative ability (inherent to human nature) will bring this new way of seeing within

everyone's reach once aesthetic conventions cease to hinder the working of the unconscious.

Hitherto condemned to a purely passive role in our culture, the onlooker will himself become involved in the creative process. The interaction between creator and observer makes art of this kind a powerful stimulator in the birth of the creativity of the people. The ever greater dissolution and ever more overt impotence of our culture makes the struggle of today's creative artists easier than that of their predecessors—time is on their side. The phenomenon of "kitsch" has spread so quickly that today it overshadows more cultivated forms of expression, or else is so intimately interwoven with them that a demarcation line is difficult to draw. Thanks to these developments, the power of the old ideals of beauty is doomed to decay and eventually disappear and a new artistic principle, now coming into being, will automatically replace them. This new principle is based on the total influence of matter on the creative spirit. This creative concept is not one of theories or forms, which could be described as solidified matter, but arises from the confrontation between the human spirit and raw materials that suggest forms and ideas.

Every definition of form restricts the material effect and with it the suggestion it projects. Suggestive art is materialistic art because only matter stimulates creative activity, while the more perfectly defined the form, the less active is the onlooker. Because we see the activation of the urge to create as art's most important task, in the coming period we will strive for the greatest possible materialistic and therefore greatest possible suggestive effect. Viewed in this light, the creative act is more important than that which it creates, while the latter will gain in significance the more it reveals the work which brought it into being and the less it appears as a polished

end-product. The illusion has been shattered that a work of art has a fixed value: its value is dependent on the creative ability of the onlooker, which in turn is stimulated by the suggestions the work of art arouses. Only living art can activate the creative spirit, and only living art is of general significance. For only living art gives expression to the emotions, yearnings, reactions and ambitions which as a result of society's shortcomings we all share.

A living art makes no distinction between beautiful and ugly because it sets no aesthetic norms. The ugly which in the art of past centuries has come to supplement the beautiful is a permanent complaint against the unnatural class society and its aesthetic of virtuosity; it is a demonstration of the retarding and limiting influence of this aesthetic on the natural urge to create. If we observe forms of expression that include every stage of human life, for example that of a child (who has yet to be socially integrated), then we no longer find this distinction. The child knows of no law other than its spontaneous sensation of life and feels no need to express anything else. The same is true of primitive cultures, which is why they are so attractive to today's human beings, forced to live in a morbid atmosphere of unreality, lies and infertility. A new freedom is coming into being which will enable human beings to express themselves in accordance with their instincts. This change will deprive the artist of his special position and meet with stubborn resistance. For, as his individually won freedom becomes the possession of all, the artist's entire individual and social status will be undermined.

Our art is the art of a revolutionary period, simultaneously the reaction of a world going under and the herald of a new era. For this reason it does not conform to the ideals of the first, while those of the second have yet to be formulated. But it is the expression of a life force that is all the

stronger for being resisted, and of considerable psychological significance in the struggle to establish a new society. The spirit of the bourgeoisie still permeates all areas of life, and now and then it even pretends to bring art to the people (a special people, that is, set to its hand).

But this art is too stale to serve as a drug any longer. The chalkings on pavements and walls clearly show that human beings were born to manifest themselves; now the struggle is in full swing against the power that would force them into the straightjacket of clerk or commoner and deprive them of this first vital need. A painting is not a composition of colour and line but an animal, a night, a scream, a human being, or all of these things together. The objective, abstracting spirit of the bourgeois world has reduced the painting to the means which brought it into being; the creative imagination, however, seeks to recognize every form and even in the sterile environment of the abstract it has created a new relationship with reality, turning on the suggestive power which every natural or artificial form possesses for the active onlooker. This suggestive power knows no limits and so one can say that after a period in which it meant NOTHING, art has now entered an era in which it means EVERYTHING.

The cultural vacuum has never been so strong or so widespread as after the last war, when the continuity of centuries of cultural evolution was broken by a single jerk of the string. The Surrealists, who in their rejection of the cultural order threw artistic expression overboard, experienced the disillusionment and bitterness of talent become useless in a destructive campaign against art, against a society which, though they recognized its responsibility, was still strong enough to be considered theirs. However, painters after World War II see themselves confronted by a world of stage decors and false facades in which all lines

of communication have been cut and all belief has vanished. The total lack of a future as a continuation of this world makes constructive thought impossible. Their only salvation is to turn their backs on the entire culture (including modern negativism, Surrealism and Existentialism). In this process of liberation it becomes increasingly apparent that this culture, unable to make artistic expression possible, can only make it impossible. The materialism of these painters did not lead, as bourgeois idealists had warned, to a spiritual void (like their own?), nor to creative impotence. On the contrary, for the first time every faculty of the human spirit was activated in a fertile relationship with matter. At the same time a process was started in which ties and specific cultural forms which in this phase still played a role were naturally thrown off, just as they were in other areas of life.

The problematic phase in the evolution of modern art has come to an end and is being followed by an experimental period. In other words, from the experience gained in this state of unlimited freedom, the rules are being formulated which will govern the new form of creativity. Come into being more or less unawares, in line with the laws of dialectics a new consciousness will follow.

Translated by LEONARD BRIGHT

In September 1958, Constant wrote a letter to his fellow members of the Situationist International criticizing their lingering embrace of traditional art forms like painting and their corresponding dismissal of the culture of mechanization. Guy Debord and Asger Jorn formulated a reply by letter and Constant replied to the reply. Extracts from the three letters of the exchange were published in December of 1958 as "Sur nos moyens et nos perspectives" in the second issue of *Internationale Situationniste*. Constant used extracts from his first letter as his statement in the catalogue of the May 1959 exhibition of his work at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam where the first of the New Babylon models to be completed was displayed for the first time.

ON OUR MEANS AND OUR PERSPECTIVES

1

Re-reading Jorn's writings ("Against Functionalism," "Structure and Change," etc.), it's obvious to me that some of the ideas expressed therein must be attacked directly. To me, these ideas as well as his pictorial activity seem indefensible vis-à-vis the conception of what unitary urbanism can become. As for the history of modern art, Jorn underestimates the *positive* importance of Dadaism and overestimates the role of the romantics (Klee) played in the first Bauhaus. His attitude towards industrial culture is naive, and according to him imagination is the prerogative of the isolated individual.

I have as little taste for individual primitivism in painting as for so-called cold abstraction in architecture, even though one likes to stress an antagonism between these two tendencies that is both false and artificial.

Industrial and machinic culture is an indisputable fact and artisanal techniques, including the painting of both tendencies (the idea of a "free" art is an error), are finished.

The machine is an indispensable model for all of us, even artists, and industry is the sole means of providing today for the needs, even aesthetic ones, of humanity on a world-wide scale.

These are no longer "problems" for artists, this is a reality they cannot afford to ignore.

Those who scorn the machine and those who glorify it display the same inability to utilize it.

Machine work and mass production offer unheard-of possibilities for creation, and those who know how to put these possibilities at the service of an audacious imagination will be the creators of tomorrow.

The artist's task is to invent new techniques and to utilize light, sound, movement, and any invention whatsoever that might influence ambiance.

Without this, the integration of art in the construction of the human habitat remains as chimerical as the proposals of Gilles Ivain.

Ten years separate us from COBRA and the subsequent history of so-called experimental art shows us its errors.

I drew the inference from this six years ago in abandoning painting and launching myself into more effective experimentation, and this in relation to the idea of a unitary habitat.

I believe discussion should go in this direction, which seems decisive to me for the development of the SI.

2

No painting is defensible from the Situationist point of view. This kind of problem no longer poses itself, i.e., applicable to a particular construction. We must look beyond divisive expressions, beyond, even, the whole spectacle (as complex as the latter may become).

Only being able to proceed from the reality of present culture, we obviously run the risk of confusion, compromise and failure. If cur-

rent artistic practice managed to impose certain of its values on the SI, then the authentic cultural experiments of our time would be undertaken elsewhere.

All art that seeks to cling to a bygone artisanal freedom is lost in advance. (Jorn has underlined somewhere this reactionary aspect of the Bauhaus.) A free art of the future is an art that would master and use all the new conditioning techniques. Beyond this perspective, there is only enslavement to the past, kept alive artificially, and commerce.

We are all, it seems, in agreement on the positive role of industry. It is the material development of the epoch that has created both the general crisis of culture and the possibility of its overthrow in a unitary construction of everyday life.

We approve of the formula: "those who scorn the machine and those who glorify it display the same inability to utilize it." But we would add: "and to transform it." Account must be taken of the dialectical relation. The construction of ambiances is not only the application to everyday existence of an artistic standard permitted by technical progress. It is also a qualitative changing of life, susceptible to producing a permanent reconversion of technical means.

Gilles Ivain's proposals are not opposed on any point to these considerations on modern industrial production. On the contrary, they are built on this historical base. If they are chimerical it is to the extent that, concretely, we do not have at our disposal the technical means of today (or put another way, to the extent that no form of social organization is yet capable of making "artistic" experimental use of these means); not because these means do not exist or that we are unaware of them. In this sense, we believe in the revolutionary value of such monetarily utopian demands.

The failure of the COBRA movement, as

well as the posthumous favour it has found among a certain public, can be explained by the term "so-called experimental art."

COBRA believed that it sufficed to have good intentions, the slogan of experimental art. But in fact it is the moment when such slogans are coined that the difficulties begin: what can the experimental art of our time be, and how is it made?

The most effective experiments will lead in the direction of a unitary habitat, not isolated and static, but linked to transitory unities of behavior.

3

The culminating point in our discussion seems to me to rest on the use being proposed for present culture.

For my part, I consider that the shocking character the construction of ambiance calls for excludes traditional arts like painting and literature, which are threadbare and incapable of any revelation. These arts, which are linked to a mystical and individualist attitude, are useless to us.

We must, then, invent new techniques in every domain, visual, oral, psychological, in order to unite them later in the complex activity unitary urbanism will engender.

The idea of replacing the traditional arts by a larger and freer activity has marked all the artistic movements of this century. Since Duchamp's "readymades" (beginning in 1913), a succession of gratuitous objects, whose creation was directly linked to an experimental attitude, has intersected the history of artistic schools. Dada, Surrealism, de Stijl, Constructivism, COBRA, the Lettrist International—all have searched for techniques that go beyond the artwork.

Over and above the apparent opposition of the diverse movements of this century, it is that which they have in common. And that is the true development of present culture, suffocated by the noise of pseudo-successes

in the domains of painting and literature, which drag out their agony down to our own day.

