

- Trained as a painter, the Dutch artist **Constant** Nieuwenhuys became involved with surrealist circles in Paris after the war. His encounter with the Danish artist Asger Jorn led them in 1948 to found the Cobra group together with the Belgian poet Christian Dotremont. Cobra was dedicated to the vitalism of *art brut* and opposed to all rationalistic forms of expression. After Cobra's dissolution in 1951 Constant moved to London for two years. There he became convinced that traditional painting was irrelevant to contemporary problems stemming from a "mechanized, technoid environment" and began to study the relation between urban space and human behavior. In 1953 he collaborated with the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck on a "color-space" installation in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. In the accompanying manifesto, entitled "For a Spatial Colorism," the authors rejected the use of color for decorative or functional ends, calling for the development of a chromatic "plastic reality" in architecture analogous to that in painting. Three years later, after attending the First World Conference of Free Artists staged by Jorn and the Italian painter Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio in Alba, Italy, Constant joined their International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus. As a member of its "experimental laboratory," he explored the idea of unitary urbanism (a concept originated by a related group, the International Lettrists, headed by Guy Debord in Paris), designing a pavilion for the laboratory, a plan of Alba based on "psychogeographic" routes, and an encampment for the gypsies who had been passing through this town in Italy for centuries. The last project became the first realization of unitary urbanist theory. Based on the notion of a mobile and nomadic architecture, it also served as the starting point of a scheme for a utopian city which Constant would call the "New Babylon."
- In 1957, after a founding meeting in Alba, Jorn's Imaginist Bauhaus and Debord's International Lettrist merged with several other radical groups to form the International Situationist. As a protagonist of the new movement during its initial stage of development, Constant continued to elaborate the idea of unitary urbanism in projects and writings. The statement that follows was published in the first of the new series of *Potlatch*, formerly the Lettrist organ—its name derived from a ritual exchange of goods practiced by the Northwest Coast Indians, reinterpreted by Marcel Mauss in his *Essay on the Gift* and later by Georges Bataille as an expression of humanity's desire for "unconditional expenditure." In his article Constant criticizes functionalist urbanism, epitomized by the French *grands ensembles* of the 1950s, for its sterility. Drawing on the ideas of the Dutch historian Johann Huizinga and Henri Lefebvre's philosophy of everyday life, he calls for a city conducive to psychic needs for play and creative use of leisure, proposing psychogeographic study techniques and models as a testing ground: "the science fiction of architecture."
- Constant resigned from the Situationist group in 1960 when its program shifted from unitary urbanism to more directly political activities. A poetic fantasist of great plastic sensibility, he continued to develop the New Babylon on his own, envisioning a global system of megastructural "sectors," their labyrinthine circuits separated by green spaces. Commenting freely on the space frames of Konrad Wachsmann and the suspended mast structures of Buckminster Fuller, Constant imagined the citizens of a postrevolutionary future living in perpetual circulation and indeterminacy, liberated from fixed modes of production by cybernetic technology and able to reinvent their own environment on a purely creative basis. "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."

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The Great Game to Come Constant

1. The necessity to construct whole cities rapidly and in large number, a necessity that involves the industrialization of underdeveloped countries and the prolonged crisis of housing since the war, has propelled urbanism to a central position among the problems of the present day. We in fact consider that all development is impossible in this culture without new conditions for our everyday surroundings. Urbanism must take stock of such conditions. First of all, it is necessary to state that the initial experiments undertaken by teams of architects and sociologists have faltered from lack of collective imagination, a fact we hold responsible for their limited and arbitrary approach. Urbanism as it is conceived by professional urbanists today is reduced to the practical study of housing and of circulation as isolated problems. The total lack of ludic solutions in the organization of social life prevents urbanism from rising to the level of creation, and the sad and sterile aspect of the majority of new housing districts testifies to this hideously.
2. The Situationists, explorers who specialize in play and leisure pastimes, understand that the visual aspect of cities counts only in relation to the psychological effects which it will be able to produce and which must be calculated as part of the sum of functions to be anticipated. Our conception of urbanism is not limited to buildings and their functions, but extends to the entire usage one will be able to make of them, or at least to imagine for them. It goes without saying that this usage will have to change as social conditions demand, and that our conception of urbanism is therefore above all dynamic. We also reject the establishment of buildings in a fixed landscape that now passes for the new urbanism. On the contrary, we think that all static and unalterable aspect must be avoided, and that the variable or furniture-like character of architectural elements is the condition of a supple relation with the events that they will live through.
3. Consciousness of future leisure time and the new situations that we are beginning to construct must profoundly change the prevailing idea that is the point of departure for urbanistic study; we can already enlarge our knowledge of the problem by experimentation with certain phenomena linked to the urban ambience: the animation of different streets, the psychological effects of diverse surfaces and constructions, the rapid change of the look of a space by ephemeral elements, the rapidity with which the ambience of places changes, and the variations possible in the general ambience of different neighborhoods. The *dérive*, as practiced by the Situationists, is an efficacious means for studying these phenomena in existing cities and drawing some provisory conclusions. The psychogeographic notion thus obtained has already led to the creation of plans and models of an imaginist type, which one can call the science fiction of architecture.
4. The technical inventions that are today at the service of humanity will play a great role in the construction of future city-ambiences. It is notable and significant that these inventions have up to the present added nothing to existing cultural activities, and that artist-creators have not known how to employ them. The possibilities of the cinema, of television, of radio, of rapid travel and communications have not been utilized, and their effect on cultural life has been the most miserable. The exploration of technology and its utilization for higher ends of a ludic nature is one of the most urgent tasks for bringing about the creation of a unitary urbanism at the scale that future society demands.