The history of modern art has been falsified to an incredible degree, out of commercial interest. We can no longer be tolerant. As for our present culture, even if we must reject it in its entirety, one must distinguish strictly between the true and the false, between what is usable for the moment, and what is compromising.

I believe that purely formal researches, if they are appropriated and transformed to our own ends, are highly usable.

Let us leave to the official gravediggers the sad task of burying the corpses of pictorial and literary expression. The devalorization of what no longer serves us is not our affair; let others take care of it.

Translated by PAUL HAMMOND

This text is the original manuscript of a lecture that Constant gave at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London on November 7, 1963. A much shortened and edited version of the text was published in *Architectural Design* in June of the following year and that publication became the way most international architects learned of the New Babylon project. To preserve the original tone of the lecture, the complete manuscript is presented here without any stylistic corrections.

Lecture given at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London

I have been asked to present here my project, called New-Babylon. You might wonder perhaps, why a painter and sculptor like I am, spends his time in describing and illustrating an imaginary city, and how a free artist gets interested in a discipline like urbanism. To make you understand that New-Babylon is not a town-planning project, but rather a way of thinking, of imagining, of looking on things and on life, I will have to start with explaining to you my conception of art, or rather of the present situation of the artist. For the cultural situation of to-day is the source out of which this New-Babylon plan is born. I almost could put it this way, that my awareness of the desperate situation of modern art hardly left me any other choice. I will try to explain this, starting from the very notion of art itself.

The crisis in the creative behaviour of the artist, his hesitations towards himself, his obvious frustrations and his provocative attitude towards society, cannot be understood well without making clear who the artist really is, at what moment he made his appearance in society, subsequently when we can expect him to disappear. At this very moment already it seems quite a curious fact, that people go on speaking of art and artists, as if these words represent accurate ideas that should be understandable at any moment and by everyone, as if art is just an odd activity and the artist just a different type of man, deviating from what should be the normal type.

Since the beginning of this century there has been much talking about the creative

faculties of the human race, and more than one avant-garde movement declared itself in favour of the "poésie faite par tous," a poetry brought forth by the whole of mankind.

The realisation of such a mass-culture does obviously not depend on the intentions of the artist only, and would demand thorough changes in society.

In the society of the past, creativity has never been essential, perhaps hardly important. Essential only is the production of primary consumption-goods. However it is remarkable that, in spite of the fact that nearly all the people that have lived, have sacrificed the whole of their lives to hard production-labour, the history of consumption shows up an everlasting hunger and shortage. During all the history of his existence, man has been obliged to spend nearly his total energy just for the purpose of staying alive.

If there has been any culture at all, this is due to the fact that an extremely small number of people, who owned the land and the other means of production, thus could avoid the necessity of labour.

Without the slavery of the big majority, these small upper-classes would not have been able to play their lives, to invent their way of living, to be creative, to establish their cultures. The division of humanity into creative and non-creative individuals, is inherent to the division of society into possessing, not-working classes and the classes of workers, and without this division, we may say, there wouldn't have been any culture at all. But the artist, properly speaking, is not a representative of the rul-

ing class, though he depends on this class. We could say that he is hired by the social élite. The artist, like we still know him in this period of his fall, is a product of the economy of money, of the capitalist economy. He only appears on the historical moment the bourgeoisie comes on the scene. The bourgeoisie never has been a creative class itself, like the nobility originally was, but the rule of money allowed the bourgeois-class to have its dreams realized by employed specialists, by professional artists. The revolutionizing role the artists played through the past centuries was enabled by the individualist ideology the bourgeoisie used as an arm against feudalism.

This having settled, we better can understand now the critical situation the artists have come in since the industrial revolution. Before the machine could take over any human labour, it first had to be produced itself. This extra effort caused an expense of energy that only could be recompensed by cutting down cultural activities, by withdrawing this energy from the creative activities that were tolerated before. The artist has surely understood this, perhaps unconsciously. How to explain otherwise his immediate violent opposition against mechanization—for which in this country William Morris is still a symbol—an opposition that continues until some of the most recent art-movements. But it is only after the first world war that the artists organized into militant “avant-garde” groups, to maintain their opposition against an industrializing society in which, they felt, there wouldn't be any place for them. The bohemian artist of the 19th century and the more recent avant-garde artist are both products of the controversy between mechanization and creativity.

In our time however, we are facing a quite different situation. The effects of machine-production are leading slowly to a limitation of human labour, and we can state already with certainty, that we will

enter a new era, in which production-labour will be automatic, and in which man will be freed from labour and from hunger both. For the first time in history, mankind will be able to establish an affluent society in which nobody will have to spill his forces, and in which everybody will be able to use his entire energy for the development of his creative capacities.

We already can say now, that there is no repeatable action, that theoretically couldn't be done by a machine. The only activity that will remain beyond automation is the unique act of imagination, by which a human being is distinguished. The only field of activity inaccessible for the computer is the unforeseeable creativity that makes man change the world and reshape it after his capricious needs.

There can be no doubt about the progressing of mankind towards this perspective. No force on earth can possibly prevent humanity from seizing the affluence of automatic production that will enable man to live a creative life instead of being nothing but an instrument of production. Soon man will no longer have to sell his life-time and to lose his creative forces, even before having been able to use them for the realization of a real human existence. The affluence of automatic production itself will be the instrument by which the now working people will forge their future freedom. And, at last, labour itself will disappear totally and the only production-force that will remain will be the machine.

The question is now how the free man of this future will use his unbound forces, in which way he will realize his freedom, what his life will be like. I hope it will be clear that no comparison can be made with the artist of the past or of the present. The *homo ludens* of the past, like Johan Huizinga described him, was a man in an exceptional situation, a man who escaped reality in suggesting another dreamed “reality” that should help him to forget the

unsatisfying circumstances of his actual life. No real contact was possible between him and the others who could not follow him into his substitute reality, being captured themselves in their utilitarian lives. His thoughts and his morals had to be different from the normal, and even when society recognized him, he remained a lonely man, sometimes an outcast.

The new *homo ludens* of the future, on the contrary, will rather be the normal type of man. His life consists in constructing the reality he wants, in creating the world he conceives freely, no longer bothered by the struggle for life. We will see that this means a complete revolution in the field of social behaviour. If man is no longer bound to production-labour, he also will no longer be forced to stick to a fixed place, to settle down. He will be able to circulate, to change his environment, to enlarge his area. His relationship to space will become as free as his relationship to time is already becoming now. I think we are getting to the point now.

If man is supposed to obtain complete freedom, to be master of time and space, can we expect that he will use his freedom in a creative way, that he won't spoil his life in idleness and boredom, like moralists are constantly telling us? Does it make sense to change society, and to reconstruct our environment, if we cannot expect that the needs of man will develop to a higher level, if we don't expect the birth of the new human type that I called the *homo ludens*?

Answering these questions, I will repeat that the artist is only socially an exception, that everybody is creative, at least potentially, and to a certain extent, and that the dissatisfaction of the average welfare-state citizen of today has more to do with the world he lives in than with his own capacities.

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.

The specific task of the creative men of this actual period is to prepare a new exciting reality, instead of depicting and expressing the unsatisfying reality that is about to be liquidated.

But this new reality must cover the social space we are really living in. The *homo ludens* of the future society will not have to make art, for he can be creative in the practice of his daily life. He will be able to create life itself and to shape it in correspondence with the still unknown needs that will emerge only after he has obtained complete freedom, after he can develop into a new *homo ludens*. At present any activity in the field of art that is not concerned with the *homo ludens* could already be called backward, and that is the reason I have concentrated my activity on this New-Babylon plan.

New-Babylon represents the environment the *homo ludens* is supposed to live in. For it should be clear that the functional cities, that have been erected during the long period of history in which the human lives were consecrated to utility, would by no means suit the totally different needs of the creative race of the *homo ludens*.

The environment of the *homo ludens* has, first of all, to be flexible, changeable, assuring any movement, any change of place or change of mood, any way to behave. The spaces the *homo ludens* will live in cannot be determined, and neither can be the use that will be made of them. Not the home can be the main element of this environment, but only the extensive social space people move around in, on search for adventurous circumstances that must stimulate their life-activity, the social space where people will meet, will influence each other, and where they actually will realize their lives.

It follows that New-Babylon could possibly be a determined urbanist plan, that provides everything town-planners think that people need. On the contrary, every element is left undetermined, all has

to be mobile and flexible, in order to make any kind of use that will be made of it possible. For the people, circulating in this enormous social space, are expected to give this space its ever-changing shape, to divide it, to vary it, to create its always different atmosphere, and to play their lives in the variety of these surroundings.

The project of New-Babylon only intends to give the minimum conditions for a behaviour that must remain as free as possible. Any restriction of the freedom of movement, any limitation with regard to the creation of mood and atmosphere, has to be avoided. Everything has to remain possible, all is to happen, the environment has to be created by the activity of life, and not inversely.

Now we will have to consider the conditions that have led to the formal characteristics of New-Babylon. There are two connected circumstances that have caused, especially in the past ten years, a critical situation in the highly industrialized countries. The first and most important is the increase of populations, that is leading to an almost complete urbanization of the landscape, destroying the land that originally was used in common. The other circumstance, related to this, is the growing importance of mechanical traffic, that enlarges enormously the living-space of each individual. It makes no sense to discuss these developments, that represent a new social situation no one can deny. The facts are simply there as a reality, and we have to deal with them. But we cannot allow traffic to destroy the social space of the cities, like it is doing now, and we cannot let the population-growth be responsible for changing all landscape into one uninterrupted townscape, boring and dead, without any possibility for creating a more interesting way of living.

Every plan for the future, may it be as free as the New Babylon plan tends to be, has to solve the problems that are posed by these

circumstances, and any failure in solving them may be considered as an attack against the freedom of life. The elementary characteristics of New-Babylon that I will mention are therefore purely practical: severe separation of fast traffic and social living-space on the one hand, and on the other hand the severe separation of the constructed artificial living-space and the free untouched nature. With these conditions the basic construction of New-Babylon is given. The urbanisation consists of a coherent system of covered unities that I call sectors, and in between remain extensive open spaces where nobody lives and where no buildings are to be found—nature parks, agricultural land and gardens. This network-like system is unlimited, and could theoretically cover the entire surface of the earth. Because of the intensified use that is made of space, this means that the field of activity of each individual has practically no limits.

The sector itself—the dimensions of which are much bigger than those of any present building—is a spatial system of high-placed levels, that leave the ground-level free for an intensive fast traffic. On top of it there may be airports or heliports, to assure the quick passage to sector-groups in other parts of the world.

The sector-floors are primarily empty. They represent a sort of extension of the earth-surface, a new skin that covers the earth and multiplies its living-space. They will have to be divided and developed into a more complicated pattern of smaller spaces.

The unfunctional character of this playground-like construction makes any logical division of the inner spaces senseless. We rather should think of a quite chaotic arrangement of smaller and bigger spaces that constantly are mounted and dismounted by means of standardized mobile construction-elements, like walls, floors and staircases. Thus the social space can be adapted to the ever-fluctuating needs of an ever-changing

population that is passing the sector-system.

Life in New-Babylon is inapt for the forming of habits. Every situation is different and should differently be faced. There could be no question of any fixed life-pattern, for life itself is to be handled as a creative material. For the same reason it would be wrong to speak of the inhabitants of New-Babylon. The unfunctional and fantastic way of living requires the rapid passage from one place to the other, from one sector to the other sector, and we could call life in New-Babylon in a way nomadic. People are constantly moving around and travelling, and there is no need for them to come back to the same place, which would soon have been changed anyhow. Therefore each sector contains a centre with private rooms—we could compare that with a hotel—where passing visitors can rest awhile, can pass the night, can make love, relax or recover when they feel sick. But they will seldom stay for a long time in such centres, for moving on is easy and anyhow makes life more interesting and intensive.

Every moment of life in New-Babylon can have the quality of a brainwashing in so far that the intensity of each moment destroys the memory that normally paralyses the creative imagination.

To make the character of the inner spaces as varied as possible, the interior of the sectors is air-conditioned in a way to create artificially any wanted climate. Passing from one space into another, one can meet the most contrasting climatological conditions. The scale the sectors are built in, and the fact they comprise more than one living-level, makes it impossible to depend on natural light, which could only penetrate into some of the outer spaces. The use of artificial light not only enlarges enormously the number of lighting-possibilities but also makes human life still more independent from sunlight than it already is now. So the technical means for the construction of atmosphere—means for the management of

light, temperature, moisture, and other atmospherical conditions—are used in a creative way, as artistic mediums. There can never be a question of the imitation of natural circumstances, but there should be taken advantage of the much greater variety the artificial climatization allows, in order to make the passage through the world of sectors as adventurous as possible.

So the *homo ludens* of New-Babylon incessantly travels through the world he creates and recreates at any instant, and we could say that staying in New-Babylon for 24 hours may offer more experiences and more sensations than a long journey in any former period of history. Every square mile of New-Babylon's surface represents an unexhaustible field of new and unknown situations, because nothing will remain and everything is constantly changing. The mobile construction-elements and the technical equipment for climate and light manipulation, guarantee the constant variation of the entire living-space.

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 non-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 of how the world might look like when labour 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 at the same time, is mentioned to suggest the presence of life, and the rest now is left to your own imagination.

This text was first published in 1964 as "Opkomst en ondergang van de avant-garde" in the eighth issue of the literary review *Randstad*. It is the first text since Constant's resignation from the Situationist International in June of 1960 to return to the theme of the role of the artist in society without specifically discussing the New Babylon project. The editor of the review, Simon Vinkenoog, had already played a major role in the project, making a television program about it in 1962 and writing poetic texts about it that appeared on Constant's *New Babylon* lithograph series in 1963.

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE AVANT-GARDE

The artist's discontent is not a recent phenomenon. Actually, half a century has passed since for the first time a group of artists more or less organized themselves to profess jointly and aggressively their common discontent to be at the root of their activities. At that time, what we are now used to calling the avant-garde embarked upon its short-lived history, the name of the movement highlighting its militant character. The term avant-garde was first used in this context in Surrealist circles. Two elements essentially characterize the movement: firstly, its followers repudiated and opposed the existing society and culture, and secondly, a number of artists cooperated closely—which up until now had been considered impossible—to form an organization, requiring a certain discipline from its members, or at least that they subscribed to a common program.

The question now arises as to what caused artists to unite into a militant group at a certain moment in history, and what was the result of their actions?

The meeting of a number of leftist pacifists in the "Cabaret Voltaire" in Zürich in 1916 is generally accepted as the first manifestation of the avant-garde movement. It is equally easy to determine when the movement's initial éclat began to wane: during the period of the economic crisis which followed the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929. It seems obvious to conclude from these facts that the short-lived activities of the revolutionary movement were connected with a particular socio-economic situation,

i.e., with the period of the "roaring twenties," a time when the economy appeared to boom, but which came to an abrupt end in 1929, when the next war already began to loom around the corner. In a wider context, the avant-garde episode was a climax within the crisis of creativity in our industrial society, a crisis which had been going on for a much longer period of time. However, though the artistic avant-garde and the decline of the capitalist system seem to be related, it should not be concluded that creativity itself was facing a crisis. On the contrary: the avant-garde bore witness to a tremendous creativity—maybe even to an explosion of bottled-up creativity—the stylistic features of which will fuel our "cultural life" for some time to come. But we should be careful not to confuse the activities of the avant-garde between the two wars with the urge of contemporary artists to get public attention by displaying amazing novelties. To fully understand the avant-garde, first we must refute the claim that the movement is still alive today. Slogans such as "avant-garde car design" or "the avant-garde within the church" bear witness to the various abuses of the term. Stylistic innovations are rampant: no year goes by without some group of young artists presenting themselves as the new avant-garde hype. None of these groups, however, make the promises of the avant-garde come true. On the contrary: most of them conform themselves more or less to social conventions, and their compliance is rewarded with social recognition. No matter how fashionable the terms avant-

garde and avant-gardism may be for the moment, we cannot but conclude that no artistic movement complies with the first and foremost prerequisite the term implies: avant-gardists repudiate and oppose contemporary society and its culture. Curiously, precisely those artists who label themselves vehemently as "avant-garde" express the meekest optimism, suggesting that modern art is bursting with vitality and that our culture is characterized by an unprecedented flourishing of creativity. Apart from these naive dreamers, who try to prove their "vitality" by wrapping themselves in barbaric carnival suits, others, less naive, are quite vocal about the decline of individualistic culture, but are also hesitant to draw the obvious conclusion. Roughly three categories can be distinguished among the present pseudo-avant-garde. Firstly there is the oldest group, that of the "neo-expressionists" and "action painters," a group for which also the (inappropriate) term "vitalists" is used. Then there are the more realistic groups of "neo-dadaists," "neo-realists," and "zeroists," who, though they claim that indeed Western culture has reached the degree zero, still try to make the zero point their point of departure. Furthermore, there is a group of so-called "Pop artists" (American) and "social realists" (Russian), who adapt to reality as it presents itself to them without critical questions, or, at the most, express a certain self-mockery—not to say cynicism—by presenting their helplessness as a jocular fact.

All these postwar movements share certain features: they are afraid to take sides or to become involved with ideology, and they are weary of battle, all of which causes them to entrench themselves in their private views and to overestimate art and the "belief" in the realization of art. Despite everything, they hold on to "art." Contemporary artists have given up fighting and integrate themselves in society. Though no one believes in cultural "values" anymore, artists no longer strive to

destroy the "ideological superstructure": they merely try to safeguard the avant-garde itself and its stylistic achievements. The pseudo-neo-avant-garde is essentially a conservative movement. It wishes to preserve, not to destroy. The present harmonious relationship between artists and art officials, between "innovators" and "conservatives," between modernists and museums, is indicative of conservative aspirations, which are incompatible with the revolutionary concepts of the avant-garde. A socially integrated avant-garde is an absurdity, as social recognition cannot be reconciled with the militant concept of "avant-garde" itself. How can anyone who pretends to be part of the vanguard trust rear-guard views? How can a revolutionary seek recognition from the society he or she fights? The fact itself that artists take cultural institutions seriously, that the most recent "avant-gardists" abound in every museum, is proof of the fact that artists have lost their fighting spirit. Instead of being met with howls of derision, disapproval, indignation, and protests, artists are being met with social recognition and the accompanying subsidies. The attempt to shock, once a weapon of the avant-garde, proves ineffective: nothing can shock us anymore. Furthermore, no one wants to shock the public any longer, but merely entertain people.

The era of the avant-garde has come to an end for once and for all. Who dares to call himself or herself an avant-gardist, is either ignorant or a liar.

The era of the true avant-garde was in fact a very tragic period for artists. It was the era of the decline of individualistic culture, a time an entire part of society saw itself deprived of a future and suffered agony. It meant the end of a cultural era, a time the last individualists helplessly tried to resist what in their view signaled the end of individualism: mechanization.

The rise and decline of the avant-garde

can only be fully understood against the background of the process of mechanization. The period of the avant-garde inaugurated the end of the cult of the artist, the end of a social phenomenon which we call "artist." The arrival of the machine announced the inevitable decline of art. Mechanization gave birth to a new type of society, in which the struggle between the classes most closely involved with the process—capitalists and proletarians—will crush the artist as a redundant relic of the past. No matter how vehemently artists fight the process of mechanization, their cause is lost. Like the American Indians, they are bound to disappear, pushed aside by a new culture which does not even give them a chance to surrender. The fate of artists has been decided. Their time is up.

From the very start, artists responded negatively towards mechanization, as if they intuitively sensed the threat it concealed. William Morris's over excitement when it came to machines, his hatred of them, was one of the first symptoms of the negativism artists have displayed almost ever since. It is no coincidence that the first protests of artists against machines were heard in England, the first country ever where mechanization took command of industry. While in France industrialization lagged behind and artists were reduced to antisocial bohemians, under the smoke of English industrial towns the "arts and crafts" movement flourished. On the European continent it was to become known as "jugendstil" or "art nouveau." The movement was a posthumous tribute to the art of handicraft and openly expressed its contempt for the advancing machines. For indeed, especially in the initial phase of mechanization, machines were fierce competitors for the artists. While in preceding centuries the owners of the means of production converted the surplus value of labor into culture, machines consumed the

major part of the surplus value, as it had to be reinvested in production equipment. The production of machinery itself required additional capital and labor—an extra burden on the production potential thus characterized the first phase of the mechanization process. Capital was found in the "margin" which once provided a livelihood for culture; the additional labor was squeezed from the proletariat by reducing its living standard. Laborers and artists alike suffered from the consequences of mechanization, which accounts for the solidarity among them. The fact that, e.g., William Morris called himself a socialist was not based on a desire for social justice or for an equal distribution of wealth, as that would have meant the end of culture, even in Morris's lifetime. From Morris down to Fourier, utopians have always understood that social justice cannot be realized unless we renounce culture, luxuries, play, i.e., the privileges of those who own the means of production. In a society in which the production level cannot guarantee wealth to all, the choice is theoretically between wealth for the few who belong to the upper class—on which artists depend—or a fair distribution of the shortages among all. In the first case, the surplus of the ruling class can be converted into culture. In the second one, we must renounce culture to increase the living standard of all. The problem previous utopias met with is that they necessitated the sacrifice of luxury, of the affluence of the few, and consequently, the abolishment of the principles on which culture has been based up until now. The artist's existence is based upon wealth—that may be the wealth of a limited number of people—but certainly not upon an equitable shortage. Initially mechanization decreased production output and increased the existing shortage. Only in a later stage mechanization resulted in a marked increase in production.

In his writings William Morris does not

cease to compare the nineteenth-century proletarian with the medieval craftsman. From a socio-economic point of view the equation is inaccurate. The medieval craftsman is a self-employed artisan, who was able to buy civil rights. The craftsmen constituted the middle class, which would give rise to the class of entrepreneurs. The industrial proletariat, however, had its origin in the agrarian community, in the large masses of those who owned nothing. Already in medieval times the latter had to provide all the labor for the production of wealth. Artists were never really interested in this class of people without access to culture. The artist's fate and social standing are linked with that of the bourgeoisie. The contemporary concept of the artist is linked with a burgeoning middle class: artists are a typical product of the money economy, which has turned human labor into a commodity. For ages the middle class had been engaged in a battle with the aristocracy and clergy, its weapon being individualism. As it never succeeded in consolidating its power, the middle class could only exert a negative influence on culture. The collective cultural pattern of the feudal classes faced a revolutionary threat from the middle class. The "imperishable" social order of medieval times was questioned during the Renaissance, a time when the "transient" individual was to manifest himself. Because of its unremitting struggle for power, the middle class—unlike the feudal rulers—never had a chance to become a class of creators. However, the economic system was able to distinguish between those who "own" culture and those who produce it. The artists became the mercenaries of the bourgeoisie. With their money the middle class financed the struggle for "individual freedom," which they needed for their ascension to power. Professional artists are a typical product of capitalism, for only in a money economy can capitalism push artists into a dependent position. As an artist, the

"creative human being" has become a salaried employee of the moneyed class.

The final aim of socialism is affluence for all. Without machines, this aim cannot be accomplished. As long as there is no marked increase in production (which should result from mechanization) the socialist struggle for an equitable distribution of wealth is incompatible with the concept of culture, i.e., with the freedom to be creative, to play—a freedom which is the cornerstone of all cultures, even if it is reserved to a happy few. In countries where industry has as yet not been mechanized to a sufficient degree, the socialization of the production must therefore bring about tensions with the art community, tensions which will inevitably result in frenetic efforts to find some "utilitarian" function for art. But art is a sort of play, and playing is incompatible with usefulness. As Huizinga puts it: "Play differs from our normal, actual life. We leave the latter behind to engage in a temporary activity with its own logic." (*Homo ludens*) However, that is true only in the "utilitarian" society, which is constantly threatened by production shortages. Because of these, the major part of the population has to spend a lifetime of hard work to gain a meager existence. Where abundance reigns, utilitarianism loses its meaning, and play is not a flight from daily life. For Huizinga, play is "first of all an action free of constraints." But freedom is related to productivity. Humankind is of course in the first instance preoccupied with the production of primary commodities. Only if people's need for food, clothing, and housing has been satisfied, will we be able to spend our remaining energy on "playful" activities. To humans, bread is more important than freedom. Only contented people are interested in freedom, i.e., people who find themselves in a situation in which they can realize their freedom. Play is the realization of freedom. Culture is the product realized by energies which either are

no longer required for the production of commodities or are extracted from the production process. The former is the case when machines replace human labor to a significant degree. The process of mechanization itself, however, requires in the first stage surplus energy, necessary for the production of the means of production. The initial stage of mechanization is therefore characterized by temporary restrictions of freedom and a stepping up of the production capacity. The margin for play narrows, as utilitarianism pervades the entirety of life, even that of those who own the means of production. In a society in the process of being mechanized, culture shrivels up into insignificance. Only in the next stages of mechanization, especially in the last one, when also the production of machinery and their operation is automated, will we be able to conquer freedom to play for all. In this stage we will have created the circumstances in which a new mass culture can evolve.

The culture of the Renaissance, with its typical, individual expressions of play (such as painting or the novel) gradually declined over a long period of time, during which the social conditions which were to give birth to new collective forms of play had not yet been realized. During this entire period of stagnation—which has not ended yet—artists were exposed to various fluctuating influences, which complicated their behavior. The artists' first reaction was to protest and to oppose any changes which might disturb the production process and in particular the relations between the classes. After some time they began to see the futility of their protest and assumed a positive attitude. But as a result the artists' position became ambiguous: the acceptance of the industrialization of society implies that artists are skeptical about their own status. Artists started to have doubts about the individualistic character of creativity. Some artists, like the functionalists, completely resigned themselves to the idea, while oth-

ers reached the depressing conclusion that they remained cut off from social reality. In their isolated position, artists took out their discontent on the "masses," which fail to understand them and from which they distanced themselves. The artist blamed the masses, a mob without past or cultural tradition, for the decline of the existing culture. For the artist, "culture" is incompatible with mass production.

However, the mass production in the domain of culture cannot simply be equated with a multiplication of playful expressions which originated in an era with a different social structure. Individualism is not based on the supposed need of the individual to express oneself with the aim to distinguish oneself from other individuals. It is based solely on the sense of a group of privileged individuals to be superior, as compared to the less free majority. The democratization or socialization of culture—the "spread of culture"—obviously leads to a devaluation of those cultural expressions which can function only for and through those who created them: a leisured social elite. The playful expressions of the elite on the other hand were closely linked with a display of power to the oppressed. How could the very same status symbols possibly be used to express the desire of the masses for freedom? The cult of the genius was born from the bourgeoisie's conception of the world, the idea that culture is produced by a few individuals, towering high over the masses, individuals whom the bourgeoisie could adopt and parade. The fact that the masses, for their part, find it hard to sympathize with these exceptionally gifted and that the introduction of mass production is accompanied by a cultural crisis seems only logical.

The gradual rise to independence of the lowest classes of society is therefore accompanied by a decline of the individualistic ideology and of the artistic forms of expression which are linked with it. Closely scruti-

nizing the renewal of Western culture which is supposed to characterize the past century, we merely discover different stages of the process of the disintegration of cultural expressions. What appears at first sight to be an "evolution" of culture, is essentially the "coming to a standstill." "Isms" and movements follow each other in rapid succession. Like a chain reaction, the destructive process accelerates continually. But in fact every new stage is a step further towards the destruction of the cultural structure. The "superstructure" starts to crack, and we come closer to the source of creativity itself, as we start to understand that "creativity" is a human passion, not a "gift from God." It is precisely the merit of the avant-garde that those who are doomed to disappear from society are also those who keep alive the sense of freedom and creativity, in circumstances in which less than ever there is a place for *homo ludens*. Artists are therefore the first to become conscious of the fact that a new collective culture is imminent and who try to discern its contours.

The idealism of the Jugendstil was short-lived. World War I meant the first defeat for bourgeois society. The isolated position artists found themselves in after the war compelled them to unite into militant groups, first in Zürich, then in New York, Cologne, Berlin, and finally also in Paris (the order is no coincidence). Artists started to understand that their exceptional status was becoming a disadvantage to them. With mechanization in progress they no longer enjoyed the support of their patrons. They had lost their privileges and were even in danger of being reduced to poverty. Gradually artists became aware that the culture of which they were the exponents was disappearing. A wide gap separated artists from both the middle class, which had turned its back on them, and the working class, which had never participated in cul-

ture and felt therefore no affinity with the artists anyway. Artists now directed their hatred not only towards the machines, their owners and the ethical principles which upheld the new society, but above all towards art itself. Art was the cause of their isolation, made them prisoners of loneliness, separated them from other human beings.

The first actions of revolutionary organized artists therefore announced themselves as anti-art: Dada. Artists had definitively turned their back on the nineteenth-century idealism. However, what does anti-art refer to? The most radical expressions of anti-art appeared to be genuine industrial products, machine-made objects, stripped of their utilitarian function: Marcel Duchamp's "ready-made." Duchamp shared Morris's view that machine-made objects are devoid of artistic qualities, i.e., they are a form of anti-art. But Duchamp was not enough of an idealist to waste energy on an anti-machine campaign and refused to take refuge in the nostalgic desire for a "hand-made" world. The "ready-made" was a novel interpretation of the object, the transformation of it through human fantasy. But this view was incompatible with the position of the artist. Almost at once Duchamp accepted the consequences and consciously chose to stop being an artist. He had played his part having presented us with the "ready-made." As yet society did not permit a more drastic transformation of the machines.

Under the heading "Dada," art historians list various loosely related groups and actions. In fact, Dada comprises everything which was later to appear in a more elaborated form as "new tendencies in culture": abstraction, surrealism, constructivism, expressionism, lettrism. Its adherents are unequally distributed among the different groups, of which the members are undisciplined and hardly agree about a common program. Dada is a neutral, collective name

for birds of different feathers. The name was useful, because for a short time the collective actions were more important than differences in aesthetic interpretation. In its initial stage in Zürich the emphasis was on satire, on mocking a society and culture which had outlived themselves. The movement reached a climax in post-Versailles Germany, where small groups of Dadaists in Cologne and Berlin did not restrict their critical views to culture. They addressed workers, opposed the government and the church. The Dadaist activity more or less coincided with the foundation of the *Workers' Council for Culture* in Berlin, and with Bruno Taut's famous address to a group of architects: "Let us be consciously imaginative architects. We know that a revolution must take place before we can really start our job." These words express the situation of the avant-garde very well. The artist as a social phenomenon is aware that his end has come. But the creative human being, the *homo ludens* within the artist, will never be threatened with extinction. As the artists' ties with society were severed, they fled into imagination, into 'surrealism.' In 1920 a number of artists founded a Dada-group in Paris, which would later give birth to the Surrealist movement.

In the "utilitarian society" the artists represents the epitome of the *homo ludens*.

Artists rightly blamed mechanization for their social degradation, and many of them desperately opposed mechanization. But others believed that their playful activities and freedom should be sacrificed to the new demands of production. In part this was because the changes the machines brought with them and the speed with which these occurred stirred their imagination, but also because solidarity with the working class had become a tradition among many artists. A sense of justice caused them to give up their privileges voluntarily. Irrespective of their motives, artists also hoped to find a new place in society,

new opportunities for action which fitted in with industrial production. Apart from the revolutionary avant-garde, the "world reformers," time and again we come across other groups (functionalists, social realists, or Pop artists) who sought to establish the link between art and "reality" without further delay, because they no longer wished to put up with the unsociable existence society imposed upon them. But the urgency with which these artists sought to adapt to society enticed them into defending views which—voluntary or involuntary—tended to be reactionary. The oldest example is Futurism. As a reaction to the struggle against the machines, the Futurists wished to reconcile themselves with mechanization, but they seemed unaware of the fact that this implied a reconciliation with the commercialization of society. Marinetti's manifesto (1909) contained a series of incompatible or contradictory statements, which were meant as a desperate attempt to adapt the artist's creativity to the cynical spirit of capitalism. "We want to glorify war and militarism," Marinetti writes in his manifesto, but also: "We want to pay tribute to the masses stirred by work, pleasure, or revolt." In their hurry to integrate themselves into society, the Futurists tried to reconcile the irreconcilable, gobbling down an indefinable mush. Other artists sought more docile ways of adaptation, through making themselves "useful." They forgot that *homo ludens* by his or her very nature defies all utilitarian standards, as the specific realm of *homo ludens* is that of play. The first functionalists still pose as the creators of a new era. "Behrens and Poelzig's factories present us with a lively image of the capitalist idea as a sort of religious call," writes Giulio Argan, leaving no room for misinterpretation. Functionalism means that the artist surrenders to the utilitarian society. functionalists deny the existence of *homo ludens*: usefulness has taken the place of play. Architects design buildings and cities

focusing on efficiency. Their ideal is a comfortable, perfectly organized labor camp. Industrial designers are opportunists and for that reason there is an air of insincerity about their creeds. Most of their concepts of culture are borrowed from William Morris. The functionalists confront the "Kitsch" of mass production with the myth of the "honest" object, but they do not hide that their theories are pervaded by nostalgia for a past age. Medieval "communal" ideals are dug up. The Bauhaus, for example, flows over with ideas like "the artist should once more serve the community." But strictly speaking, the subjugation to commercialism simply means that the artists surrender to the commercial way of production and that they serve the profit-making class. It is not the "community" that benefits from the artists' "sacrifice," but the entrepreneurs. The functionalists are the first artists who were not victims of mechanization. They sacrificed their dreams and creativity to the "tough" reality and gave up their newly acquired freedom without any attempt to resist. But their sacrifice was without avail. The functionalists pretended to use the machines in a creative way, but actually they had mechanized their creativity. In doing so they incapacitated their creativity, for the human faculty of creative invention is the only one which cannot be mechanized. They tried to replace the freedom of playful fantasy with the illusion of an idealized form, which has only to be fed to the machine to allow the masses to enjoy the pleasures of culture. Though the functionalists have adapted their superiority to the modern world, they remain as lonely as before.

With hindsight, Functionalism appears as a flight from art, from an antisocial bohemianism, from the internally divided avant-garde. It is the attempt of a group of individuals who have been excluded from society to adapt themselves, an attempt which failed.

Surrealism openly broke with social reality. The first number of the surrealist magazine *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924) does not beat about the bush: "... only in their dreams people are still entitled to freedom."¹ Freud's hypothesis that repressed urges emerge to the surface in our dreams inspired the surrealists to apply the same hypothesis to the unfulfilled creative urges. In the past, society had offered people, or rather, artists the possibility to realize their secret wishes and fantasies. Now the dream acts as a substitute for the lost reality: seeking to compensate their loss, artists consciously fled into the dream. Their flight bears witness to the artists' ultimate surrender. In spite of their social actions and the fighting spirit they seem to demonstrate, surrealists simply continue bohemianism, "*l'art pour l'art*." More than the Dadaist actions, the dualistic character of surrealism shows us the dilemma of the artist in an industrialized society: the artist is heir to a lost freedom, but also the prophet of a new, vast freedom; the artist is, more than anyone else, capable of lending meaning to the concept of freedom, but at the same time the artist's ties with society have been severed; the artist continues the past, but also heralds the future; the artist is the symbol of *homo ludens*, at a time when *homo ludens* is experiencing the greatest hardships ever. Identifying creativity with the automatism of the fantasies of dreams, the artist renounces the status of "genius." Indeed, psychoanalysis has refuted a myth and it is the surrealists' merit to have grasped this at once. Dreams are accessible to anyone and, symbolically fleeing into the dream, the surrealists are the first to recognize creativity as a basic human urge. Whether Freud's interpretation of dreams is well-founded, or whether later theories account better for our dreams, is immaterial. It is not the psychology of the dream itself that is essential to surrealism, but the conviction that dreams may constitute a compensation for reality and consequently that

reality as it presents itself to us cannot possibly satisfy us. This conclusion also implies that we must first transform reality, before we can satisfy our creative urges. Thus a bridge has been built between the avant-garde and the social revolution. But the flight into "surrealism" is therefore no less a flight from reality. Dreams are too much part of our individual experiences and memories to enter the specific territory of creative imagination. The image of the past supplants the image of the future. The automatism of the subconscious leads to mere habitual repetitions, as can be inferred from the inflexible monotony of the Surrealist arsenal of images. But in a way the aesthetic failure of Surrealism means that it had a case. Its uniform symbolism bears witness to a strong sense of nostalgia for freedom, to a creative urge which remains incapable of acting, frustrated by social reality. The destruction of the existing order is therefore the only real aim of the Surrealist movement.

But this aim also affects the artist. Professional artists are a product of the money economy. The destruction of the existing society obviously will also bring about the destruction of individualistic culture. The Surrealists remain incapable of finding a solution to this problem, a fact which accounts for the inconsequences of their activities. On the one hand they are the advocates of "the sovereignty of thought" (Breton), but on the other hand they seek to join political movements which do not recognize this sovereignty. In modern society the artist stands irremediably alone. If artists really believe that society should be transformed, if they really want a new society, they must start with renouncing art. The proletariat turns down the artists' attentions. The culture-less class is prepared to make great sacrifices for a better future, but is unsympathetic to the nostalgia for a lost freedom which artists relive in their dreams. Nostalgia is a sentiment unknown to the

proletariat, as it has no past. But it does have hope, a hope which the artist finds hard to share.

In the second surrealist manifesto (1930) André Breton complains about the lack of understanding in political circles.² The choice between art and politics is indeed inevitable for every surrealist, which causes the movement to crumble. The failure of surrealism is due to the fact that the movement appeared at a time which was unfavorable to the proclamation of the universal right to freedom of play and creativity. The economic productivity did not enable this freedom as yet—even if production was rationalized to the largest degree possible. The surrealists were ahead of their time. Their dream was the future. They were the first to understand that to make the world worth living, it takes more than to increase our material well-being: our actions should take place on another level. Long before anyone claimed that mechanization would grant us more time to live, the surrealists realized that the smoldering creativity in each human being would one day burn brightly. Being alive means being creative, i.e., being in the act of transforming and changing everything. The creativity of former cultures was incomplete and suppressed, because only few could change anything at all, and only to a limited degree. Mechanization introduces an era in which humans will dominate nature to an unprecedented extent. It will become possible to transform the world according to our wishes and fantasies. In the future, creativity will be directed towards life itself, towards our daily experiences, as our daily life will no longer be tied up with the struggle for life.

The tragedy of the avant-garde resides in the fact that art is a relic of a declining society; artists, continuing the past, belong to a yesterday without future.

The historic significance of Surrealism resides in its understanding that creative action is an

essential need of human beings and their accomplishment of social freedom. The Surrealists discovered Lautréamont's maxim "Poetry should either be created by all, or by none" and made it their own. However, poetry can only be composed by all in a society without material want, in a society of abundance, in which the means of production are used rationally, all labor is performed by machines and humans are no longer slaves of labor, a society in which consumption is free for all and the creative potential of all people has been activated. It is the kind of society which no longer needs any artists.

The role of the avant-garde is to destroy systematically the last remnants of an obsolete individualistic culture. The avant-garde is the broom which will sweep away all obstacles on our way to the collective culture to which Lautréamont alludes. The avant-garde artists herald the free and creative men and women of tomorrow. But the artists are but a symbol, as they have not conquered freedom for themselves yet. The relative freedom they enjoyed in the old society has vanished with that society, and for others, for those who still constitute the "working class," freedom has not dawned yet. The culture from which the artist emerges is dead, and the new culture, the collective poetry of the masses, cannot be realized before the masses are free. The new freedom is inextricably linked with an increase in productivity and a rationalization of production, to guarantee that all people benefit from the increased productivity. Freedom without abundance is but a hollow phrase. Mass culture depends on mass production and mass consumption: only when the masses live a life of luxury will they have time for play and the creation of culture, very much in the same way in times past the owners of the means of production were creators of culture. But abundance for all, though within reach in the future, is not a current reality.

After World War II it was obvious to everyone that the avant-garde no longer had a future. Those Surrealists who had not engaged in politics emigrated to America, where they lived like monks secluded from the outside world. The only Surrealist publication during the war (VVV, published in the USA) completely ignored political events and abstained from any criticism of society. The avant-garde no longer exists, and what remains of surrealism is nothing but the kitschy aesthetics of supermarkets and advertisements. Avida Dollars, the nickname Breton coined for Salvador Dali, is the rising star of Americanized "surrealism."

The avant-garde has become a rearguard of unworldly artists who flutter around like scared birds in a technoid world.

But what about the others? What about those who have tried to absorb technology, to adapt their art to it? We may either admire their unselfishness and radicalism, or their naive optimism may make us smile, but one thing is for certain: the time that technology can be put to creative use has not dawned yet. The creative sterility of those who thought that mere formal innovations of the arts were sufficient a change, bears witness to the hopeless, even desperate situation of the artists. Artists who have renounced fighting are doomed, as creative human beings can only survive through battle or through creative action, both of which aim to achieve but one goal: the transformation of the world. Those who accept the world as it is, will decline with the very world which, in spite of themselves, they cannot stop loving. Futurists exalted militarism and nationalism, but died an ignominious death. Constructivists praised labor and the pounding machines, but have been ousted by the machines themselves. Social realists and Pop artists thought they could easily bridge the gap between life and art, but each in his own way has been emasculated by the society to which they surrendered without resistance.

Art is dead, but those who give in renounce everything, even the future.

After the war, young artists found themselves in a situation which differed entirely from the pre-war one. During the war, artists had lost nearly all contact with other artists both at home and abroad. The naked struggle for life had dispelled any thought of art and creativity. The war had left a cultural vacuum which could not be filled by what remained of the avant-garde. After 1945, the younger generation found themselves in an exceptional position. Without anything to hold onto in an economically disrupted society, without being the heir to any aesthetic theories, the young generation was in a far better position to judge the situation critically than the avant-garde had ever been. They were only loosely connected to any traditions, even to the "revolutionary" one—a tradition the postwar surrealists appealed to, unconsciously revealing the ambiguity of their views. The war had shattered artists' belief that they were indispensable to society. Unlike their predecessors, the new generation could not fail to see the weakness of their position, their actual redundancy. The extreme material want of the ensuing years left no room for self-delusion. In this atmosphere of skepticism the experimental movement was born.

Cobra, "the international of experimental artists" (1948-1951) was not an avant-garde group in the pre-war sense. The postwar artists did not share the belief that they had a mission to accomplish, but they did share an extremely developed sense of reality. It is not without significance that Cobra was founded in 1948 after the international conference organized in Paris by a group of young Surrealists who wished to restore the glory of the avant-garde (*Centre international de documentation sur l'art d'avant-garde*). But also the modernized version of surrealism—the *surréalisme révolutionnaire*—held no appeal to the new

generation of artists. It is a striking fact that the founders of Cobra are from countries without cultural tradition or revolutionary past, countries without "cultural vocation" or national arrogance—most of them either northern or small countries. To the credit of the small group of Danes, Belgians and Dutch—including myself—who founded Cobra, they turned a deaf ear to the tempting voice of the already aged avant-garde. The new generation was too sober to have faith in an idea or to trust promises that had never been credible. Aware of the fact that for the time being it was impossible to realize the new culture, they resorted to evasive action, i.e., the experiment—even if that meant that artists were to live a life of isolation, a fate preferred to the self-deceptive promise of taking active part in the transformation of society. It is not my intention to play down Cobra by confronting its modest attitude with the pre-war avant-garde. The rupture with those who continued surrealism was consciously meant as a rupture with all artistic concepts, in particular with the intellectual principles of the avant-garde. The statement issued by the founders of Cobra on November 8, 1948 leaves no doubt: "The Belgian, Danish and Dutch delegates at the conference of the *Centre international de documentation sur l'art d'avant-garde* believe that this conference has yielded no significant results. The resolution adopted on the closing session of the conference bears witness to the complete lack of any shared views, to the extent that even the fact that the conference has taken place cannot be justified. To continue our international activities, there is only one way left: an organic, experimental cooperation, which avoids all sterile, dogmatic theories." Finally artists have returned to their point of departure. They admit that they no longer have a role to play in society. They wish to put an end to discussions and proceed with action: action will turn out to be more relevant than reasoning. Unlike the avant-garde, they want

to work, not combat. Their attitude was very sincere. At last, the members of Cobra had come to the conclusion that from their position in society they could not pretend to be the vanguard of society. They understood that they could only claim their job, the fact that they represented creative humankind. They had to keep the fire of creativity burning, a fire that was nearly extinct in other people. The experiment was the last stronghold where the artist could withdraw in voluntary exile. The artist resigned, but not without protest. The question, however, of what was to be achieved remained open, for under the given circumstances "practical cooperation" was difficult. There can be no theory without discipline, and no discipline without cooperation. Two years after its foundation the movement still existed in name only, and most of its members had lost mutual contact. An elegant solution was found in 1951, when the group was formally dissolved in the wake of an exhibition in Liège (which had not attracted great public attention anyway). A movement without program turned out to be unviable. The artistic fire had been extinguished. The official art scene started to use the term "experimental" to refer to a picturesque group of individuals, upon whom the technological and commercial society looked down upon as a tourist attraction. "Creeping inflation" contributed to the fact that art was seized upon as an investment. A work of art, once a status symbol, now degenerated into an object of speculation. Artists who had resisted to the last finally renounced their freedom and even their symbolic resistance. Maurice Rheims, auctioneer at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris writes in *The Strange Life of Objects*: "Another one says: 'One million for a Dubuffet is nothing, you just wait awhile and he'll be worth three.' No one has ever heard: 'I like Dubuffet. Even if he costs only a hundred francs, I would love him just as dearly.' One is simply dumbfounded by the increase of the prices of the works of certain artists in

the course of a year. The only thing that is still missing is the ringing of the totalizer at the racecourse of Longchamp. The astonishing price rises—and though they may seem fictitious, they certainly are real—are in no way related to the artists' talents, but result from a psychosis that is not just instigated by professional art dealers. It must be added that also the unstable monetary situation in the world, which has been going on for decades, contributes to the soaring of prices."¹

With inflation rampant, banks and major industrialists invested capital in art collections, as experience had taught them that the price of a work of art tends to increase in the course of time. However, a prerequisite for future price rises is that the artist enjoys a certain social status—the artist should acquire "fame." Most artists nowadays tend to believe that they can build a new, solid economic basis for themselves.² The purpose of their "struggle" is to find a place on the art market. The *raison d'être* of a work of art seems to reside exclusively in its commercial value—or rather, in its value as an investment. More and more price is equated with quality. The tragic artist of the avant-garde period now plays the funny part in this comedy of errors: barbarians in the nuclear age, cave-dwellers in the space age. As jesters in the service of captains of industry they have sunk so low that their social degradation can only be a source of unholy glee. It is as if artists have vanished from society and we are left with caricatures of them.

The boom of the art market has far-reaching consequences. A discrepancy is growing between ideas and practice, between the unfulfilled desires of creative people and the works artists produce to satisfy the growing demand for valuable objects. For the first time in history the artist denies his role and ceases to be the symbol of *homo ludens*. The artist can no longer be equated with the creative human being, but has become a his-

toric figure exhibited in museums. Until recently the destructive effect of the rising prices on the art market was largely ignored. Quite often the view prevails that the generous sums spent on "art" stimulate the development of "culture." Those who indulge in this illusion, seriously overestimate the artist's influence on contemporary society. It is a romantic error to assume that artists are always ahead of their time and that they announce future developments. Just like everyone else, artists are dependent on society, and their independence has certainly not increased in recent times. The now popular slogans about art and "freedom" are mere echoes of former liberal slogans which in present day society have become devoid of meaning. Artists are granted exactly that amount of freedom as those who pay them think fit. The boundaries which the latter dictate and which artists cannot cross without renouncing their newly acquired material well-being, correspond exactly with the boundaries they ought to cross to regain their creativity, to keep up with the changing times. Presently it could be argued that contemporary artists are completely out of touch with the time they live in. Their current role as suppliers of "cultural products" compels artists to assume a conservative attitude. Actually, "artists" have become reactionary to a degree we have never seen before. The now fashionable concept of the "arriviste" is particularly suited in the context of contemporary art, as was the pre-war concept of "kitsch" at that time. "Kitsch" is a pejorative term, with which the idealistic artist expressed his contempt for the commercial production; "arriviste" is an honorary title modern bourgeois artists bestow upon those who made their way to the top.

But of course protests were bound to be heard. Not everyone was conned into accepting the new "culture" or was taken in by commercialism. Between 1955 and 1957 a group of Paris ex-lettrists issued *Potlatch*,

a mimeographed magazine. *Potlatch* railed against the exaltation of the postwar economic miracle, against the myth of the *nouveau roman*, against "vitalism," against film festivals and awards, against functional architecture, and against the general commercialization of culture. After 1957, G.E. Debord edited *Internationale situationniste*, a magazine which appeared at irregular intervals and continued for some years the critical analysis of its predecessor. But the group did not constitute a real movement. The adherents came and went and the only view they shared was their contempt for the current art practice. Indeed the *Internationale situationniste* is conspicuously disinterested in the work of art itself. A critical analysis of the qualities of the work of art is missing. The unconcerned attitude is apparent from their apathetic tolerance or downright repudiation of the work of art. It is to their credit that at least on a theoretical level the situationists have contemplated the decline of individualistic culture right through and drawn the ultimate conclusion. The situationists seek to replace the individual arts from the past by a "unitary urbanism," a hypothetical concept of the artificial living space as a medium to be used for a future, collective creativity. For the first time, the slogan "Poetry should either be created by all, or by none" acquires a practical meaning.

My collaboration¹ with the founders of the *Internationale situationniste* dates from 1958 and resulted in the *Declaration d'Amsterdam*, signed by Debord and myself. In it we defined the concept of "unitary urbanism" and drafted the outlines of a program intended to put the concept into practice.⁶ At the situationist conference in Munich, 1959, the Amsterdam Declaration becomes the basis of the debate among the participants (mainly painters). But at that time it turned out to be impossible to persuade them to engage in new, explicitly anti-individualistic activities. My breaking off

relations with the situationists was inevitable and shortly afterwards the group fell apart. Though small, scattered groups continue to call themselves "situationist," these do not propagate a clear-cut situationist program. Unanimous action by an organization consisting only of artists has proved impossible in our time.

Artists, as a social class, have abandoned their opposition to society. The curtain has fallen on the last episode of individualistic culture. The "degree zero" has been reached. Even scandalmongering, once the weapon par excellence of the avant-garde, is no longer effective. No one really still believes in culture, and therefore everything is taken for granted, or at least considered an advisory statement. Ministers of culture, museum directors, art historians, presenters of educational television programs: all of these explain to us what art means to society, they inform us about the latest trends, they teach us that "culture" is indispensable to the functioning of society, they help artists to find a well-deserved place in the "welfare state." After successive careers as a bohemian and revolutionary, finally the artist is integrated into society. Artists no longer need to be creative, they are being created by forces more powerful than themselves.

Art is dead, but creative humanity awakens. It is waiting for its chance, aware of the fact that the situation is developing in its favor. The utilitarian society is about to collapse, digging its own grave. Whereas the increase of world population, decolonization and the industrialization of "new" countries once provided new markets to cope with the increasing production capacity, now the latter has gone out of hand. At the same time, the continuing mechanization and automation will reduce the demand for human labor. We face a situation in which a virtually unlimited production potential will contrast sharply with the reduced purchasing power of an unemployed population. The

situation will become even more critical as more and more—currently still "underdeveloped"—countries mechanize their production. This will lead to a revolutionary situation with a demand for free consumption and the socialization of world production, which in its turn will drastically change our way of life. *Homo faber* will cease to exist and a playful way of life will come within reach of the entire human race. The life of the liberated masses will be like the new poetry, produced by all. It is the task of the last artists to pave the way for this culture of the future.

Psychologists, sociologists, politicians, all of them are dumbfounded and defenseless when it comes to a new phenomenon which neither of them can understand nor explain: the revolt of the *homo ludens*. The young generation is on the move, driven by an irresistible urge. They long for a more intense life, they want to call forth an adventure which until now they have searched for in vain, they want to free life from the drag of labor, they want life to be play, and are prepared to use violence as a means to reach their end.

Mechanization and automation frees humankind from the yoke to which it has yielded since prehistoric times: the necessity to produce, urged by the pressure of an always imminent material shortage. The ever-increasing productivity of the industrialized countries is accompanied by a decrease in working hours. However, the freedom which should result from this fact cannot be put to practical use as yet, for this freedom clashes with both the organization and the ethical principles of our society. Society is at a complete loss as to what to do with automation. In any manner possible it is being denied that automation is a Trojan horse; the confrontation with reality is being postponed as long as possible. But the grim logic of the process of mechanization will eliminate humans from production and consequently the entire superstructure of our

utilitarian society will be undermined. The avant-garde has no further part to play, as the struggle against the superstructure is now fought on all levels. *Homo ludens* is awakening in every human being. But *homo ludens* cannot prevail in a stagnating society which does not realize its full economic and technical potential. Trying to find new codes of conduct, the new generation constantly collides with the obsolete views of present-day society. The new generation is evolving standards which have nothing in common with the utilitarian standards the ruling class imposed on the toiling masses. They no longer believe in "serving society," they disclaim "responsibility" within the system, they no longer accept having to live a life of patience and waiting. They have smelled freedom and want it NOW.

The world is now being confronted with the phenomenon of a generation which refuses to accept the existing order—"hipsters," "teddy boys," "rockers," "mods," "halbstarken," "blousons" "noirs," "beatniks," "sleazers," "stilyagi," or whatever they may be called—and which exerts an as yet largely ignored revolutionary influence.

This mass of youths, freer, more thriving and more numerous than ever before, are driven by an urge to act, but all they find is a frustrating void. But their enthusiasm cannot be curbed: their voices will sound louder and louder. Until the time has come when they will be able to sublimate their urge into a creative urge, into "the urge to play," their aggression will turn against everything that thwarts their ambitions. They will not rest before the entire superstructure has been destroyed, regardless of the protests, indignation or even the violence they meet with. The revolt of creative people against the ethic principles and institutions of the utilitarian society will not end before the "ludic," playful society is a fact.

The vast, non-stop happening we can expect to take place once the creative potential of the entire human race is unleashed will change the face of the earth as drastically as the organization of production has since neolithic times.

The age of *homo ludens* lies before us.

Translated by DIRK VERBIEST

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1. "Le procès de la connaissance n'étant plus à faire, l'intelligence n'entrant plus en ligne de compte, le rêve seul laisse à l'homme tous ses droits à la liberté." [It is no longer necessary to acquire knowledge, reason is no longer of any importance: only in their dreams people are still entitled to freedom.]

2. "si vous êtes marxiste, braillait vers cette époque Michel Marty à l'adresse de l'un de nous, vous n'avez pas besoin d'être surréaliste." [If you are Marxists, Michel Marty shouted at one of us about that time, you needn't be Surrealists.]

3. "Tel autre dit: "A un million, Dubuffet est pour rien, il en vaudra bientôt trois." Personne ne l'a encore entendu dire: "J'aime Dubuffet; il vaudrait cent francs je l'aimerais tout autant." Ainsi voyons nous les prix des oeuvres de certains artistes varier au douze mois dans des proportions ahurissantes. C'est tout juste si on n'entend pas le cliquetis du totalisateur à chiffres changeants de l'hippodrome de Longchamp! Ces hausses surprenantes, et qui est de plus ne sont pas aussi fictives qu'ils paraissent sont, en dehors du talent du peintre, le résultat d'une psychose dont les auteurs ne sont pas toujours des pro-

fessionnels, et facilitées, il faut le dire aussi, par une instabilité monétaire mondiale qui dure depuis des dizaines d'années." Maurice Rheims, *La vie étrange des objets*.

4. In his book *Pour la forme* ex-Cobra painter Asger Jorn sets out his view that investing in art undermines the capitalist system. The least to be said about this is that Jorn grossly overestimates the amount of capital invested. The phenomenon has more disastrous consequences for art than for capitalism.

5. At an international conference of artists in Alba (Italy) in 1956 I had given a lecture entitled *Demain la poésie logera la vie* [Tomorrow poetry will provide lodging for life], in which I advocated anti-functional architecture and urban planning. The lecture resulted in my first contact with the editors of *Potlatch*, who were later to found the *Internationale situationniste*.

6. Cf. Conrad, *Programme und Manifeste zur Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts* [Programs and Manifestos concerning Twentieth-century Architecture], Ullstein Bauwelt Fundamente No. 1, Berlin, 1964.

This text was written in 1969 and published in April 1970 as "Planologie of revolutie?" in the small arts review *Te elfder Ure* (At the Last Hour). The editor of the review was the architect Nic Tummers, who had organized the 1965 exhibition of New Babylon in Maastricht and launched *De Nieuw Babylon Informatief*, a series of four small newspapers that were distributed at key exhibitions between 1965 and 1966.

PLANOLGY OR REVOLUTION?

Environmental planning has something in common with theology: the abstract character of the subject and the unbridgeable gap between the basic assumptions and the reality the researcher explores bring about a certain feeling of helplessness, a vacillating between facts and wishful thinking, which in the end results in idealistic theories, out of touch with reality, and consequently in non-committal, moralistic statements about "humanity" and "humankind." It seems impossible to find a planner who—apart from statistical data and definitions—is able to avoid intangible concepts, such as "contemplation," "the happiness of humankind," "responsibility." Confronting these concepts with reality, the planner seems to accuse the evolution of technology, as if the latter were a human being, who must account for his actions. To the planner's mind, plans seem not to be developed by people.

Thus Lewis Mumford, in his book *The City in History*, asks the rhetorical question: "Will science and technology be used to the benefit of our lives, or will our lives be subjected and submitted to the unbridled expansion of technology?" The author then proceeds with the statement that in the twentieth century the latter is happening. It does not occur to Mumford that people are not oppressed by technology itself, but by those who handle the technology and abuse it to maintain power and subject the majority of humankind—very similar to the way the ax or club was wielded in ancient times, though on a smaller scale. He seems reluctant to conclude that the majority of people live in servitude, their fate being decided by the few, and that this situation has existed for

quite some time. Mechanization has not really changed this, but has created the possibility to put an end to people's plight. Science and technology are merely means which can be used in a variety of ways. Mumford's question therefore should be reformulated in more assertive terms: "When will we be able to wrest the control over these means away from those who abuse them, and use them to raise human existence to a higher level?" For only then will environmental planning truly meet scientific standards, and will we be able to discuss urban and rural planning. As it is now, environmental planning is part of the program of governments and determined by their policy, which—in a capitalist society—means that environmental planning is subservient to business interests. Planners are not at liberty to draw conclusions from their research independently, or formulate plans to organize our environment in accordance with the insights they gained from it, but rather they are obliged to comply with the directives of these powers. If they decline to do so, their plans are considered unfeasible and "utopian."

Actually, it is quite understandable that planners, finding themselves in a defenseless position, resort to idealistic slogans or warnings, appealing to common sense. It allows them to get rid of their guilty conscience, taking it out on an abstraction. But for those of us who are not professional planners, it is better not to indulge in dreams, but to start from the observation that the way in which our social environment is organized has nothing to do with ethics, mentality or good intentions. Resorting to these is as effective

as appealing to God to end a war. The form and ordering of our environment is definitely determined by economic factors. Despite their good intentions, planners—except if they are idealists—serve the interests of those who wish to prolong the current economic structure until the end of times. From this point of view, all futuristic juggling with figures serves only one purpose: to present the future as the continuation of the present, to banish the idea of revolution from society, to create conditions in which a revolution is unlikely to succeed. Assuming that the structure of our material space is determined by the economic structure (a fact which is indeed taken for granted in the Second Document on urban and rural planning), it follows that, in the world we live in, environmental planning based on real human needs is a mere illusion. When economic interests, i.e., the interests of those who own the means of production and who consequently hold power, dictate the construction of military training camps where recreation-grounds or natural reserves were planned, the former will be constructed. Similarly, environmentally unfriendly industries are likely to be constructed in residential areas if the interests of the powerful require so. This is what happens in the world out there, and I want to join planners in warning the public: don't lend your ear to prophecies of progress which are intended to make us believe that environmental planning is a means to end the chaos in which we live.

Within the context of this false and dangerous pragmatism, I want to recall the words of Bruno Taut, who in 1919 wrote in a letter to young German architects: "Let us be consciously imaginative architects. We know that a revolution must take place before we can really start our job." The revolution has not taken place yet, though it may be nearer than it ever was. The organization of the space we live in still depends on those who consciously have chosen the domain of the imagination in order to main-

tain their independence. But despite the activities of our planners, the chaos has not ceased to increase since 1919 and, consequently, so has the need for a social revolution, which, according to Bruno Taut, will allow us to embark upon our task. What is currently meant with environmental planning is something which is continually overtaken by events. It is a sort of "keeping up appearances": taking the edges off an intolerable situation, taking one step in the right direction, when dozens have been taken in the wrong one. To illustrate the point: after entire residential areas have been destroyed in the city center to construct roads and parking lots for the benefit of business interests, vehicles are banned from one shopping street, as a band-aid to the wound. When streets and squares have been transformed into tin warehouses, children are offered an isolated corner with toys, instead of space, which is what they need. And as long as no one mentions what has been lost, the new constructions appear the result of careful urban planning. The planners, pragmatic as they are, explain that what they call the "scaling-up" of things is necessary, because they have worked out that the earth is inhabited by an increasing number of people, all of them using a car, and therefore space is becoming a scarce commodity, which necessarily brings about the urbanization of rural areas. But though our need for space is ever-increasing, in practice we keep surrendering space to cars, to provide a market for the industry and to secure profits. Yet traveling by car becomes more and more difficult, as the increasing number of cars make the use impractical. And though we sacrifice our living space to the car, the social space, the space in which we socialize and interact with people, is narrowing steadily. Because living becomes less intensive in the space at our disposal, we are forced to travel longer distances to maintain poorer relationships and ephemeral contacts. If, in a densely populated country such as

ours, we tried to use our living space more intensively, we would increase our possibilities to communicate in less time, and consequently, we would intensify our life. Instead, we are forced to spend an enormous amount of time behind the wheel to maintain our relations with other people. In the current situation, cars do not contribute to the quality of our life, or make life easier. On the contrary: urban planning does not promote the efficient use of cars, but the profit of car manufacturers.

In a famous report, *Traffic in Towns*, Collin Buchanan plainly states that it must be concluded from the study on which the report was based that the poor efficiency of the car makes it impossible to design an adequate road network. It could be expected that the author would therefore hold a plea to restrict the use of cars, but Buchanan is a planner and his book was commissioned by the British government, who benefits from a flourishing car industry. As usual, the planner transfers his responsibility to those who are the victim of his plans: "The first of the two preceding exercises demonstrates that full car ownership and use in a city the size of Leeds postulates a network of such formidable dimensions that it could not be faced. Yet we are quite sure the public would not accept the other extreme, demonstrated in the second exercise, of confining personal movements to public transport." In a capitalist society the car is not primarily a means of transport, but a piece of property, and what Buchanan really means is that the public will not surrender a property it recently acquired and for which it had to sacrifice so much.

If the interests of the industry, i.e., of those who own the means of production, are the first consideration of those who plan the organization of our environment, then our environment will be seen as a transport network and a warehouse, and the interests of those who must live and work in this space will be considered of secondary importance. But even so, the question has to be put: if

one believes as firmly in the car's future as in the survival of the capitalist system? It is certainly reasonable to confront an author like Buchanan with this question, as he himself admits that from his research it is obvious that there is no satisfactory solution to our demand for space, a demand which follows from the unrestricted private car ownership. If Buchanan is right, then it is obvious that the car will be replaced by new means of transport, like small helicopters or vehicles which move about on an air-cushion.

Indeed, we know that experiments with these types of vehicles have been done—of course for military purposes. However, why do planners—apart from the so-called "utopians"—not include these possibilities in the now fashionable prognoses about the year 2000? After all, in the course of the next decades these new means of transport may render the entire network for which we had to sacrifice so much entirely redundant. We cannot find but one answer to this question: once more the interests of the industry require that the investments of the car manufacturers should become profitable.

Environmental planning does not only refuse to take into account social revolutions, but also technical ones, for fear that our present view of society will be shattered. The only difference between the famous year 2000 and the present is the difference between 11 million Dutchmen and 20 million of them, a difference which is emphasized time and again. Apart from the fact that it is highly questionable that since the invention of the contraceptive pill the population will keep increasing at the same pace it did during the last 50 years, within the context of the continually increasing economic interdependence of the western industrial nations the question arises whether these 20 million people will live within the borders of the Dutch state. Furthermore, planners are oblivious to the possibility that these 20 million people may be redundant on the labor market, a possibility which is

very real, if we take into account the continued automation.

If Dutch (and other) planners really were concerned with the personal emancipation of people, their plans would take into account the future automation of industry, a fact which implies that industry will need less space and that the no longer employed part of the population will need more freedom to use the available space. This implies no conflict with economic growth. On the contrary: the sometimes supposed conflict between economic growth, environmental planning and human freedom is merely used as a pretext to cover up the fact that our living space is being taken away from us to further technical developments, which are coming to a standstill anyway. In this context, automation is actually being slowed down as long as cheap labor is available, and the freedom automation grants us is being withheld from us, supposedly for the sake of employment. Automation, however, opens the door to producing goods without labor. Norbert Wiener, a pioneer in the field of cybernetics, has concluded that humans, compared to computers, are inaccurate, slow, and unreliable, in short: an uneconomical product. He therefore required that humankind should no longer be prevented from seeking and finding new challenges for the energy which is now at their disposal. However, this implies that the right to free consumption without labor is being recognized and, as far as the material security of people is concerned, that they become the co-owner of the automated means of production, i.e. that the production is being socialized. It goes without saying that this is unlikely to succeed without struggle and that those who hold economic power are busying themselves seeking ways to escape the looming dilemma, i.e. the choice between on the one hand overproduction due to the diminishing amount of money which circulates in society, or on the other hand deflation because of the saturation of the market.

Both of these equally threaten their position. Environmental planning, as it is conceived now, merely serves to seek ways out of this dilemma, instead of being founded on the concept of a society of free, creative individuals, a society in line with the future possibilities technical developments have brought within reach. We live in a revolutionary era, a time when a battle is going on between on the one hand those who can survive only by realizing the future, a future in which people will live at another level, not as a laborer, but as a creative human being, and on the other hand those who try to hold on to their privileges as long as possible, seeking to continue the past. What is lacking in the theories and prognoses of the planners is a sense of realism, an awareness, an acknowledgment of this battle, of which the struggle to conquer and to preserve our living space is a part. This battle is fought by the people of the industrialized nations, but even more so by the people of the so-called "developing countries," who are oppressed and exploited by the former. They struggle against an economic concentration of power, for which concepts like "space for human beings" and the "organization of the living space" are without value.

In these circumstances, there can be no question of environmental planning in the sense of "making plans for the organization of our living space, plans which harmonize with the aim to develop the talents of the largest possible number of people to the highest possible degree," though this sense is precisely the only valid one. Otherwise, all talk about the future, whether it is projected onto the year 2000, or onto a later year, is nothing but a series of hollow phrases, mere fiction. Current environmental planning faces a revolution, and without taking into account a revolution no serious plans about the future can be made. Or, as Nietzsche put it: "Who wants to be a creator, must first of all be a destroyer." First society, as it is now, must be overthrown, only then will it be

possible to organize the space which has become available. For now there is no space to organize, no space for humans. Space is constantly growing more narrow. Bit by bit we are being diddled out of our living space.

Designing urban plans which promote acculturation implies that planners focus on the plan itself and not its realization. It is a deliberate attempt to restrict oneself to the domain of the imaginary, or, as is often said depreciatingly, to the utopian. If we lack the courage to face forward, or, as pragmatists sneeringly put it, to "take a step into the future," then we have to choose between either resigning or cooperating with the current state of affairs, between passivity or complicity—the latter having disastrous consequences for humankind. Do we have to reject the utopian approach and stick to a down-to-earth one? What does a utopia involve? Is it utopian to believe more in a revolutionary change of society than in the eternal life of a stagnating economic system? Is it more utopian to make plans for a foreseeable future than to adapt oneself continually to so-called "views," which time and again turn out to be outdated? Does it bear witness to a sense of realism to draw a continuous line from the year 1900 to the year 2000 and to infer the future number of cars and people from this projection? Or could it be that in the end it is less utopian to take into account that cars have become obsolete and that procreation, no longer tied up with the structure of the family, could be planned? A planner who departs from the view that society will always remain the same and that it suffices to draw a straight line from the present to the future to develop plans for this projected future, fosters a dream which is no more realistic than the revolutionary's dream about changing the direction of that line. Those who put their trust more in a revolution than in the continued existence of the present society and who therefore base their plans for the future on a social uprising, may as yet be constrained to

the realm of the utopian, but that does not imply that they lack a sense of realism.

Despite all scepticism surrounding the issue, we know for a fact that the technical development will lead, or rather, is leading, to the setting free of vast amounts of human energy. Entertainment cannot provide a definite solution to this problem, as it is a passive activity, more intended to regain lost energy than to the application of newly gained energy. From the history of civilization we learn that the leisured classes have not limited themselves to recreational activities, but that they used their energy primarily for playful-creative activities, and for that reason the leisured classes should be seen as the builders of civilizations. Entertainment is a modern concept, a makeshift solution for people who do not entirely consume their energy in the production process, but who have yet to find their way to new outlets.

After centuries of leading the lives of slaves, people do not readily find a way to dissipate their surplus energy on a higher level.

However, it is to be expected that human needs and people's demands concerning their everyday surroundings will change drastically in the course of the next decades. To contemplate these needs and demands more keenly than the interests of manufacturers cannot be considered simply utopian, unless the term utopia is viewed more positively than is usually the case. Designing realistic plans means making plans for future humanity, for people whose lives are changing radically, for people who try to attain a higher level of existence, despite the fact that the realization of such plans is still dependent on an economic revolution which has to create the foundations for the ordering of space. Only on that basis will we be able to satisfy the needs of future generations.

Presently a lot of plans are being designed for so-called "cities of the future." The merit of these designs depends on the designer's view of the future. Quite often they involve merely a radicalization of the old, functional

cities: moving sidewalks, monorails and other gadgets seem only geared to increase the speed of transport. The question is whether moving about quickly in an automated society will still be relevant, or whether we should not use the available space more intensively, are simply ignored. Another feature of these "cities of the future" are the gigantic residential complexes, including supermarkets. However, before designing these hypercomplexes, the architects should have wondered if the disappearance of labor will not be accompanied by the disappearance of the compelling need to reside in one particular place. Will a nomadic lifestyle, i.e. the frequent change of residence, fit the leisured part of humanity more than eternally living under the same roof? The architects of this sort of futuristic city actually depart from an obsolete view of society. Very much in line with Le Corbusier's functional city, their plans still aim to integrate the entire population in an industrial complex: the proletariat is to become part of the production apparatus. The redundancy of human labor due to automation of the production process is sim-

ply overlooked. This sort of city fits in with a fascist ideology, the oldest example of such a city being the "Città futurista" of the fascist Italian architect Antonio Sant Elia, dating from 1914.

But whether one is a pragmatist or the architect of these futuristic cities, present society still has to be confronted. Planners may devise either modest or more daring plans, but in either case they depart from a sedentary way of life, which consists of living with the family, going to work daily, entertaining oneself passively, i.e. from the actual situation. The revolutionary potential of present society is simply ignored. The dilemma we seem to be facing consist of either collaboration or resignation: the flight into pragmatic solutions, which will turn out to be ephemeral, or into aesthetic, "utopian" plans, which will turn out to be impractical. To escape this dilemma, only one way is open to us: a revolutionary plan, based on the demands of the revolution, based also on the belief that the present society can be overthrown.

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Translated by DIRK VERBIEST

